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'The harvest is now open'

Tunisia revolt may throw open doors to gospel, Christian worker says

By Ava Thomas
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Daniel Evans knows Tunisia pretty well, and to him, the seaside nation has always been the "little Switzerland" of North Africa — always trying to keep the peace.

People would occasionally open up about the deep stresses of the high unemployment rate or the cost of living but never publicly. Any visible frustration mostly resided in their eyes, said Evans, who has done some Christian work in the area over the years. "A revolt just didn't seem a part of their nature."

But apparently it was.

Evans was in Tunis when everything went down — when the protests started in mid-January and changed the seaside vacation spot to a war zone.

"Fear settled over us in the evenings with the helicopters and gunshots and the mandatory curfew from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m.," he said. "No one came out for the first few days, and when we did resurface, we realized there were very few shops open and no bread, fruit or vegetables to be found at the local shops."

Local residents had put up homemade barricades of household items in the streets, and area youth were carrying hammers, bats and sticks and checking IDs before letting cars into their neighborhoods.

"When we got past the fear factor, we realized they were just trying to do their part to aid the thin stretched military in the protection of their homes and families," Evans said.

"It was awesome to see neighborhoods work so quickly to set up their own crime-watch system."

And that neighborly spirit carried over, he said. Tunisians responded quickly to each other's pressing needs. Women and girls got out in the streets and cleaned things up until the garbage services began running again. Even the local phone company offered free minutes for cell phone users to call their families.



BP photo

'MOST EUROPEAN' — Some say Tunisia, a nation in political upheaval, is the 'most European' nation in North Africa, with its educated middle class and more liberal social views and gender freedom than its counterparts in the region.

"We were overwhelmed by the air of benevolence and good will," Evans said.

And everyone seemed happy, he said, "beaming with pride and excitement about their future."

Optimistic outlook

His outlook on the possibilities for believers in the area is equally bright.

"It is exciting to know that there will be good that comes with the bad in the days ahead," Evans said. "With the newfound freedom comes free-

dom of religion; praise God. It now seems comprehensible that thousands of seekers will be drawn to the church at first just to have the freedom to experience and see firsthand another option."

The change and how it came about is unprecedented in the region, he said. "It has left the country unstable and unpredictable at the moment."

Evans said his hope for the church in Tunisia is that it would be unified and would preach the gospel of Christ freely as the uncertainty continues. "The harvest is now open, and

may God's grace and peace bring a multitude of new believers to become followers of Jesus, where real liberty resides," he said.

Evans said the Tunisian church asks for prayer

► for wisdom and unity for the emerging leadership of the country,

► for free and just elections and

► for boldness to share with their neighbors and friends about Jesus Christ, "the one true Liberator."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Name changed for security reasons.

Will Graham to headline Evangelism Conference

For the first time in Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference history, participants will not only learn about how to do evangelism but also will do evangelism together.

This year's evangelism conference to be held at Gardendale First Baptist Church Feb. 28–March 1, will feature Will Graham, grandson of Evangelist Billy Graham, during its Tuesday evening session in what is being dubbed as a "harvest event."

"We're working real hard to encourage the DOMs (directors of missions)

and pastors around the Birmingham and Gardendale areas to have unchurched people in that (service)," said Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), which sponsors the annual evangelism conference. "[The Tuesday evening session] will be organized like a one-night Billy Graham crusade with one speaker. While we've always had an evangelism conference, we've never made it into an evangelistic event."

In preparation for the event, a training session was held in November 2010 for pastors and DOMs who plan to serve as counselors.

And for those who were not able to attend the training session but want to serve as counselors, a training session will be offered March 1, prior to the evening event.

With Gardendale First able to seat 2,500 in its sanctuary, Gilbreath hopes the place will be "packed out." His office recently bought a billboard that (See 'Conference,' page 6)

COMMENT

When We Speak About the Bible, Part 2

Last week, we considered some of the internal evidence that causes Baptists to believe in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament. This week, we look at some of the internal evidence that affirms the New Testament is also “God-breathed.”

That means the Bible is unlike any other book. Because it has “God for its author, salvation for its end and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter” (Baptist Faith and Message, Article I), the Bible is “a perfect treasure of divine instruction.”

Scholars frequently begin looking at what the New Testament says about itself by turning to John 14. There, in verse 26, Jesus told the disciples the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them. Since Jesus alerted the disciples that God’s Holy Spirit would be at work in and through them, no one should be surprised when His words prove true.

Acts 2 begins with the disciples experiencing the filling of the Holy Spirit. And as a direct result, the apostle Peter preached authoritatively about Jesus, the need for repentance and how Christians should live together. When the Jews of Jerusalem asked, “What shall we do,” Peter did not hesitate. He declared, “Repent and be baptized.”

Peter did not doubt that he was preaching a message straight from God. Neither did those who heard his words. Today Peter’s message, recorded in Acts 2, is still as divinely inspired as it was the day his words echoed off Jerusalem’s stone walls. There is no difference in the inspiration of his spoken words and their written record.

Early writings

Divine inspiration and authority were claimed for the earliest writings of Jesus’ followers. Perhaps the earliest writing comes from the Council of Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15. When a dispute erupted about whether one had to be a Jew before becoming a Christian, the matter ended up before the church fathers in Jerusalem.

When the council sent its verdict — one did not have to be a Jew in order to be a Christian — it said, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v. 28). Thus the council claimed divine inspiration and authority for its decision, which was conveyed in writing to the Christians at Antioch.

The apostle Paul’s writings are filled with claims of divine inspiration and authority.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstra-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

tion of the Spirit’s power so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:4–5).

Eight verses later, he added, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

To the Thessalonian believers, the apostle wrote, “And we also thank God continually because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Paul believed his message was God’s word. It was divinely inspired and authoritative. That is why he did not hesitate to pronounce condemnation on anyone who preached a gospel different from the one he preached (Gal. 1:8–9).

Again whether the words were proclaimed by voice or pen made no difference. Both were considered divinely inspired and authoritative. In 1 Corinthians 14:37–38, Paul wrote, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.”

In the final verses to the Romans, Paul described his writings as “prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God” and “able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 16:25–26). There can be no doubt how Paul viewed his writings.

And there can be no doubt how others viewed them either.

Often quoted are the words of Peter that Paul’s writings “contain some things that are hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16). What is frequently overlooked is Peter’s view of those writings. In verse 15, Peter said Paul wrote “with the wisdom that God gave him.” Peter then added that “unstable people distort” what Paul wrote “as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (v. 16).

Here Peter placed Paul’s writings alongside “other Scriptures.”

Paul also recognized the writings of other New Testament authors as Scripture.

In 1 Timothy 5:18, he quoted two passages and

attributed both to “Scripture.” The first comes from Deuteronomy 25:4. The second has Old Testament lineage but is an exact quote of Jesus’ words from Luke 10:7. Evidently Paul was aware of this writing and considered it Scripture.

Both Paul and Peter, near the end of their lives, wrote about the inspiration of Scripture.

Paul wrote to Timothy that “the Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). As stated last week, the primary emphasis of this passage refers to the Old Testament writings that Timothy had known from his infancy. But there can be no doubt that it is the New Testament writings that “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Evidently Paul meant this passage for both testaments.

Likewise Peter wrote about inspiration in 2 Peter 1:19ff. In his day, “the words of the prophets” (Old Testament) had been “made more certain” by the light that shines in a dark place, a reference to the coming of Jesus as the Christ.

Carried by the Spirit

When he wrote about men speaking as they were “carried along by the Holy Spirit,” he seemed to be describing his experience as well as giving a theological conclusion.

James Orr, a Scottish theologian of the last century, summed up the matter of inspiration well when he wrote, “The most searching inquiry still leaves them with a Scripture, supernaturally inspired to be an infallible guide in the great matters for which it was given — the knowledge of the will of God for their salvation in Christ Jesus, instruction in the way of holiness and the ‘hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal’ (Titus 1:2).”

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“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

Ada Lou Stokes

MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden
Etowah Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES: Proverbs 3:5-6

FAVORITE HYMNS: "The Solid Rock" and "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

HOBBIES: Reading and keeping in touch with family and friends

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 25 years of marriage to Howard; two daughters, Cindy and Karen; six grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren



STOKES

Ada Lou Stokes, a member of MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden, has a passion for working with children. One of her greatest joys has been volunteering for 20 years with the after school program *The Big A (Adventure) Club*.

Q: What was your childhood like?

A: I grew up in Anniston, where I attended First Baptist Church and was involved in GAs (Girls' Auxiliary), YWAs (Young Woman's Auxiliary), BYPU (Baptist Young People's Union) and Sunday School.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

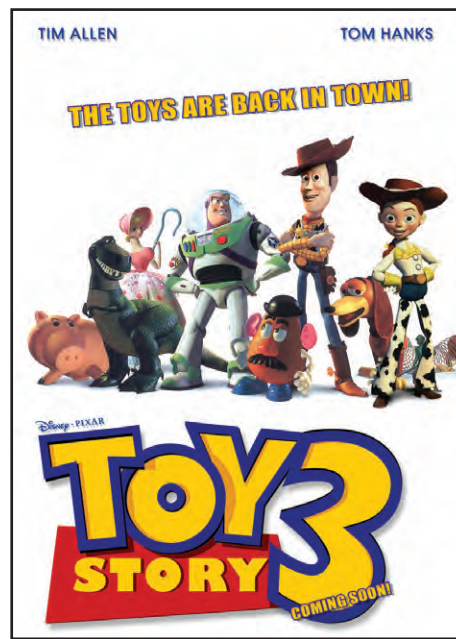
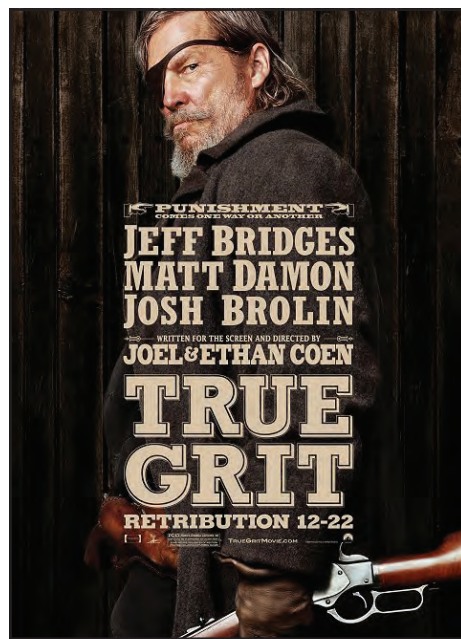
A: When I was 11 years old, I moved to another community. A friend invited me to a prayer service. It was there that I invited Jesus into my heart.

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

A: We moved back to Anniston, where I was blessed to meet and marry a godly man. We led a mission Sunday School that was sponsored by First Baptist of Anniston. Then we moved to Gadsden. We joined MeadowBrook Baptist and I have been a member there for the past 41 years. I've worked with Mission Friends, GAs, Vacation Bible School, Training Union and Sunday School. I now serve as mission involvement chairman for our Women on Mission group. We have a different project each month, where we get involved in our community.

Q: What does being a Christian mean to you?

A: Trusting and obeying God. ... I pray that I never get too old to tell of God's faithfulness, His love and mercies to me.



'And the Oscar goes to ...'

Movie reviewer gives Christian perspective on Oscar-nominated films

By Phil Boatwright
Baptist Press

The nominations for the 83rd Academy Awards were announced Jan. 25 in Beverly Hills. In keeping with a revived tradition that resurfaced last year, there are 10 nominees for best film. "The King's Speech" received the most nominations with 11; "True Grit" in close pursuit with 10.

The nominees for best picture are "Black Swan" (R), "The Fighter" (R), "Inception" (PG-13), "The Kids Are All Right" (R), "The King's Speech" (R), "127 Hours" (R), "The Social Network" (PG-13), "Toy Story 3" (G), "True Grit" (PG-13) and "Winter's Bone" (R).

Let's first examine the strengths of several of the nominees before looking at an element of filmmaking most often ignored by award committees.

"The Fighter" shows the importance of family and its main theme is one of redemption (See a detailed review at <http://www.previewonline.org/rev.php3?3627>).

Reminding us of the true special effects (story, dialogue and performance), "The King's Speech" contains a depth in both script and execution, giving film viewers a striking example of what this medium can deliver.

It is a film about character (<http://www.previewonline.org/rev.php3?3630>).

"The Social Network" defines a generation of go-getters who are finally seduced by the same forbidden sins as other generations — namely, boundless pleasures of the flesh and the love of money.

What impresses the film's characters is the thought of gaining a billion dollars. Never once do they think about losing their very soul (<http://previewonline.org/rev.php3?3604>).

Though there are some darker tones in "Toy Story 3," like its predecessors it's about friendship — and faith (<http://previewonline.org/rev.php3?3573>).

While darker in tone than the original (I sense a trend in sequels and remakes), the new "True Grit" captures the faith element found in Charles Portis' 1968 novel, with young Mattie's religious values being well spoken here and supported by the contemplative hymn "Leaning On the Everlasting Arms." Sadly, though "True Grit" got 10 nominations, it failed to receive one for Best Score — even though, in my opinion, it was (<http://www.previewonline.org/rev.php3?3632>).

"Winter's Bone" is poignant and moving, a well-acted, nicely paced drama concerning nobleness found in the human spirit (<http://www.previewonline.org/rev.php3?3635>).

Alas, along with the artistic and thematic qualities found in most of these films, many of the contenders are also laden with a cancerous content that has stealthily attached itself onto the fabric of our culture. Along with excesses in the areas of sexuality ("Black Swan," "The Kids Are All Right") and violent behavior ("True Grit," "Winter's Bone"), vulgar and profane language are found in each of these movies, except for the cartoon.

Six of the best picture nominees are rated R, three are PG-13, with only one rated G (same as last year, though that year's one animated film, "UP," was rated PG).

With the exception of Disney's "Toy Story 3," each of these films uses both obscenity (curse words) and profanity (misuse of God's name or Christ's). Indeed, "The King's Speech" received its rating for two or three scenes that featured the main character uttering a stream of invectives out of frustration. Without those few abuses, the film could easily have stayed within the PG category.

Homosexuality became a theme graphically pronounced in several movies this year, and two of the films containing lesbian activity were given award recognition. Though I did not review "The Kids Are All Right," I was disheartened by the near pornographic qualities found in "The Black Swan." Sexual situations are used here to shock and reveal a dispassionate bawdiness

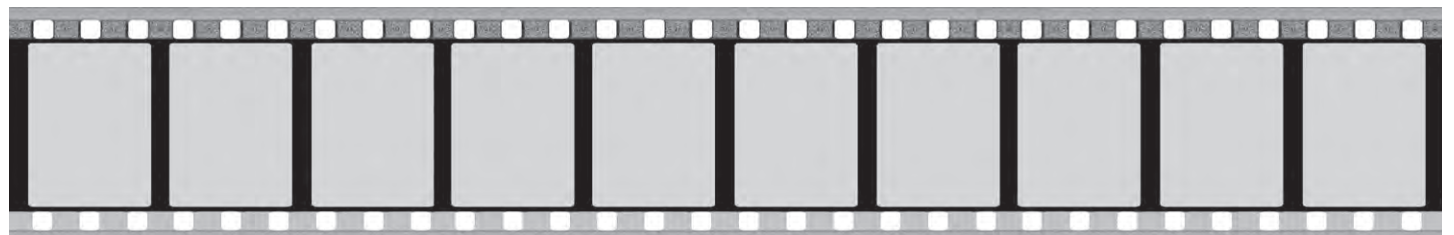
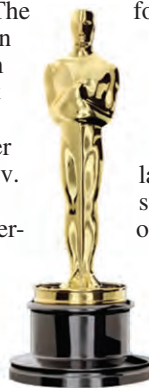
(<http://moviereporter.com/reviews/display.php?id=1921>).

The Bible makes it clear that we are not to be governed by the world's standard. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). The key word here is renewing.

Movies can be parables that instruct, sometimes in spite of their makers. Indeed, we can learn from viewing portraits of man's folly. But a film's allegory best serves as a warning when you know God's will.

Embrace God's Word and you will be able to see through the agendas of those you don't.

Phil Boatwright reviews films from a Christian perspective for Baptist Press and is the author of "Movies: The Good, the Bad, and the Really, Really Bad," available on Amazon.com. He also writes about Hollywood for previewonline.org and moviereporter.com.





NAMB photo

SHARING WITH LOCALS — NAMB church-planting missionary Jacques Avakian (right) shares with a Canadian motorcyclist in Pierrefonds, Quebec. Avakian says, "Quebec is one of the toughest mission fields."



NAMB photo

PERSONAL MINISTRY — Jacques Avakian (left) talks to a member of Eglise Renaissance de Long Sault, the church he serves as pastor.

NAMB church planter lights darkness in Quebec

In describing the spiritual condition of the people of Quebec, where he has been overseeing church planting since January 2009, North American Mission Board (NAMB) church planter Jacques Avakian calls to mind the boat crew in the story of Jonah.

"People in Quebec are spiritual and they're seeking something but they're not seeking the right spirit," he said. "The people Jonah met on the boat were spiritual, but they didn't know the right God because no one was sharing the truth with them."

Desire to share

Avakian's desire to share God's truth with others developed early in his life. An Armenian born in Lebanon, he was a teenager when his family fled to Cyprus in 1978 because of war. Avakian grew up in the Armenian Orthodox faith but had attended Catholic and Maronite schools in Lebanon, and at the age of 7, he received Christ as his Savior after attending a Child Evangelism Fellowship class.

In Cyprus, he attended a Brethren school and remembers the day

he promised God to serve Him if He let him live through the war. "I fully surrendered my life to Him when I was 15," said Avakian, who moved to Montreal in 1986.

Now 47, Avakian is married to Martine Arbour, a French Canadian, and has two children (Sabrina, 14, and Sebastien, 12). He speaks fluent English, French, Armenian, Arabic, Turkish and Greek — an asset for anyone serving in such a multicultural area. He is the pastor of Eglise Renaissance de Long Sault in Grenville, Quebec, about an hour west of Montreal.

The Avakians are two of more than 5,000 missionaries in the United States, Canada and their territories supported by the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) for North American Missions. They are among the NAMB missionaries featured as part of the annual Week of Prayer, March 6-13. With a theme of "Start Here," the 2011 AAEO goal is \$70 million, 100 percent of which benefits missionaries like the Avakians.

"When I came to Quebec, God put it on my heart to start a new church," he said.

In 2005, Avakian was introduced to Gary Smith, national catalyst for church starting in Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces (Canadian National Baptist Convention, CNBC).

'A visionary'

"He and I clicked and he asked me if I'd be part of their leadership, so I joined as the Quebec church planter." In 2007, Avakian became the regional church-starting strategist for Montreal, and since Smith's move to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Avakian has been serving as the advocate for Quebec.

"I'm a starter, a visionary," said Avakian, who has played a part in the startup of nine Quebec churches and is currently working with a 10th church in the process of officially affiliating with the CNBC. "Every morning, I get up to spend time with someone who is excited about starting a church and to help them be creative about the possibilities. My personal ministry is to see as many people as possible come to the Lord through any means and to see Christians grow and go through the maturity that God wants them to reach."

Avakian points out that many people in Quebec are bitter because of past experiences with organized religion. "They're not letting the walls be broken," he said. "I want to challenge everyone to look forward and remember that God heals the past. It's my personal mission that every soul who lives in the province of Quebec be reached ... to pray that God would remove the strongholds in Quebec so that when people hear the gospel, they respond to it instead of react to it."

To this end, Avakian is developing a prayer campaign called Prayer and Fasting 1771, which in-

volves one day of prayer and fasting per week for seven weeks and then one week of daily prayer and fasting.

"We have to have strategies, but we often forget the initial commandment that Jesus gave that we need to pray first. There are cultural and generational strongholds that need to be removed by prayer and fasting." Avakian estimated 1,000 communities in Quebec have no evangelical presence.

Though he believes in the importance of nourishing believers, Avakian feels that evangelism is of utmost importance and that church planting motivates evangelism.

"It's not that we're not satisfied with existing churches," he explained. "But we believe in different models of churches. God has been moving in our and other conventions, and more people are talking about church planting. But most seminaries don't even teach about church planting, so I'm getting in touch with some of them and encouraging them to focus on it more."

Looking to the future

Another of Avakian's goals is to start a church-planting center that would train and send out church planters, so he's developing a network of people who can provide help and resources.

By the year 2020, Avakian would like to see 200 CNBC churches in Quebec and 20,000 baptisms.

"I want to see churches with a vision to plant other churches. ... I don't want church to be a place where we go on Sundays to take a breath before holding it again for the rest of the week. Sunday should be a celebration of what we do during the rest of the week."

The main challenge of working in Quebec is the shortage of laborers.

"We're really short on people and resources," Avakian said. "If people outside of Quebec invested in ministry here, we would see great things happen."

Still Avakian believes evangelicals in

Quebec need to live by faith and trust that God will provide the resources.

"We need workers who are willing to give up everything to serve God."

"People say Quebec is one of the toughest mission fields and I agree but what mission field is easy? I don't believe anyone is beyond hope, no matter how tough they are. I haven't met one person in Quebec who didn't want to listen to what I was saying. If every believer in Montreal committed himself or herself to reaching one person a year, we would double ourselves in one year!"

(NAMB)



NAMB photo

DISCIPLESHIP — Jacques Avakian (left) prays with members of his regular Bible study group in Quebec.

Association awaits seminary's decision about building

Tarrant Baptist Association's (TBA) executive board voted unanimously Jan. 24 to offer to sell a building that has been a point of contention with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

If the seminary is unwilling to buy the building on its campus in Fort Worth, Texas, for fair market value, then the TBA executive board asked that the matter be referred to a three-member arbitration panel as stipulated in a 1982 affiliation agreement, according to TBA moderator Al Meredith. The executive board also resolved to pray for seminary leaders in the matter.

The seminary sent a letter Dec. 10, 2010, inform-

ing the association that it had six months to vacate the building located at 4520 James Ave. According to Meredith, while the building is located on the seminary's campus, Southwestern transferred the deed to the association in 1997. Meredith added that three or four years ago, representatives of the seminary inquired about the availability of the property but that nothing had been said on the matter between then and last December. A second letter from the seminary dated Jan. 18 reaffirmed its position but allowed for some leeway in when the association would have to move, Meredith said.

Trying to negotiate

"I don't have another step if these measures don't resolve the issue," Meredith, senior pastor of Wedgwood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, said after the executive board meeting, voicing hope that the issue can be resolved through a negotiated settlement. Otherwise "if the TBA wins, the Kingdom loses. If Southwestern wins, the Kingdom loses. No one wants to see the Kingdom lose because of this."

Representatives of Southwest-

ern have declined comment until the matter is resolved.

Published reports indicate that the seminary holds that the affiliation agreement between the entities has been breached and is no longer in force.

The seminary's letter raised two issues: TBA's inclusion of churches that are not in "friendly cooperation" with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and a

lack of help with finding preaching assignments and ministry opportunities for seminary students and faculty.

TBA member Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth no longer is affiliated with the SBC and the Baptist General Convention of

Texas (BGCT) over differences in how to deal with homosexuality among church members. The SBC voted in 2009 to cease relationship with the church, and in 2010, the church voted to leave the BGCT.

"What the SBC does is not binding on state or local institutions or the local churches," Meredith said. "It is different for Southwestern, since it is a denominational entity. As an association, we're trying to work with people who are archconservatives and moderates and everything in between."

As to the association's lack of help in placing students and faculty, Meredith said, "The great majority of the pastors on staff in the Tarrant Baptist Association attended Southwestern. At my church, I am the only person on staff who did not attend Southwestern. That does not even take into account the myriad of seminary students who volunteer in TBA churches."

Meredith added, "I pray for (seminary President) Paige Patterson and Southwestern Seminary every day, as I know many of our members do."

(BP)

"If Southwestern wins, the Kingdom loses. No one wants to see the Kingdom lose because of this."

Al Meredith
TBA moderator

'Incitements to violence'

Governments of Iraq, Egypt fail to protect religious rights

The governments of Iraq and Egypt have failed to protect the freedoms of religious minorities, resulting in "horrific atrocities" against historic Christian communities, a religious freedom advocate testified Jan. 20.

Nina Shea, a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, appeared before Congress' Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission less than a week after an Egyptian court handed down a death sentence to a man convicted in a January 2010 attack in which six Christians and a Muslim guard were killed in the city of Nag Hammadi.

Shea told the congressional panel, "The Oct. 31 violent siege of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq, during Sunday Mass and the New Year's Day bombing attack against Coptic Christians emerging from a church service in Alexandria, Egypt, sent shock waves around the world."

'Horrific atrocities'

The "horrific atrocities did not occur in a vacuum," Shea said.

"In Egypt, for the past two years, we've seen a dramatic upsurge in attacks against Copts, while in Iraq, churches have been targeted at least since 2004, and while the violence in the country has decreased overall, attacks against the Christians have increased," Shea said.

"This fall, an al-Qaida group ... explicitly linked the Christian

communities of Iraq and Egypt in its threats to kill Christians.

"Clearly the governments of both nations have failed to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief, especially for religious minorities, including Christian communities which have been in Egypt and Iraq for nearly 2,000 years," Shea said.

On Jan. 16, Mohammed Ahmed Hassanein, also known as Hammam al-Kamouni, received a death sentence on first-degree murder and terror-related charges for the 2010 attack in Nag Hammadi, The Associated Press (AP) reported. The State Security Court, whose rulings cannot be appealed, is expected to announce verdicts against the other two defendants in the case sometime this month.

The death sentence in the 11-month trial came on the heels of the Jan. 1 suicide bombing in which 21 worshipers were killed at a church in Alexandria, the AP noted. Egypt's top security official has blamed the Army of Islam in the Gaza Strip for the attack.

Muslim-Christian stress in Egypt was intensified further by a Jan. 11 incident in which an off-duty police officer opened fire on a train in southern Egypt, killing a 71-year-old Christian man and wounding five others, including the man's wife.

Shea told Baptist Press she sees the death sentence as "tokenism."

"There are a number of attacks on Christians not being prosecuted, and the case in which the

death sentence was handed down is not finished," Shea said. "There are two other defendants still on trial."

The Jan. 11 attack, Shea noted in her congressional testimony, is yet another evidence of "a long-standing, deeply entrenched pattern of impunity in attacks against Christians."

Discriminative policies

"There are government measures that discriminate against Christians and allow them to be scapegoated. You regularly see incitements to violence against Christians in government-owned media, including wild conspiracy theories about Christians preparing to take over Egypt. It creates an atmosphere of intimidation and incitement to violence against Christians," Shea said.

Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's estimated population of 80 million and regularly complain that police ignore discrimination and violence against them.

The AP noted the government has tried to calm Christian fears, freeing dozens of Christians detained after November 2010 rioting over construction of a church building in a Cairo suburb and beefing up security outside churches.

In a widely publicized celebration in mid-January, President Hosni Mubarak presented one of the nation's highest honors to a famous Christian surgeon, the AP reported. (BP)

Bills hope to bar federal funds for abortion

Pro-life members of Congress reinforced Jan. 20 their intention to prohibit federal funding of abortion by introducing two bills: one that would accomplish the feat across the board and one that would do so in last year's health care law.

The introduction of the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, H.R. 3, and Protect Life Act, H.R. 358, came one day after the House of Representatives voted 245-189 to repeal the health care measure dubbed "Obamacare" by its critics.

One of the reasons for the effort to rescind the 2010 law was its authorization of subsidies for insurance plans that cover abortion.

The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, which was introduced by Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., with 161 co-sponsors, would institute a permanent, governmentwide ban on federal funds and subsidies for abortion. It would serve to standardize bans on abortion funding that now exist in various federal programs, many of which have to be approved each year, and make certain the prohibition extends to all agencies.

The Protect Life Act, introduced by Rep. Joe Pitts, R-Pa., with 89 co-sponsors, would amend last year's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to bar federal money from paying for abortion or abortion coverage.

Speaker of the House John Boehner called Smith's bill "one of our

highest legislative priorities" and designated it as H.R. 3 to demonstrate its importance.

"A ban on taxpayer funding of abortion is the will of the people and ought to be the law of the land," Boehner said at a Jan. 20 news conference announcing its introduction. (BP)

Missouri Baptist Foundation buys more time

A judge has put on hold the effects of an earlier ruling in the ongoing legal battle between the Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC) and the Missouri Baptist Foundation.

On Jan. 26, Cole County Circuit Court Judge Byron Kinder issued a stay of a Dec. 31 order so that outgoing Judge Paul Wilson's decision could be appealed to the Missouri Court of Appeals and possibly to the state Supreme Court.

In December, Wilson ruled in MBC's favor that the foundation did not have the right to file amendments it made to its charter in October 2001 without MBC approval. Kinder's stay means the

foundation can continue to operate as it has since the MBC filed legal action against it in 2002. The foundation has 40 days from the December ruling to file an appeal.

"While this routine legal process continues, the foundation will conduct its business as it always has with a strong commitment to serving the best interests of its clients and all Missouri Baptists," foundation Interim President Stephen Mathis said in a written statement.

If allowed to stand by the higher courts, Wilson's ruling would require the foundation to return to its 1994 charter and articles of incorporation, and trustees not elected under its provisions would have to give up their seats. (ABP)

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

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



Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► **First Church, Prattville**, will host a conference sponsored by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union for women of all ages called Renew...one-day Feb. 26, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Speaker, author and founder of Kingdom Heart Ministries Kimberly Sowell will speak. Shelley Jennings will lead worship. Lunch is included. To register visit www.alabamawmu.org. Travis Coleman is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Birmingham Association and United for Life Foundation** will hold a resource conference called Embracing Alzheimer's and Other Dementias for families, caregivers, clergy and professionals Feb. 4-5 at Shades Mountain Church, Vestavia Hills. Sessions will be Friday from 1:30 to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Ellen Marie Edmonds, radio host and author of "Embracing Dementia, A Call to Love," will speak. Other speakers include Daniel Potts, MD; Rhonda Dial; Dale Brakhage; Debbie Moss, RN; and Richard M. Allman, MD. For information visit www.embracingalzheimers.com or call 205-599-3245. Breakfast will be included. Mike McLemore is executive director. ► **Hunter Street Church, Hoover**, will hold AXP (Authentic Experience), a single adult worship event Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m. Landon Dowden, pastor of Crosspoint Church, Baton Rouge, La., will speak. Kristian Stanfill, singer/songwriter and worship leader for Passion conferences and North Point Community Church, Atlanta, will lead the music. Gospel in Community will be the focus of the event. For information call 205-985-7295 or visit www.hunterstreetsingles.org. Vince Martin is minister to single adults. Buddy

Gray is pastor. ► **First Church, Irondale**, will host a benefit performance called "Two Suitcases and an Accordion: Traveling with the USO Camp Shows in WWII" featuring storyteller Dolores Hydock and WWII USO Camp Show performer Barb Sparkes, of Birmingham, Feb. 20, 2-3:30 p.m. Benefits will go to Alabama Grief Support Services. For tickets call 205-870-0336. Bert Breland is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Evergreen Church, Jackson**, will hold a men's conference Feb. 5, 2-6 p.m., with Wesley Hicks of Stave Creek Church, Jackson, Johnny Kendrick of Tompkins Church, Grove Hill and Turner Ward, manager of the Mobile Bay Bears AA baseball team. Dinner will be served. Howard Gaston III is pastor.

CLEBURNE

► **Cleburne Association** will hold its second quarter senior adult day Feb. 21, 10:30 a.m., at Macedonia Church, Ranburne, with Mark Fuller, southern gospel pianist/soloist, of Atlanta. There will be soups, salads and desserts. For information call Sandra F. Kent, senior adult coordinator for Cleburne Association, at 256-463-5341. Larry Riddle is director of missions.

COFFEE

► **County Line Church, Enterprise**, will hold revival Feb. 20-23 with Daniel Wilson, associate in the office of evangelism for the State Board of Missions. Casey Speigner, minister of worship and education for Pine Grove Church, Centre, will lead the music. Services will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and weeknights at 7. Danny Wiggins is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **First Church, Athens**, will hold its third annual women's conference March 25-26 with Linda Shepherd, author and international speaker. Sessions will be Friday from 6:30 to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Lunch will be included. For information contact Jackie Jackson at 256-232-7829 or jackiejackson12@gmail.com. Edwin Jenkins is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Central Church, Decatur**, will host Don Piper, author of "90 Minutes in Heaven," Feb. 6, 8:15 and 10:30 a.m. Rob Jackson is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Matt Hayes** is the new pastor of **Sharon Church, Pinson**. He and his wife, Karen, have two children.

SELMA

► **Elkdale Church, Selma**, will hold a dedication service for its new renovations Feb. 6. Sunday School will be at 9:15 a.m., worship at 10:30 a.m. and open house from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Cory Horton is pastor.

SIPSEY

► **Sipsey Association** will hold an evangelism conference March 5 at Big Hill Church, Gordo. Dinner will be at 5 p.m. The conference will be at 5:45 p.m. with Ray Hallman, pastor of Davidson Church. Ted Sessoms is associational evangelism director, and Max Stripling is director of missions for Sipsey Association. Ralph Smith is pastor of Big Hill. ► **New Hope Church, Berry**, will hold revival March 6-8 with Alfred Banks, pastor of Buhl Church. Services will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. and weeknights at 7. Ed Steelman is pastor. ☞

Conference to host 2 tracks, Q&A lunch

(continued from page 1) says, "The Graham legacy continues," located in Birmingham at the intersection of interstates 65 and 20/59 in order to get the word out to the community.

"I pray that at the closing harvest event people would come to know Christ," Gilbreath said. And, he added, that these people will be plugged into a church. That's why his office plans to send decision cards to the associations where the people live for follow-up.

Gilbreath said he hopes this event will be a model for churches and associations so that they can leave saying, "We can do this, too."

Even though Graham is the headliner for the conference, many other exciting things will take place, Gilbreath said.

Like last year, the conference will offer two different tracks —

the evangelism track featuring preachers and worship and Great Commission ministries tracks, which offer practical ways to do intentional evangelism through church ministries.

Conference speakers

This year's conference will feature 11 guest speakers, including three Alabama pastors (Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Baptist Church, Bessemer; Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First; and Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery); Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis; and James Merritt, senior pastor of Cross Pointe Church, Duluth, Ga.

Prior to the Monday afternoon sessions, there will be a question and answer (Q&A) session with Gaines and Merritt during a ca-

tered lunch. Seating is limited. In addition, Gaines and Merritt will be bringing members of their church staffs to help lead the Great Commission ministries tracks.

"Last year was the first year for a mega church pastor to bring his staff and it was a huge success," Gilbreath said.

"There are all kinds of topics where pastors can get real help. ... This conference is to give them what they need. We're not bringing them in to say, 'Do it this way,' but to help.

"I would hope that our pastors, staff and lay people would go away motivated to reach people," he added.

"All we want to do is to come alongside them in what they're already doing."

For more information, call 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 245. (TAB)

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Tuscaloosa pastor celebrates 60 years of ministry

Curtis Kelley, senior pastor of Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, was 14 when God called him to preach. Three years later, Kelley preached his first sermon, which began 60 years of ministry.

"When you love what you do and you are immersed in your work, you don't think of it as another year [has] come and gone," he said.

But the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church Kelley serves didn't want this milestone to pass without some recognition.

On Jan. 23, more than 300 people gathered at Taylorville Baptist to celebrate his six decades in ministry. Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), presented him with framed certificates of recognitions on behalf of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Tuscaloosa County Probate Judge W. Hardy McCollum and the SBOM.

Also, as a special surprise to Kelley, his son Matthew, pastor of Christian Valley Baptist Church, Livingston, gave the morning sermon. Matthew preached on Curtis' ministry motto: preaching the blood, the Book and the blessed hope.

Curtis did not begin his ministry as a preacher, however. A lover of music, he served as a minister of music and youth and an evangelist before entering the pastorate. He eventually served as pastor of five churches in Alabama and Georgia. During that time, he also traveled to places like India, Kenya, Nigeria and Japan, on short-term missions trips. In 2000, Curtis retired from First Baptist Church, Talladega, and for two years, did interim work for several churches. But when Taylorville called him to be its full-time pastor, he knew it was a calling from God.

During his eight years at Taylorville, Curtis has seen a 300 percent to 400 percent increase in membership, and because of the growth, the church has begun a building project. He attributes the longevity of his ministry to God and his wife of 55 years, Barbara.

"It was great that the church honored me in this way, but I know where the real honor and glory goes," Curtis said. "The Lord is the One who deserves it."

Smith named Beeson's 2011 Alumnus of the Year

David Smith, student minister at South Hamilton Baptist Church, was awarded the 2011 master's degree Alumnus of the Year by Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham on Jan. 25.

Smith, who has served as the chaplain at the Hamilton Aged and Infirm Correctional Facility in Hamilton since 2007, was cited for his work with Beeson's extension division to offer faith-based classes at the prison. Through the extension division, Smith has offered courses in Biblical Introduction, Christian Doctrine, the Life of Christ and the Life and Letters of Paul. About 25 inmates are enrolled in the program.

"He is a God-called servant who serves as a teacher, preacher and minister. We are proud to call him a graduate of Beeson Divinity School," said Beeson extension division director Jim

Pounds in presenting Smith the award during Beeson's opening convocation of the spring semester.

Smith earned a master of divinity degree from Beeson in 2004 and a bachelor's degree in religion from Samford in 2001. He and his wife, Heather, have two children. ☞



KELLEY



SMITH



But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:44-45

'We are you' marketing working for faith groups

To many viewers, the "I'm a Mormon" ad blitz from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seemed hip, refreshing and original.

The campaign, launched last year in nine U.S. cities, generated a lot of national buzz. Its short videos featured regular folks talking about their lives as doctors, skateboarders, tax attorneys, environmentalists, surfers or former felons before announcing that they are Mormon.

Turns out, lots of other faiths take a similar tack.

Scientists, with longtime connections in Hollywood, have produced personal-story videos for a marketing effort known as "Meet a Scientist." The Episcopal Church has an "I am Episcopalian" series. A Muslim agency links modern believers with Islam's founder in an "Inspired by Muhammad" push. Catholics reach out to lapsed members in their "Catholics Come Home" drive. Methodists seek the younger crowd by redefining what church is.

The styles and motivations for

all these campaigns vary — some clearly are proselytizing; others are correcting mistaken impressions. But all of them follow the "I Am" national trend in advertising.

As Americans became less religious, they began to look to consumer goods for their identities, explained Mara Einstein, a professor of media studies at Queens College in New York. They saw themselves as the person who used a PC or a Mac, drove a Volkswagen or a BMW or sipped a Starbucks latte.

That personal approach eventually circled back to spirituality. Religious groups began trying to tell potential members that theirs was a faith for someone who looked and acted like them, Einstein said.

The message of these ads is not just that we — Mormons, Methodists, Muslims — are normal, said Einstein, who wrote "Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age." It's that "we are you."

Scientists

The Church of Scientology Inter-

national launched its "Meet a Scientist" series in the early 1990s, putting personal descriptions on T-shirts, brochures and magazines.

The movement started by devotees of science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard claims more than 8 million members but has faced stiff criticism in several countries, in the media and by some former followers.

In 2008, the church posted video profiles on its own YouTube channel. Today the site features more than 200 Scientist testimonials, including ones from educators, teens, skydivers, a golf instructor, a hip-hop dancer and engineers, Scientology spokesman Tommy Davis said.

They tell their stories, what attracted them to the faith and how it has helped them.

The church is not motivated by bad press or critics, Davis said. "To the degree that there's any sort of misunderstanding of Scientology, it comes from ignorance and lack of firsthand experience."

Since the videos began airing in 14 U.S. markets, the number of people wanting more information about the church has skyrocketed.

"Frankly (our) interest is in proselytizing," Davis said.

We want people to see what Scientology does and the tools for peo-

ple to use to improve their lives."

Episcopalians

The Episcopal Church, meanwhile, has been around for centuries and believes it has much to offer religious seekers. But like many mainline Protestant churches, its numbers are shrinking. Plus it has no marketing budget.

"We are seen as a normal, old denomination and kind of forgotten," said Anne Rudig, the church's director of communications. "I wanted a way to show that even though we have an ancient liturgy, our church is pretty contemporary. We are relevant."

She reasoned that the best way to spread that message would be to hear from longtime members such as Gail Bennett, who likes the church's emphasis on justice and peace, or new converts such as Diane Caruso, who finds beauty in the faith's music and liturgy.

"It's a place where I really could talk to God," Caruso said in a vid-

eo. The campaign started in 2000 with dozens of testimonials. So many Episcopalians logged on to the site it nearly crashed. The effort took off from there, with many members filming themselves and sending their videos to the New York headquarters.

"I still get e-mails from people who say, 'I had no idea the Episcopal Church was like this,'" she said. "It's not all old white men."

Now, Rudig said, if she only had a marketing budget as big as the Methodists.

United Methodists

The United Methodist Church took a different branding path — describing what it does, not who is in it. The \$20 million marketing push began in May 2009 and targeted 18- to 34-year-olds, many of whom have rejected organized religion altogether. Creators dubbed the campaign "10,000 doors" to suggest the myriad ways to become engaged with the church.

"Whether it's helping to provide an anti-malaria bed net for a child in Africa, volunteering to help in the community or joining a church's recreation league, we want you to feel welcome," Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, said in a news release. "There is a doorway through which you can approach the United Methodist Church."

The effort, part of a grander scheme known as "Rethink Church," uses "nonchurch language" and "positive land mines" to attract young people by inviting them to look at the faith with fresh eyes, Einstein wrote in a forthcoming essay, "The Evolution of Re-

ligious Branding." "These 'land mines' are issues like Darfur, theology of ecology, homelessness and so on."

Some of the messages, sprawled across billboards, asked questions such as "What if church were a literacy program for homeless children? What if church considered ecology part of theology? What if church could bring sides together? Would you come?"

Muslims

Muslims in the United States and Britain have faced perception problems — if not outright hostility — of their faith. Hoping to counter such negativity, a group known as the Exploring Islam Foundation created an ad campaign for subway walls and taxis in central London, as well as video interviews on its website, inspiredbymuhammad.com.

The spots contain messages such as "I believe in social justice. So did Muhammad. I believe in women's rights. So did Muhammad. I believe in protecting the environment. So did Muhammad."

British values are "synonymous with Islamic values," Remona Aly, the foundation's campaigns director, said in a release, "those of being committed to social justice, caring for the environment, of mutual respect and tolerance

and contributing positively to your society." In other words, it says, Muslims are us.

Mormons

The Mormon effort sprouted from research, too, showing that many Americans either know nothing about the faith or harbor stereotypical, even false, impressions. Several recent studies, including one by the authors of "American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us," rank Mormons among the least liked U.S. faiths.

To modify that impression, producers of the "I'm a Mormon" series sought members who were atypical, articulate and photogenic.

"Mormons are doing an impressive job using new media to reach people and connect with individuals in a way that ... works for them," Catholic blogger Matthew Warner wrote on the *National Catholic Register* website. The Latter-day Saints were "smart in their approach," he wrote, building on two basic facts: Lots of people think Mormons are weird, and once people get to know a Mormon personally, that impression changes.

In an e-mail, Warner said he believes the campaign will be effective "for actually improving the public perception of Mormons for many people." (RNS)

"I wanted a way to show that even though we have an ancient liturgy, our church is pretty contemporary."

Anne Rudig
Episcopal Church

"Mormons are doing an impressive job using new media to reach people and connect with individuals."

Matthew Warner
Catholic blogger

Nearly half of Protestant churches use social networking, poll reports

Nearly half of more than 1,000 Protestant churches polled by LifeWay Research in September indicated they are using Facebook as a ministry tool.

The research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention's publisher, LifeWay Christian Resources, said increasing numbers of churches are turning to social networking and Facebook is far and away the most used networking tool.

Forty-seven percent reported using Facebook, and 28 percent uses other services like MySpace or Ning or a church-management software, while 40 percent of churches said they are not using any kind of social networking utility.

'Places of interaction'

"Churches are natural places of interaction," LifeWay Research Director Scott McConnell said.

"Congregations are rapidly adopting social networking, not only to speed their own communication but also to interact with people outside their church."

The most popular use of social networking (73 percent) is interacting with the congrega-

tion, followed closely with 70 percent that uses it only to distribute outbound news and information.

Church staff members also are turning to mobile devices like smart phones to access e-mail (53 percent), access calendars (33 percent) and update and respond to Facebook posts (32 percent).

Fifteen percent of staff members use mobile devices to blog or tweet.

Three-fourths of churches (78 percent) maintain a website. Most (91 percent) use the website to provide information to potential visitors, while eight in 10 (79 percent) use it to provide information to members of the congregation.

Fewer than half (43 percent) use their websites to obtain and distribute prayer requests, and 39 percent allows people to register online for events and activities.

Four out of 10 churches (42 percent) update their websites once a month or less frequently. Forty percent posts new material at least once a week and 15 percent more often than that.

One in four churches (26 percent) uses blogs in its online ministry, but 33 percent of churches said they expect to be blogging this time next year.

A quarter of churches (26 percent) said they proactively look for new technology. Half (47 percent) are open to new technology but don't go looking for it.

One in four (24 percent) admits to being slow in considering new technology, but 3 percent avoids it altogether.

A sharp contrast

"Many churches are using their website like a Yellow Pages ad characterized by basic information and infrequent updates," McConnell said.

"This is in sharp contrast with churches that use their website like a bustling church receptionist registering people for upcoming events, collecting prayer requests and obtaining volunteers.

"There is nothing wrong with using a church website to simply give directions to the church or state the church's beliefs," McConnell added.

"However, we must realize that more and more people expect to be able to interact online without having to drive or make a phone call to the church."

(ABP)

'Constitutional separation?'

Cities are levying fees on churches to alleviate economic pressures, experts say

When a community needs to rebuild crumbling roads, should houses of worship pay fees for the number of times their congregants drive on them?

That is the question behind a recent suit filed by churches in the small city of Mission, Kan., who argue the city's new "transportation utility fee" is a tax they should not have to pay.

With cash-strapped states and cities facing a slew of tough choices, there is a growing debate nationwide about whether religious congregations should help foot the bill.

"It makes no sense to tax churches and to limit their ability to provide their services, and it does damage to the constitutional separation between church and state," argued Erik Stanley, senior legal

counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, which is representing Catholic and Baptist churches in the city of 10,000.

He acknowledged that church-state separation is generally not an argument made by his conservative Christian law firm, but in this instance, he said, "there should be a separation here."

Houses of worship are generally exempt from federal and state taxes, in part because nonprofits are viewed as providing beneficial services for society.

As a result, municipalities often

don't gain any revenue from the property on which they sit, and Stanley views the fees as a way to get around the churches' tax-exempt status.

According to the lawsuit filed in December, the city calculated the number of trips generated to and from a property based on a manual of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

The manual estimates that a church produces an average of 5.8 vehicle trips per week for each seat in a sanctuary. That led to a fee of \$898.77 for First Baptist Church and \$1,685.19 for St. Pius X Catholic Church.

Stanley said state courts in Idaho and Florida have ruled against similar fees, determining that city-imposed fees were invalid because they were not authorized by state legislation.

Mission officials deny that the churches should be exempt, as well as the notion that the fee amounts to a tax.

"It was just a fair way to spread the cost among those who are generating the traffic," said Mission Mayor Laura McConwell, "to help pay for the roads that you need to bring people in either for your business or for the churches or to people's homes."

She said calling the fee a "drive-way tax" is a misnomer.

"We discussed it also with our attorneys ... to make sure we weren't

stepping on anyone's constitutional rights before we instated it," she said. "I'm pretty comfortable with what we've chosen."

McConwell said her city's fees are because of aging infrastructure, not the faltering economy. But experts say economic pressures have led municipalities to levy fees on nonprofits with increasing regularity.

"Given the current economic conditions for cities, we're seeing cities are looking for other ways to find revenue in order to pay essential services," said Gregory Minchak, spokesman for the National League of Cities.

Robert Tuttle, a church-state expert at George Washington University Law School in Washington, said the fee debates in Mission and elsewhere aren't about churches' tax-exempt status but whether a government institution is authorized by state law to impose a fee.

Cash-strapped governments are nothing new, he said, but current economic challenges are prompting creative ways of dealing with money woes.

"To the extent that they weren't willing to engage in political fights before, maybe now they're willing," Tuttle said. "Maybe fees are hurting churches even more because their donor contributions are down."

A drainage fee in Houston, adopted last year in a close public vote, has been criticized by churches, which could pay thou-

sands to hundreds of thousands of dollars for a new city initiative to control flooding.

"If you take \$100,000 out of a church budget, that's personnel, that's benevolent ministries, and those are things that now aren't going to be done," said David Welch, director of the Houston Area Pastor Council. "Who's going to do it?"

Heavy burden

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston said early estimates suggest costs for it and its 78 parishes could reach \$1 million.

"We especially realize this fee will place a particular burden on our poorer inner-city parishes,

which have very limited resources," said Jenny Faber, spokeswoman for the archdiocese. "We hope for a more equitable solution for our parishes (and) other religious entities and nonprofit groups."

Jessica Michan, press secretary for Houston Mayor Annise Parker, said the City Council still needs to vote on how the fee will be calculated and what organizations will be exempted. But a city document about the initiative notes that eight of Texas' 10 largest cities have drainage fees — and none exempt churches.

As in Mission, there's been a suit filed to try to halt the fee, charging that it was vague and therefore invalid. (RNS)

"We hope for a more equitable solution for our parishes (and) other religious entities and nonprofit groups."

Jenny Faber
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

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Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Ga. school board votes to keep graduation at church

CANTON, Ga. — A Georgia school board voted Jan. 20 to keep its high school graduation ceremonies at a Southern Baptist mega-church, ignoring threats of a possible lawsuit.

The Cherokee County school board voted unanimously not to move graduations for the district's students away from First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., a 17,000-member congregation led by former Southern Baptist Convention President Johnny Hunt.

In 2009, lawyers for Americans United for Separation of Church and State warned the school board that holding graduation services in a religious setting while suitable secular venues are available is an unconstitutional government establishment of religion.

In December, the school board postponed a vote on whether to move the ceremonies, reasoning that holding off until some newly elected board members took office would put the district in a stronger position in the event of legal action.

Ga. law prohibiting guns in church remains in place

MACON, Ga. — A federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit by gun rights advocates who claimed a Georgia law prohibiting weapons in a house of worship was unconstitutional.

GeorgiaCarry.org, an organization that supports gun owners' rights, and two of its members filed suit against state officials saying the law placed an undue burden on them.

"The law at issue here ... does not prohibit anyone from attending services at a place of worship," ruled Judge Ashley Royal of the U.S. District Court in Macon, Ga.

The judge said any burden on worship attendance was "tangential" because the law requires that people not carry the weapon in services, leave it in their cars or surrender it temporarily to security officers.

Jerry Henry, executive director of GeorgiaCarry.org, said his group is mulling whether to appeal the decision. "We are disappointed in the judge's interpretation," he said.

Belmont adds 'sexual orientation' to its nondiscrimination policy in landmark move

Less than two months after facing a controversy over the departure of a lesbian soccer coach, Belmont University's trustees Jan. 26 added "sexual orientation" to the school's nondiscrimination policy, a landmark move that is being criticized as a major departure from its Christian founding.

Located in Nashville, Belmont had ties to the Tennessee Baptist Convention (TBC) for more than 50 years until the university's board, in 2005, voted to move away from a TBC-elected board to a self-perpetuating board. Two years later, the two sides reached a settlement in which Belmont would pay the TBC \$11 million over 40 years.

"For decades Tennessee Baptists poured themselves into making Belmont what it is," Randy Davis, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, said. "We did sever ties in 2007, but many of us never dreamed that the school would walk away so rapidly from their Christian heritage and roots. My heart is broken for all of the Tennessee Baptists that have loved and invested themselves in Belmont over the years. Many of our strongest leaders today are Belmont graduates, and the sentiment that I am hearing from them is one of outrage."

The controversy began in early December, when former women's soccer coach Lisa Howe left her position. It was unclear whether she resigned or was fired, but her players claimed she was let go when she told them her lesbian partner was pregnant. Howe seemed to imply that her sexuality was an issue,

saying that her dedication to the program and school did not change "when I acknowledged that I am a lesbian and that my partner and I are expecting a baby." Belmont initially stuck by its decision, with Belmont trustee chairman Marty Dickens saying "we do adhere to our values as Christ-centered, and we don't want to make apologies for that."

Christian leaders outside of Belmont circles applauded the school, but it soon became apparent the school might be backtracking.

'Long-standing practice'

Just days after Howe left, Belmont President Bob Fisher held a press conference and said that in his 10 years, "sexual orientation has not been considered in making hiring, promotion, salary or dismissal decisions." He also acknowledged there are "many gay and lesbian students, as well as gay and lesbian faculty and staff."

Belmont also faced pressure from record executive Mike Curb, who had given \$10 million toward construction of the basketball arena and said he would "do everything" he could to get the board of trustees to "change its policy on homosexuality and rehire Howe."

Fisher held a press conference Jan. 26 during which he said the new policy simply reflects the

school's "long-standing practice."

"We are a Christian community that is welcoming, loving and inclusive of everyone," Fisher said, according to the *Belmont Vision* newspaper.

Howe released a statement, saying, according to *The Tennessean*, that Belmont needs to make sure "that acceptance of LGBT students and staff is not just a written policy." LGBT is an acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender."


Belmont's board Jan. 26 also affirmed that school faculty and staff are expected to "uphold high Christian standards of morality, ethics and conduct," *The Tennessean* daily newspaper reported.

Davis said the school logically cannot claim to be biblically grounded while affirming unbiblical values.

"If you hold to a high Christian moral standard, and yet you embrace a lifestyle that the Scripture condemns, there is a conflict," he said. "In this postmodern era, there is a strong temptation for believers to become more tolerant of sin because they are afraid of being labeled. I think this issue [homosexuality] is a flagpole kind of issue that many Christians are silent on. But compassion toward people and a biblical conviction can coexist." (BP)

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Go for the win-win solution

I can feel it when it happens. My jaw tenses up. I feel nervous and start getting warmer. It's the moment my mind makes the switch from discussing an issue to fighting for my side.

This is especially true if I have put a lot of thought into my opinion. The longer I have thought about and dealt with an issue, the more vehemently I defend my position.

However, somewhere along the way, I lose sight of my opinion and why I believe it is correct, and I begin to focus on winning the debate. Whether it's at work or home, I want to win. This means, in essence, that I want the other person to lose.

Does that happen to you? You begin a discussion based on what you believe is the right course of action, but you continue it based on your motivation to win. I win. You lose.

While winning under these circumstances can be gratifying, it does defeat us ultimately. Think of the model laid out for us in the Scriptures. Jesus taught a way of self-sacrifice and servant leadership. Paul worked to persuade people, but he did not force the issues.

Practically speaking, there are significant consequences to operating from a win/lose mentality. First it creates a division in the relationship. While the winner feels victorious and validated, the loser feels distant and unappreciated. This usually results in a lack of commu-

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



nication and respect for the other person.

Second, and more importantly, it means that some problems have not been addressed. Remember the other person has very real concerns. There are reasons that he or she defended the other position. In an effort to win, those reasons can be disregarded and left unaddressed, which can lead to real problems.

We have gotten our way in that particular circumstance, but we also have caused a person to seek distance from us and not taken the

time to address very real concerns. So problems may be left to fester and lie under the surface. It's a pattern of this type of communication at home and in the workplace that leads to serious breakdowns.

Perhaps, instead, when faced with a conflict, the question to ask is "How can we both leave this conversation as winners?" Instead of a win-lose argument, seek the win-win approach. All concerns get addressed and both parties leave feeling validated. Both may have to give some but both gain some.

A Takeaway Value . . .

When you find yourself in a conflict, seek a win-win solution.

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.

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ERLC announces its 2011 legislative agenda

The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) has announced its legislative agenda for 2011.

The agenda outlined covers a wide variety of issues, including:

- ▶ Codification of the Mexico City Policy, which previously barred federal money for organizations that perform or promote abortions overseas. President Obama used his executive power to rescind the policy.

- ▶ Passage of the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act.

- ▶ Enactment of a ban on federal funds for Planned Parenthood, the country's No. 1 abortion provider and leading recipient of Title X family planning money.

- ▶ Repeal of last year's health-care law and replacement with a "realistic alternative."

- ▶ Ratification of a constitutional amendment to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

- ▶ Resistance to efforts to promote the homosexual agenda, including the Employment Non-discrimination Act, which would add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to a list of characteristics an employer cannot consider in hiring, firing and promotion decisions. It would expand the list that cur-

rently includes race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

- ▶ Passage of a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget limited to 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product, with exceptions for war and other crises.

- ▶ Exposure of attempts at administrative overreach by the president and federal agencies to institute policies when the administration's legislative efforts fail.

Persecuted Christians

- ▶ Continuation of attempts to help focus attention on and provide relief for persecuted Christians and others around the world.

- ▶ Defeat of such proposed treaties in the United Nations (U.N.) as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the U.N. Defamation of Religions resolution.

- ▶ Action by the Obama administration to distribute congressionally approved funds to organizations able to implement technology to break Internet firewalls set up in totalitarian states.

The ERLC's legislative agenda may be accessed online at <http://erlc.com/article/legislative-agenda-for-2011/>. (BP)

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Riddles Bend Baptist Church is searching for a bivocational youth minister. If interested, send resumes to: Riddles Bend Baptist Church, ATTN: Youth Search Committee, 5574 Riddles Bend Road, Rainbow City, AL 35906, or e-mail: fulenwider_d@bellsouth.net.

YOUTH/CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Brent Baptist Church currently accepting resumes for youth/children's minister with secondary Bible education. Resumes accepted until March 31. BBC Search Committee, 470 Mychael Lane, Centreville, AL 35042.

PART-TIME YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Contact Kennedy Baptist Church, Lamar Association, Kennedy, Ala., 205-596-3713 or e-mail resume to: secretary@kennedybaptist.org.

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Want to know God?

By Pastor Herman Pair
FBC Sandusky in Birmingham

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Before God, through Jesus Christ, created this world, He knew and loved you. He knew that you would "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

God loves us even when we break His commandments and fall short of His standards. He has shown us that He loves us and wants us to know Him: "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

How awesome to know that God loves us even though we are unloving in our sins. The good news is "for God so loved the world (you and me) that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Sin has the great price of death on it, which we have earned through our sinfulness, but God in His love has given us the greatest gift — better than \$1 million — Jesus.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Yes, God is offering you the gift of His Son, Jesus, as the payment for your sins.

It is a gift of eternal life; you must open your heart and confess with your mouth to receive it and be saved from your sins. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:9-10). You will have a changed life for eternity. The Bible declares, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

By faith, receive God's free gift of an eternal life of knowing Him and Jesus and be changed forever.

'Given a gift'

FBC North Mobile education pastor, wife see God's love through Down syndrome child

By John Evans
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Heather Messick stood in the hospital shower crying. "The only thing I could pray over and over was, 'God, help me,' because I didn't know how I was going to live life after that point," Messick said. "There was nothing familiar to me."

She was scheduled to bring her new daughter, Victoria, home from the hospital the next day. But as the frightening unknown of raising a child with Down syndrome washed over her, Messick was overwhelmed.

"When I was raised, I had a very sheltered home life," she said. "I didn't have anything really hard ever happen to me. Nothing that took me to the brink."

When Messick, already the mother of Elyssa and Natalie, had the first ultrasound done at 11 weeks with Victoria, the doctors knew something wasn't normal. A battery of long ultrasounds followed that took an emotional toll on the expectant mother.

"I didn't get to go to the doctor and see an ultrasound (just) to see my baby," Messick said. "It was going to see what was wrong with my baby every time I went."

As the weeks went by, she clung to Psalm 139, in which David spoke of how the Lord formed him in the womb.

"I thought, 'I just have to believe in my head that God knows what He's doing, that He didn't make a mistake when He made Victoria,'" Messick said.

When Victoria was born, the doctors confirmed she had Down syndrome, a genetic defect that causes serious developmental, physical and mental problems. It was new territory for Messick and her husband, Mark, adult education pastor of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland.

"I didn't grow up having a lot of contact with special needs children," Heather Messick said. "I felt like



Photo courtesy of Heather Messick

FAMILY OF LOVE — Mark and Heather Messick, pictured with children Elyssa (far right, back), Natalie (far right, front) and Victoria, have found new opportunities for ministry since having Victoria.

this was foreign to me. I thought, 'How can I be a good mother to this baby?'"

Mark Messick grieved over the difficulties Victoria would face in the future.

'Bottom of your soul'

"You always want your child to be accepted, to flourish, prosper and do well," he said. "That's gone in just a matter of seconds with a diagnosis. It grieves you to the bottom of your soul."

Heather Messick admits she also struggled with how Victoria looked; children with Down syndrome have visibly different facial features than others. But when her oldest daughter, Elyssa, first came to see her new sister in the hospital, she remarked over and over how beautiful she thought Victoria was.

"God has used my oldest girl to really bring conviction to my heart, to say, 'You need to get over that and accept [Victoria] how she looks, how she is,'" Heather Messick said.

A major turning point came when, at 7 weeks old, Victoria had surgery for several heart defects, which occur in about half of Down syndrome babies.

"As I began taking care of her, I think God created a bond between us I didn't initially feel," Heather Messick said.

Mark Messick also remembers his and his wife's perspectives changing after the initial waves of fear and uncertainty passed.

"A couple months after [Victoria] was born, we wondered, 'What were we so upset about? [God] has blessed us with this incredible little girl who is joyful and happy, and God has a plan for her life,'" he said.

In the almost three years that have passed since Victoria's birth, the Messicks have experienced the challenges and blessings that come with raising a special needs child.

Since Victoria develops slower than other children, she has needed a number of therapists to aid her

progress. Heather Messick had to teach her how to roll over, crawl and walk — things babies usually learn themselves. She isn't speaking many intelligible words yet, but she's learned signs to indicate things like when she's hungry. Each mark of progress is precious.

"I think that God just has shown me over the past almost three years I need to be thankful for every little phase she goes through, every victory she has," Heather Messick said.

With the challenges of raising Victoria come joys as well from watching her take her first steps to seeing her perform hand motions to songs. Heather Messick describes her as a very loving child who delights in showing affection and sees in her an example of God's love.

"We tell people we feel like we've been given a gift," she said. "We get to live life a little differently from other people, but I think we're going to be able to experience living life with a person who probably will always love us unconditionally, and I think God is going to use her to teach us a lot about Him and how we ought to be."

"I don't know what Victoria is going to grow up to be or what she's going to be like, but God has good things for her," she said.

Victoria's life also has opened doors of ministry to others. Heather Messick, an accomplished vocalist who has recorded two Christian albums ("Wonder" in 2000 and "Meet Us Here" in 2010), is frequently invited to speak or sing at churches and events. She wrote one of her songs, "She Is God's Child," about Victoria.

Not a mistake

"It reminded me that God did not make a mistake when He made Victoria," she said. "He gave me a gift when He gave me her."

For more information, contact Heather Messick at hcmessick@yahoo.com or 251-591-3101. To read her blog, visit www.messickmom.blogspot.com.

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Excel's Helping Hands ministry puts 'feet to faith' in community

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

Pastor Terry Harden didn't want his daughter to grow up in a church that was only a gathering place for Christians on Sundays and Wednesdays. He wanted her to see her church as a relevant part of the community — a body of believers focused on its true calling to fulfill the Great Commission and win people to Christ. So he and some of his members got to work — literally.

Last year, under Harden's leadership, members of Excel Baptist Church in Bethlehem Baptist Association began working each month to meet the physical needs of people in their surrounding area. Under the name Helping Hands ministry, the group held a free car wash, did light construction work and completed yard work and maintenance throughout the community.

Harden believes the heightened local missions focus at Excel Baptist began in 2008. In one of his sermons, he challenged his members to be such a force in their community as to make it hard for anyone from the Excel area not to know the Lord and go to hell.

Although Harden said the church always has been missions-minded, supporting the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions "even in the tough economic times," he believes doing local missions was something it was missing. Now he believes some of his members have become more outwardly focused in their community.

"We're not where we should be, but I think the majority of our people really have a heart for the Lord," Harden said. "We are good to give for international and North American missions. But what about right here where we live? What about our Jerusalem? Over the course of time, that's been kind of where we're

headed. A light was already burning, but what we've tried to do is get us to recognize it and turn our focus towards it. It's not where it needs to be, but it's sure brighter than it was. ... We can touch the world from here."

He added, "I think people really want to be involved. ... We (pastors) stand in the pulpit and encourage them ... but a lot of times, we don't provide them an avenue to flesh out what we encourage them to do."

Kathryn Blan, Woman's Missionary Union director at Excel Baptist, and a few women from the church started a grocery ministry to help families of those who have lost jobs recently. The group bags donated groceries and delivers them to needy people.

"We just had so many people in our community who were losing their jobs," Blan said, explaining that the group began helping 40

families and now helps 11 families with members who still can't find jobs. "I've been on dozens of missions trips, and I thought what I do overseas I need to be doing at home. So, at one of our Women on Mission meetings, I discussed it with our ladies, and they were all in agreement."

Hearing about the church's work, local groups have held food drives and given the items they've received to the church.

"Anytime we can help a family, we want to be notified about it so we can help them," Blan said. "(I hope) that we become more missions-minded in the days to come, that everybody will see that we are concerned for our community."

Although some people the church volunteers tried to help refused their services, others were very appreciative. When a group helped an elderly couple cut shrubs, which had grown over their house, and returned the next week to complete the project, it found out they were unchurched.

"Since then, they (have) visited our church a time or two," Harden said. And some people who have received help have volunteered to help

others through the ministry, Blan pointed out.

Over time, finding projects became more difficult, the number of volunteers dwindled and Harden wondered how to sustain the ministry. So, instead of doing projects on a monthly basis, the church will do larger projects once a quarter.

Volunteer opportunity

"Hopefully we can enlist more volunteers to come and help us," Harden said.

On Feb. 12, the church plans to deliver "fire safety" packages to

community residents. The packages will include 9-volt batteries for smoke detectors, information about Excel Baptist and a salvation tract. Harden hopes to have 50 to 60 volunteers involved in the project.

"We are going to demonstrate the love of Jesus in a practical way and invite them to Excel if they don't have a church," he said. "All the world ever needed was a remnant, and I'm praying for that remnant right now. Jesus said, 'If you love me, you'll obey my commands,' and we need to just put feet to that faith. That's what we are trying to do." ☞

"I've been on dozens of missions trips, and I thought what I do overseas I need to be doing at home."

Kathryn Blan
Excel Baptist Church



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This article first appeared last Spring and is considered worthy of re-printing. Enjoy!

A Reverse Mortgage Testimony

By Bro. Max and Carolyn Youngblood, retired pastor and wife

After more than 50 wonderful years in the ministry in Alabama, Carolyn and I found ourselves with a mortgage with more than 20 years left to pay. (Part of the reason for this comes from living in a pastorate for most of those years. Those years resulted in not having any equity in a home. Churches, if you are not already doing so, please consider giving your staff a housing allowance.)

I had heard of Reverse Mortgages but did not think we would qualify since we had less than 50 percent equity in our home. After I saw Jimmy Dixon's article in *The Alabama Baptist* I decided to give him a call. Jimmy came to our home and we had a great time of fellowship and gained a great deal of information on the subject. We were still skeptical but we completed an application. To shorten a long story, that was a little over one month ago and the other day we closed on the reverse mortgage, and we never left our home for any part of the process. We also received enough cash to do the things we need to do.

Carolyn and I highly recommend this to anyone 62 or over that could use this kind of help. It has been an answer to prayer for us.

For a free brochure or more information, call Jimmy Dixon direct at 205-451-0676, or toll-free at 1-866-879-7775. Like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is Bible study director, a FAITH team leader, deacon and Upwards coach at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.

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Family Matters

CELEBRATING 120 YEARS

Showing Children True Love Through Christ

By Erin Tunnell, ABCH Communications Manager

Robby came to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) having already lived a tough life for one so young. His mother had been placed in a mental institution, which prompted his coming to live on one of our campuses.

As Paul Miller, ABCH President/CEO, recalls, the many traumas Robby had experienced, were evident in his rebellious attitude. As a teenager, he got in trouble several times for various offenses. On one occasion, this landed Robby in Miller's office, as Miller was the campus director at the time.

After dealing with the disciplinary side of things, Miller told Robby he was concerned about not just his well-being on campus, but also his spiritual well being.

"Preach, preach, preach. That's all you ever do," Robby responded. "Besides, if God really loved me like you say He does, He never would have allowed all the things that have happened to me to happen."

"I told him I couldn't resolve all of those issues, but I knew God loved him and had a plan for him, and part of that plan was being at the Children's Homes," Miller says. "I also told him I'd pray for him every day."

As time went on, Robby and Miller were able to have some serious talks about God, and Robby even asked one time, "You still praying for me every day?"

"Yes Robby, every day," was Miller's reply.

Robby never became a Christian while at the Children's Homes. He graduated high school, got a job and moved on with life. But one Thursday, we received a call from Robby. "Well, you'll be happy to know last night I prayed to become a Christian," he told his former houseparents.

"Sometimes children who have been through great trauma have difficulty understanding a loving God," Miller said. "So we have to model it for them and explain it to them at their level of understanding. It takes time." At the same time, Children's Homes workers never pressure a child to make a decision to follow Christ, because the decision needs to be genuine, he noted.

"Our place is to share the gospel and be genuine and authentic about it," he said. God is responsible for the outcome.

Because of the support of churches and Alabama Baptists like you, we have the opportunity to share Christ's love daily with children just like Robby. Will you join us in praying that they can find the true love Christ brings, the love that will never leave them?

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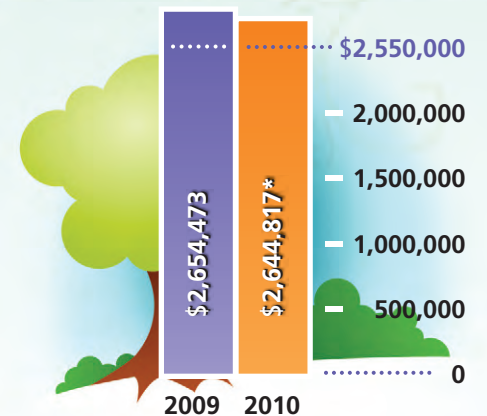
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* Graphic represents giving totals as of press time.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 6

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

DANGER! UNBRIDLED PASSION 2 Kings 9:16, 21b-22; 10:15-19, 30-32

What's the Basis for Your Passion? (9:16, 21b-22)

The conspiracy to overthrow King Joram of Israel was about to begin. Joram had been in Ramoth Gilead, a border town, defending it against the Syrians. Since he was wounded, Joram went to Jezreel to recover, thus leaving Jehu at Ramoth Gilead. Jehu swore the men in Ramoth Gilead to secrecy and then drove his chariot toward Jezreel without stating exactly what he intended to do. After learning of Jehu's approach, with a contingency of soldiers, Joram and King Ahaziah of Judah went out to meet him. By God's providence, the two kings met Jehu at the plot of land King Ahab had seized by having Naboth murdered. Joram's question, "Is it peace, Jehu?," suggests that he suspected a coup attempt was taking place. Jehu responded that there could not be peace as long as the prostitution and witchcraft of Joram's mother, Jezebel, continued. Prostitution ("whorings") refers to worshipping foreign gods, and witchcraft ("sorceries") refers to false cults with power ascribed to evil arts. Jehu then assassinated the two kings, and later he had Jezebel killed at her house in Jezreel (9:24-33). Jehu acted passionately in obeying what God had commanded him to do. We must remember, however, that nowhere in the New Testament are Christ's followers given the license to harm others in the Lord's name as Jehu was in his day. Not every story in the Bible was written for us to imitate. We exist to spread a passion for God's glory by making disciples of all nations.

How Do You Stay Accountable? (10:15-17)

As Jehu made his way from Beth Eked, he met Jehonadab, Rechab's (also Recab) son. The founder of a strict religious group, he apparently saw in Jehu a kindred spirit. His support would give Jehu credibility among more conservative elements in Israel. The two declared their mutual commitment. Jehu then invited Jehonadab to join him in his chariot and see firsthand his zeal for the Lord. Upon

entering the city of Samaria, Jehu killed all who were left in Ahab's family. Jehonadab, more of an ally than an accountability partner, shared a mutual zeal. Christ followers must stay accountable to others to live passionately for Christ. We are wise to have brothers and sisters hold us accountable so that we live in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Do Right Ends Justify Wrong Means? (10:18-19)

An act of deception completed Jehu's rise to power. Under the pretense of being a greater follower of Baal than Ahab, Jehu summoned all the Baal worshipers, prophets and priests to a special worship gathering in his honor. At the appointed time, Jehu had the Baal followers killed. Jehu took a passionate stand for the Lord in completely removing an ungodly pagan cult from Israel. Do right ends justify wrong means? Are Christ followers permitted to use any means necessary to expose and resist ungodly practices that have become deeply rooted in their culture? As Jesus' followers, we must guard against pursuing a God-honoring goal if it means employing ungodly actions to achieve it.

When Does Passion Fall Short? (10:30-32)

Sadly Jehu's legacy was characterized by a selective spiritual passion. Despite his attacks against Baalism, Jehu did not lead the nation back to the true worship of God. He allowed the worship instituted by Jeroboam to continue. In effect, he expelled the foreign religion (Baalism) in favor of the long-standing Israelite state religion begun by Jeroboam. Jehu acted as the instrument of punishment against Omri's corrupt dynasty but did not operate out of Elijah-like motives. Rather he was like Syria, Assyria and Babylon, an instrument that punished but exhibited few personal moral strengths. Passion for God in one area of life can never justify unfaithfulness in another area. We are to love God with all of our heart. Christ followers are to glorify God in all they do. Partial obedience is actually disobedience. ❏

Bible Studies for Life By Scott McGinnis Associate Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

GOD LOVES THE UNLOVELY Hosea 1:2-9; 3:1-5

The prophet Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C. Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah had been politically divided for nearly two centuries. The background for the Book of Hosea is the waning days of Israel, when kings in both the north and south were tempted to stray from God, pursue security through political alliances and worship other gods. Hosea's ministry dates from about 750 to 722, the fall of Israel to Assyria. The book notably contains some of the frankest expression of God's emotions in Scripture. Here God is pictured as a husband torn between anger and compassion as he considers his faithless spouse. Here, too, God, as the long-suffering parent of a runaway child, wavers between punishment and forgiveness (Chapter 11). Hosea considered God's emotional life through the lens of these most fundamental familial relationships. In so doing, the book invites readers to model their relationships on the pattern of God's unrelenting and redeeming love.

God Longs for Restoration (1:2-9)

Hosea's message invokes a fundamental analogy: The covenant between God and Israel is best understood not as a sterile contract but as a marriage. The book begins with God's remarkable instruction to the prophet to marry "a wife of whoredom," that is, a promiscuous woman, and have children with her. In the crucible of a broken family, Hosea came to see something of the brokenness of God, who longed for the restoration of relationship with Israel. Hosea's children were given names that predicted the destruction that would come upon Israel. The first, Jezreel, refers to the site of a bloody massacre by which the ninth-century king Jehu established his rule in Israel (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9-10) and represents a condemnation of the cutthroat politics that dominated Israel's political life. The second child's name, Lo-ruhamah, means "not pitied" and signifies God's refusal of forgiveness to Israel. The third child's name, Lo-ammi, or "not my people," reverses the fundamen-

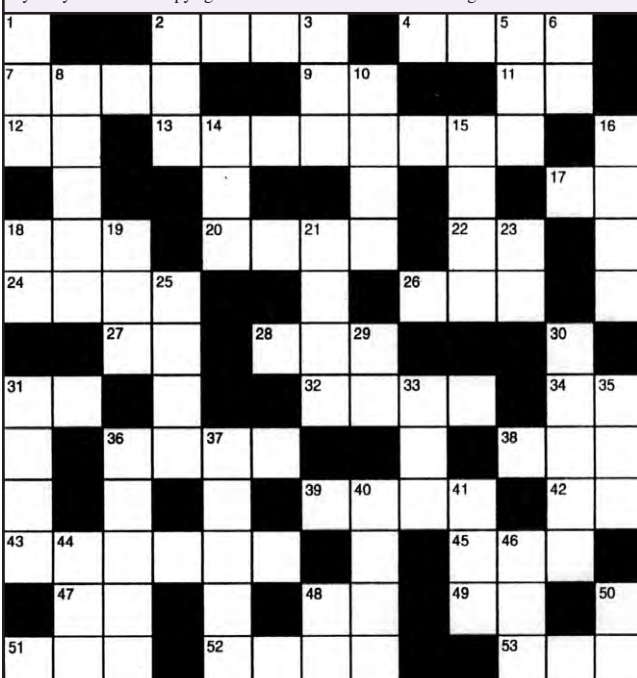
tal covenant established between Israel and God when He delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 6:7). However, the finality of God's judgment as implied in the names of Hosea's children is called into question by the final two verses of Chapter 1, which anticipate the restoration of Israel and reversal of the predicted destruction. The complexity of emotions in Hosea's family is further indicated by a slight shift in the text describing the birth of his children. In the case of Jezreel, Hosea's wife, Gomer, "conceived and bore him a son," while the births of the two younger children are simply reported as Gomer "conceived again and bore a daughter/son." The lack of reference to Hosea implies, or at least allows, that the children were the offspring of Gomer's illicit unions. In a patriarchal culture in which capital punishment was prescribed for both adulterers (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22) but often implemented for the woman only (Gen. 38:24; John 7:53ff), Hosea's willingness to stand by his wife and claim her illegitimate children was an act of heroic forgiveness and abiding love.

God Intervenes to Redeem (3:1-5)

Chapter 3 continues the story of Hosea's marriage but shifts the voice from the third person to the first person, a change that lends even more immediacy to the story. Some commentators suggest that the third chapter is simply a retelling of Chapter 1, but the book's narrative flow suggests otherwise. With remarkable, and sometimes troubling, frankness, Chapter 2 explores the emotions of God as an aggrieved husband: His patience exhausted, he threatened to strip his wife naked, turn her into the wilderness to kill her with thirst and abandon her children (2:3-5). However, the divine anger eventually gave way to a desire for restoration, and the wilderness became a place of renewal rather than punishment (2:14). Given this interlude, the instruction to Hosea in Chapter 3 to "again, go love a woman" and redeem her from the consequences of her infidelity is all the more poignant. Just as Hosea's love for Gomer would not allow him to leave her to her own devices, so, too, God intervened to redeem Israel from its waywardness. God's last word was love. ❏

Christian Crossword

By Judy Ellis Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

2. She _____ me of the tree, and I did eat. (Gen. 3:12)
4. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until _____. (Matt. 11:13)
7. He that sacrificeth unto any god, save _____ the Lord only. (Ex. 22:20)
9. _____, let that night be solitary. (Job 3:7)
11. _____ Saul also among the prophets? (1 Sam. 10:12)
12. They that received tribute money came _____ Peter. (Matt. 17:24)
13. The Lord will lighten my _____. (2 Sam. 22:29)
17. The God of my mercy shall prevent _____. (Ps. 59:10)
18. Love worketh no _____ to his neighbor. (Rom. 13:10)
20. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal _____. (1 John 2:25)
22. Where there is _____ vision, the people perish. (Prov. 29:18)
24. Thou shalt not _____ false witness against thy neighbor. (Ex. 20:16)
26. He planteth an _____, and the rain doth nourish it. (Isa. 44:14)
27. Ma's companion.
28. Upon the great _____ of his right foot. (Lev. 8:23)

31. _____ that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart. (Isa. 47:7)
 32. And _____ that believed came. (Acts 19:18)
 34. That Christ cometh _____ the seed of David. (John 7:42)
 36. Continue in prayer, and watch in the _____ with thanksgiving. (Col. 4:2)
 38. And whether it shall be cow or _____, ye shall not kill it. (Lev. 22:28)
 39. Father, _____ thy hands I commend my spirit. (Luke 23:46)
 42. The children of Gad called the altar _____. (Josh. 22:34)
 43. Prove all _____; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thess. 5:21)
 45. _____ the day of the Lord is near. (Joel 3:14)
 47. United Nations. (abbr.)
 48. I _____ the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)
 49. Tennessee. (abbr.)
 51. So soon as I shall _____ how it will go with me. (Phil. 2:23)
 52. Ye know that our record is _____. (3 John 12)
 53. And all that handle the _____, the mariners. (Ezek. 27:29)
- Down**
1. _____ Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm. (Acts 16:28)
 2. And we know that we are of _____. (1 John 5:19)
 3. Moose.
 5. That he might be revealed in _____ time. (2 Thess. 2:6)
 6. Nova Scotia. (abbr.)
 8. We accept it ... most _____ Felix. (Acts 24:3)
 10. And they cried out all at _____. (Luke 23:18)
 14. Then _____ those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. (Matt. 25:7)
 15. Therefore ye _____ of Jacob are not consumed. (Mal. 3:6)
 16. If I _____ witness of myself, my witness is not true. (John 5:31)
 18. In the same place. (abbr.)
 19. The lot is cast into the _____. (Prov. 16:33)
 21. And he reigned over all the kings _____ the river. (2 Chron. 9:26)
 23. _____ that my people had hearkened unto me. (Ps. 81:13)
 25. Whosoever shall say to his brother, _____. (Matt. 5:22)
 29. Each. (abbr.)
 30. Their _____ and strength unto the beast. (Rev. 17:13)
 31. And Tychicus have I _____ to Ephesus. (2 Tim. 4:12)
 33. For they know _____ the way

35. When they that _____ them saw what was done, they fled. (Luke 8:34)
36. And the city had no need of the sun ... to. (Rev. 21:23)
37. For I through the law, am dead to the law, that I _____ live unto God. (Gal. 2:19)
40. If ye shall ask any thing in my _____, I will do it. (John 14:14)
41. Why do we and the Pharisees fast _____? (Matt. 9:14)
44. Shade.
46. Lod, and _____, the valley of craftsmen. (Neh. 11:35)
48. Gold. (symbol)
50. For do I now persuade men, _____ God? (Gal. 1:10)



Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Former national WMU president Gregory dies at 89

BIRMINGHAM — Christine Gregory, national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) president from 1975 to 1981, died Jan. 22, in Danville, Va. She was 89.

She served on the 1980s Southern Baptist Peace Committee that studied the controversy between conservatives and moderates. She also served as vice president of the Baptist World Alliance and as first vice president of the SBC.

At age 38 with three young sons, she became WMU president of First Baptist Church, Danville. In 1961, she became associational WMU director, and in 1968, she served as missions action chairman for Virginia. She was elected as president of Virginia WMU (1971-1975).

Gregory was elected as president of national WMU and served from 1975-1981.

After she retired, she was elected as first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the first woman to hold that particular office, and the third woman ever to hold a convention office, according to WMU. In 1982, she was nominated to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's board of trustees in Wake Forest, N.C., and also became adviser to Averett College in Danville. The school awarded her an honorary doctorate in 1976.

From 1981-1983, she served on the SBC Annuity Board to help study its church pension plan. She described her service on this committee as a "most significant" opportunity because the board was able to provide secretarial and janitorial workers in churches with fair pensions. Also in 1983, she was awarded another honorary doctorate, but this time by the University of Richmond.

Campbellsville football team honored for service

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. — When players walk out of the locker room in Campbellsville University's (CU) Hawkins Athletic Complex, the first thing they see is a bulletin board full of photos from the team's most recent service projects, thank you notes from teachers and community members and a list of who will participate in the team's upcoming service projects.

That commitment to community service is a key reason why the team has been named the Buffalo Funds Five Star NAIA Champion of Character Team for the 2010 football season. Buffalo Funds is the corporate sponsor for the NAIA's Champions of Character program.

"It's awesome for our team to receive this award," head football coach Perry Thomas said. "When you look at our team goals, character development is our number one goal and has been a strong contributor to the continued growth of our program."

Thomas and his staff from the Kentucky Baptist Convention-affiliated university received the award Jan. 9 at the American Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame dinner in Dallas. The award is based upon the values of integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship and servant leadership.

CU senior captain A.J. Brown, of Pelham, agreed that incorporating character into the team's dynamic has brought change to the program. "It allows players to see people as they truly are, and it helps the team work together for the same goal," he said. "Character has helped me by staying true to myself and to my teammates. I believe character has helped the team believe in one another, develop trust, accountability. Now we all have one another's back."

ERLC leader resigns from new interfaith coalition

WASHINGTON — A top leader of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has resigned from a new interfaith coalition, saying some fellow Southern Baptists felt it was inappropriate for him to support the building of mosques. Richard Land, who heads the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, told organizers at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) "many Southern Baptists share my deep commitment to religious freedom and the right of Muslims to have places of worship."

At the same time, "they also feel that a Southern Baptist denominational leader filing suit to allow individual mosques to be built is 'a bridge too far.'" The ADL formed the Interfaith Coalition on Mosques after it was widely criticized for opposing the construction of the controversial Park51 Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero. Land told the ADL in a Jan. 14 letter that he had received a "spirited response" to his support of a disputed mosque project in Murfreesboro, Tenn., and some fellow Southern Baptists viewed it as promotion of Islam. "I do not agree with that perception, but Southern Baptists have the oft-expressed right to form their own perceptions as well as the right to expect their denominational servant to be cognizant of them and to respect them," he said.

Campus News



Samford University

► **Samford Recognizes Years of Service:** More than a century of combined

service to Samford University was recognized during the annual employee service awards luncheon Jan. 20.

A total of 121 employees, representing 1,395 years of service spanning four decades, were honored. Those with 25 or more years of service included

► 35 years — Sharron Schlosser and Joy Whatley, nursing; Billy J. Strickland, music; Howard Walthall, law; and Elizabeth Wells, university library.

► 30 years — Sara Berry, admission; Donna Harless, divinity; and Randall Richardson, music.

► 25 years — Jon Clemmensen, journalism and mass communication; Larry Davenport, biology; Bob Henderson, pharmacy; Ann Kolter, technology services; and Jennings Marshall, business.

Morgan earned a bachelor's degree from Grand Canyon University (GCU) in Phoenix and a master's degree in education and a doctoral degree in education administration and foundations of education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Morgan has served as assistant registrar at GCU; coordinator of special events and foundation development at Southwestern Seminary; director of foundation development at Baylor University in Waco, Texas; and academic grants officer at Samford University in Birmingham.

Most recently, Morgan worked as a grant writer for the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio.



University of Mobile

► **UMobile President, Wife Display Artwork:** University of Mobile (UMobile)

President and first lady Mark and Marilyn Foley are displaying their artwork in an exhibit titled "Family Studio: Works by Mark and Marilyn Foley." The exhibit is on display in Martin Hall Gallery through Feb. 28 on the university campus. A special artists' talk will be held Feb. 10 at 1:30 p.m. in Martin Hall. A reception will follow at 2:30 p.m. Admission is open to the public.

The exhibit displays Marilyn Fo-

ley's ceramic work and paintings created over a three-year time span. Mark Foley, an avid metalsmith, is showing selected welded pieces.

Included in the display is a miniature model of the 12-foot cross now standing on the UMobile campus, originally designed by Mark Foley.

For more information, contact Philip Counselman at 251-442-2283 or e-mail umartexhibit@umobile.edu.

► **UMobile Presents Valentine's Day Concert:** Joanie Brittingham, adjunct instructor of voice at the University of Mobile (UMobile), will perform a Valentine's Day concert titled *Struck by Cupid's Arrow: A Night of Love Songs* on Feb. 14 at 7 p.m. in Moorer Auditorium on the UMobile campus.

This concert, which tells a love story, is based on the progression of a romantic relationship.

Brittingham will be accompanied by Sharon Hudson, pianist and adjunct professor of music at UMobile.

Brittingham has two master's degrees from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, in voice performance and music history and literature and obtained her undergraduate degree from West Virginia University in Morgantown in voice performance and theatre.

She has studied at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, and the Oberlin in Italy program.

For more information, call 251-442-2420.

► **UMobile Honor Band to Present Concert:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) Honor Band will present a concert Feb. 26 at 1 p.m. in Ram Hall on the university's campus.

The concert is the concluding event of a three-day Honor Band camp featuring outstanding high school students from private schools and academies throughout the South who are nominated by their high school band directors.

UMobile's RamCorps will begin the concert with a high-impact brass and percussion performance of a variety of styles with choreographed movement.

The Honor Band will be conducted by Wes Dykes, adjunct director of symphonic winds, and feature clinician Daniel Wooten.

Wooten is in his eighth year as director of bands at Niceville (Fla.) High School.

He has conducted all-county, all-region and all-state bands throughout the Southeast. Wooten also served for more than a decade as a staff member with the Spirit of America National Honor Band and is an active performing percussionist.

For more information, contact the UMobile Center for Performing Arts at 251-442-2420.



Judson College

► **Judson Names New VP for Advancement:** Judson College President

David Potts has announced the appointment of Terry Smith Morgan to the position of vice president for advancement.

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Making a difference

Missouri church builds house, gives it to needy family

As the area's economy continued to decline, Missouri Baptist pastor Steve Easterwood asked himself, "What can our church do to help?" The church where Easterwood is senior pastor responded, "Let's give away a house."

On Dec. 18, First Baptist Church, Dexter, Mo., presented the keys to a new three-bedroom house to Brenda Wade and her 7-year-old son to create a home.

"It's a real blessing for me, an answer to prayer," Wade said.

The De Soto, Mo., native moved to Dexter in 1993 to be near two brothers. Living in a tiny, drafty trailer, Wade couldn't envision finding a better place at an affordable rate.

Though she enjoys having friends visit, she was too embarrassed to invite them to her former residence.

The church's desire to make a significant difference in the community provided Wade's opportunity.

Doing 'something local'

"We have a lot of missions work going on [through the church]," Easterwood explained, including house construction in Nicaragua.

"I thought, 'We have a lot of tough economic times in Dexter ... and we need to do something local.'"

The missions committee at First, Dexter, endorsed the idea, and the church named a task force, half its members to hammer out construction details and the other half to determine the recipient.

Several church members, some who are builders, donated time and energy to make the project — dubbed Grace House — a reality. Deacon David Fleming served as general contractor and did much of the work himself.

Local contractors also gave time and materials.

"Many do not attend church but contributed anyway because they saw the dream," Easterwood said.

The church purchased the lot and bought additional materials and supplies, completing the home debt free.

As work progressed on the house, task force members charged with naming the recipient, developed an application and spread the word through local media.

One of Wade's friends heard about it and encouraged her to apply.

In September, Wade had begun asking the Lord to provide a different residence. She didn't learn about the Grace House project



Photo by Cheryl Easterwood

GIFT OF GRACE — Members of First Baptist Church, Dexter, Mo., and other well-wishers stand with Brenda Wade (front) and her son, T.J., the recipients of a new home the church built to give away, during the house's dedication.

until November, and although she went ahead and applied, she didn't think she would be chosen.

A certified medication technician, Wade works for a local nursing home. Though she struggles financially, she earns just slightly more than current guidelines allow to qualify for any government assistance. She thought that likely the church would choose someone else.

"I would probably never be able to afford to buy a house on my own," she said. "And I didn't think I had a chance at all [for Grace House]."

But after interviewing all applicants, the task force narrowed its choice to two families, ultimately choosing Wade and son T.J.

"One of her co-workers said to me, 'No one deserves this house more,'" Easterwood said.

The church didn't give the home outright, but added a few stipulations that will benefit the family a second time.

Wade is required to live in the house for at least eight years. During that period, she will pay the church \$300 per month, with the

money to be used to pay taxes and insurance coverage.

Funds remaining after those annual costs are deducted will be escrowed.

"At the end of eight years, the family will own the house free and clear and will receive the balance in the escrow account," Easterwood said.

Long-term benefit

Although she still pays monthly for a place to live, Wade estimates she will save close to \$100 each month in utility costs. The escrow money likely will be used for college, either for herself or for T.J.

Thankful for a place to call home now, Wade also sees a longer-term benefit.

"I will have something to leave my son," she said.

While considering possibilities for their next local ministry project, church members recently learned that a major manufacturer plans to lay off 500 workers in its latest downsizing move. They are waiting for God's plan to minister to those affected.

"With the Grace House project, we were just trying to do what Jesus did," Easterwood explained. "He came upon people with needs and he met them. It's really pretty simple."

(ABP)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Life sentences upheld for 2 who killed missionary, sons

NEW DELHI — India's Supreme Court amended a ruling upholding a life-in-prison sentence for two men convicted of murdering a Baptist missionary and his two young sons 12 years ago by removing language that critics said appeared to condone vigilante violence intended to "teach a lesson" against proselytizing among the nation's tribal poor.

On Jan. 21, the Supreme Court upheld life sentences for Dara Singh and Mahendra Hembram.

They were convicted of burning Graham Staines, 58, and his sons Philip, 9, and Timothy, 7, alive while they slept in a van outside a church in Koenjhar district of Orissa, eastern India, on Jan. 22, 1999.

Declining to reinstate the death penalty for one of the killers, the 76-page judgment stated "there is no justification for people committing conversions on the premise that one religion is better than the other."

In a paragraph explaining why they declined to reinstate a death penalty awarded by a jury in 2003 but commuted to life sentences two years later, the justices opined:

"In the case in hand, though Graham Staines and his two minor sons were burnt to death while they were sleeping inside a station wagon at Manoharpur, the intention was to teach a lesson to Graham Staines about his religious activities, namely, converting poor tribals to Christianity."

The language prompted protest among Indian Christians, who claimed it "de-legitimized" their constitutional right to profess, practice and propagate their faith. One group wrote an open letter Jan. 25 objecting to "gratuitous observations" and language "that seems to acknowledge vigilante action of criminals like Dara Singh who take upon themselves 'to teach lessons' to persons serving lepers and the poor."

Bowing to the pressure, the court changed its reasoning to the fact that 12 years has passed since the act was committed and that it could find no reason to enhance the sentence "in view of the factual position discussed in earlier paragraphs" of the ruling.

Staines moved to India from Australia in 1965 and for 34 years ran a leprosy home in the Mayurbhanj district about 900 miles southeast of New Delhi.

Seventh-day Adventists 'building bridges' with Azerbaijan

BAKU, Azerbaijan — After Azerbaijan's deportation of a former leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Russian citizen Ivan Uzun, and denial of re-entry to Moldovan citizen Gheorghiy Sobor, Adventists have told Forum 18 News Service they are trying to resolve problems with the government through dialogue.

Sobor lives in the capital Baku with his Azerbaijani wife and their three young children. He thinks he may have been denied re-entry as he helped Adventists gain state permission to import books.

His wife, Aida, said, "Without any court decision and without the possibility for him to respond, they have separated Gheorghiy from his family and children. Such an action contradicts basic human rights and international law at the same time as Azerbaijan considers itself a democratic country."

Yusif Askerov of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations claimed "there is no discrimination." Adventists stress that they have been present in the country for more than a century. An Adventist said, "We're working to build bridges with the government."

"With the Grace House project, we were just trying to do what Jesus did."

Senior Pastor Steve Easterwood
FBC Dexter, Mo.

VOICE YOUR
OPINION

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

Remember to:

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