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'Massive overhaul'

NAMB to focus on 'sending' churches, new church plants

Trustees of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) approved sweeping changes Feb. 9, altering the focus, strategy, leadership and organizational structure of the Southern Baptist entity. The changes come almost five months to the day after trustees voted to approve Kevin Ezell as NAMB's president.

The package of changes approved by trustees involves four primary areas: NAMB's national strategy, a regional approach to how NAMB will do its work, an organizational restructuring that will align NAMB's staff chart with its new strategy and four new vice presidents who will give leadership to key ministry areas.

"This is a massive overhaul," Ezell said. "We believe it's going to be an historic overhaul."

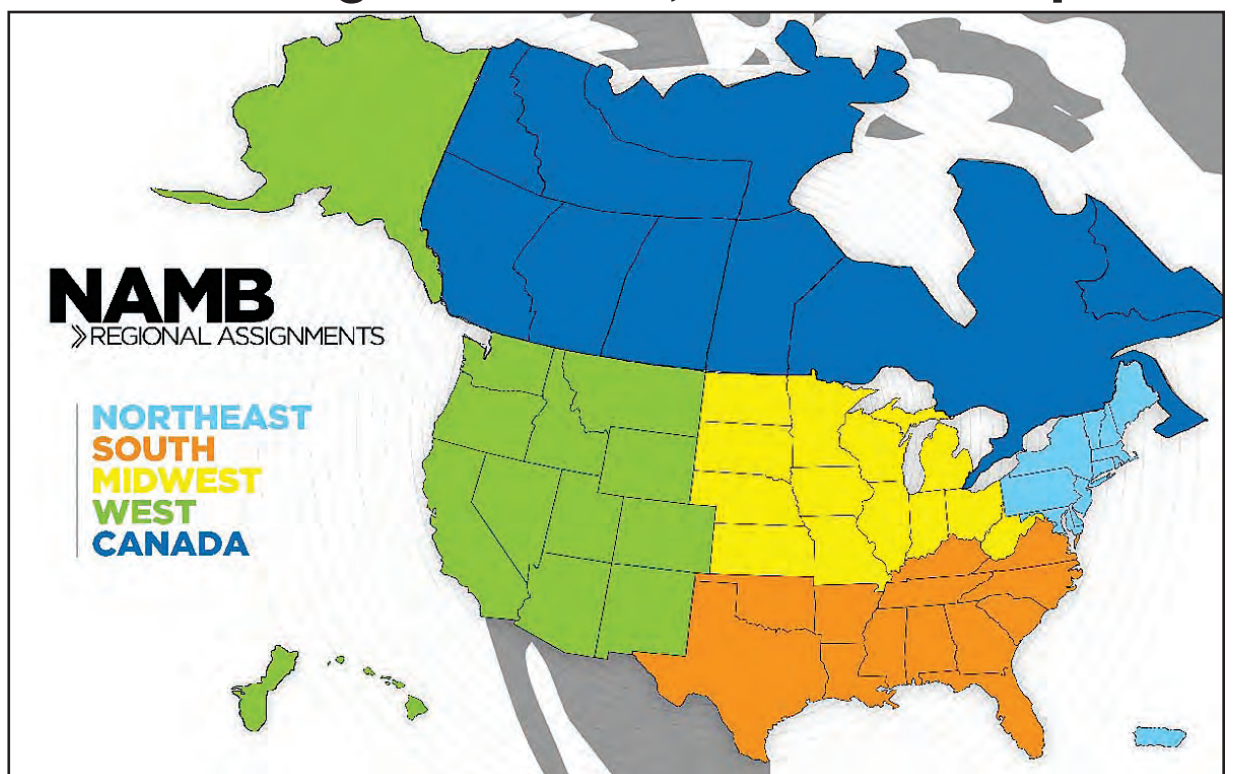
NAMB's national strategy — titled Send North America — will focus on mobilizing missionaries and churches for evangelistic church planting. Once churches or potential missionaries have connected with NAMB, after an assessment, NAMB will provide any needed equipping and training before the missionary or church enters the missions field. Evangelism and leadership development will be integrated throughout the process.

Alabama Baptists' evangelism director, Sammy Gilbreath, is excited about the changes related to evangelism.

"Evangelism will be an important part of NAMB," he said. "And God's Plan for Sharing is safe for the next 10 years as a major evangelism strategy.

"Larry Wynn (see story, page 3) is a homerun for that position," Gilbreath added.

"Sending" churches that partner with NAMB will have a broad range of participation options, up to and including starting a church themselves. Smaller churches can participate in clusters with other churches. All will be encouraged to send missions teams, volunteers and other resources to directly help and



NAMB graphic

THINKING REGIONAL — North American Mission Board trustees approved a new regional approach to NAMB's strategy implementation. Regions are broken down as shown in the above map.

partner with church planters on the missions field.

Both sending churches and new church plants will be expected to contribute to Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program and to minister in a manner consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.



EZELL

"This entire strategy points everything we do toward assisting churches in planting healthy Southern Baptist churches," Ezell said. "Our desire is to mobilize thousands of Southern Baptists to be engaged in church planting."

He added, "Right now there are 4 percent involved; our initial goal is to see 10 percent of churches involved in evangelistic church planting."

The Send North America strategy will take on a regional focus. NAMB trustees approved a new approach to the board's work that will divide North America into five regions: Northeast, South, Midwest, West and Canada. Each region will have its own vice president who reports directly to Ezell and will work closely with state Baptist convention leaders in that region.

Ezell said state leaders have been an integral part of shaping the new direc-

tion for NAMB and that he is thankful for the lengths state executives have gone to work with him.

"We relate with 42 state association executives. It's vital we work together — not because we have to but because we want to. They have been incredible. They, too, have a heart to reach North America and they all have a heart for reaching the underserved areas," he said.

Ezell noted that 80 percent of NAMB's funding to states already goes to unreached regions and when money starts shifting from Southern states to unreached areas, that percentage will

go even higher. As NAMB funding to Southern states is reduced, Ezell said state leaders will be able to direct that money to specific unreached regions of their choosing. NAMB activity in the South will continue, Ezell said, noting, "We'd be very remiss if we did not continue to invest in the South and plant churches in those areas."

Ezell indicated NAMB hopes to have new integrated strategic partnership agreements signed with each state convention by the end of March.

NAMB will prioritize its efforts in 50 population centers throughout (See 'Putting,' page 3)

Will religious freedom come to Egypt?

By Bob Terry and Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

When Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman announced the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 11, could this have been another "shot heard 'round the world," similar to the start of the American Revolution in 1775?

At press time, no one could say for sure, but the world was definitely watching and waiting, hopeful that with the end of the dictatorial leader's nearly

30-year reign would come freedoms unknown in that part of the world.

"This could be as significant as the fall of the Berlin Wall," said a Southern Baptist representative with Alabama ties working among Palestinians in the Middle East. "For many years, dictators have controlled the Middle East, so even if other governments don't fall, they will change (as a result of Mubarak's resignation)."

But change in any of the governments is not guaranteed to bring more (See 'Christians,' page 6)

COMMENT

Trustworthy Communications Always Has a Price

Ever since the first Baptist periodical was published in Alabama, Baptists have known that trustworthy communications always has a price. Baptists also know that trustworthy communications are essential for them to work together beyond their local church.

Alabama history records several attempts to start a Baptist publication in the 1830s. One historian wrote, "During the early history of Alabama Baptists, each pastor and church worked alone with little sense of fellowship, cooperation and unity." No common medium provided communication, identity, missions information, theological reflection, religious news and more.

But lack of financial support doomed the first three efforts to start a Baptist paper in the state. That is one reason messengers to the 1836 Alabama Baptist State Convention approved plans to establish a denominational paper and pledged "individual and collective influence in support of the paper."

When *The Alabama Baptist* first appeared in 1843, state Baptists declared through a resolution, "It (*The Alabama Baptist*) is a channel through which the pastors and churches of our denomination communicate with each other; it is a welcome visitor to our families; and we are convinced that if universally introduced among us, it will be an instrument of great power in promotion of the best interest of the denomination and in advancing the cause of Christ at large."

The convention approved a resolution saying, in part, "that we urgently recommend to the brethren general to make a strenuous effort to place the paper in every Baptist family in the state."

Much has changed since 1843, but the need for Alabama Baptists to have a trusted source of information remains. And it is still true that trustworthy communications always has a price.

Largest state Baptist paper

Today *The Alabama Baptist* has the largest circulation of the state Baptist papers cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention. Three of the nation's ecumenical religious communications associations — Associated Church Press, Evangelical Press Association and Religion Communicators Council — have each named *The Alabama Baptist* the best regional Christian newspaper in America. For the past 10 years, *The Alabama Baptist* has consistently been judged among the top three regional Christian newspapers in the nation.

Despite the many professional honors garnered by Alabama Baptists' state paper, circulation of the printed piece has declined over the past 30 years. At its height, circulation neared 140,000. That was in the late 1970s. By 1995, circulation stood at 105,000. Circulation rose to 115,000 by the turn of



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

the century but has steadily declined to its present 93,000 Alabama Baptist families who receive the state Baptist paper each week.

The current economic recession took circulation numbers below the 100,000 mark in 2009. But the changing role of print media in society has been eating away at circulation for a number of years.

Still the essential role of trustworthy communications has not changed. Members of cooperating Baptist churches still need the news and information about what God is doing through Baptists at home and around the world. Otherwise Alabama Baptists end up back in the 1830s, when "each pastor and church worked alone with little sense of fellowship, cooperation and unity."

That is why the delivery system for the news and information of *The Alabama Baptist* is expanding. In addition to the weekly print edition, an e-edition is now available, and breaking news stories are immediately posted on our website (www.thealabamabaptist.org). Thousands of readers receive daily updates through Facebook and Twitter.

And like those early days, these new outlets for trustworthy communications still have a price.

In late November 2010, the state Baptist paper premiered its e-edition. The e-edition is an enhanced version of the weekly print edition. Enhancements include videos, slideshows rather than the single photo on the printed page, audio files and links to related stories and ads.

Feedback from the more than 4,500 people who receive the e-edition has been beyond expectation. People like the graphics, the color, the enhancements, and many people prefer receiving the paper digitally rather than in print form.

The Alabama Baptist is still on a learning curve related to the e-edition. Posting it required faster computers to run the new software needed to support the e-edition. Staff members had to learn new programs and add to their workload. But progress is evident from week to week.

During this roll out of the e-edition, it has been made available free to any Baptist who would like to see it. All we need is an e-mail address to notify

readers when the new edition is available. Publicity has invited readers to try the "free trial subscription."


Some people are asking why the e-edition can't always be free, but just as with the print edition, trustworthy communications always has a price. It costs to collect the news and information. It costs to write and edit the articles. It costs to process all of the information, produce trustworthy news and distribute it to Baptists across the state.

Alabama Baptists recognize the importance of trustworthy communications through Cooperative Program support of the state Baptist paper. But the paper has to earn almost 80 percent of its annual budget through subscriptions, advertising and other revenue sources.

By this summer, when the new delivery system is fully developed, a subscription fee will be applied to the e-edition of *The Alabama Baptist*. Individual subscriptions will be available as well as church subscriptions similar to the plans used for the print edition. Alabama Baptists can then get their news and information about what God is doing in His world in the traditional print format, the digital format or both formats.

Trusted source of information

The commitment of the state Baptist paper is to continue being the trusted source of information, inspiration and interpretation it has been for almost 170 years. Whether in print or digital form, we want the paper to continue to be "a welcome visitor" in Baptist homes.

It is hard to improve on what messengers said in 1843. When *The Alabama Baptist* is placed in the home of every Baptist family in the state, the trustworthy communication it provides will be "an instrument of great power in promotion of the best interest of the denomination and in advancing the cause of Christ at large." 



THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Readers react to *The Alabama Baptist* e-edition

"Looks great. You are always on the cutting edge, taking advantage of the latest technology. Thank you for all you do. You are the best!"

Ron Holladay
Lowndes County, Ala.

"I like the color and the page turning feature. I like the ease of getting the paper to show up on my computer. But, since I am a paper reader and like all the information in front of me, in larger print and can be read in my easy chair, the e-edition will not help me much. I used to read one particular church's newsletter when they mailed it to me. But once I let them start e-mailing it to me, I delete it as soon as it comes through."

"Any time I have a resource that includes a lot of information, a newspaper for example, I want it where I can glance at the whole and read the parts. I am a loyal reader and promoter of *The Alabama Baptist*. If it were to only be online I would only go to it to look for a specific article."

Julian "Steve" Stephens
Montgomery, Ala.

"Love it. The audio and video are terrific additions."

Linda Harrison
Fultondale, Ala.

"This is fantastic! What a fun way to read *The Alabama Baptist*! Great job!"

Denise George
Birmingham, Ala.

"The e-edition looks tremendous."

Craig Gault
Mobile, Ala.

We are interested in your feedback. E-mail us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.



BP photo

A NEW DAY — Kevin Ezell (far left), president of the North American Mission Board, discusses strategy with his four new vice presidents: (l to r) Larry Wynn, vice president of evangelism; Steve Davis, vice president of Midwest Region; Aaron Coe, vice president of mobilization; and Jeff Christopherson, vice president of Canadian Region.

Who are they?

A brief look at the four new vice presidents of NAMB

North American Mission Board (NAMB) trustees approved four new vice presidents during a trustee meeting Feb. 9.

▶ Larry Wynn, 57, senior pastor of Hebron Baptist Church, Dacula, Ga., for the past 33 years, is NAMB's vice president of evangelism. He will work closely with state convention partners to lead and equip Southern Baptists in the area of evangelism, with a special emphasis on "GPS: God's Plan for Sharing."

While at Hebron Baptist, Wynn and the church have recorded more than 10,000 baptisms. Wynn earned a bachelor of arts degree, majoring in psychology and minoring in religion, at Mercer University in Atlanta in 1977. He also is an alumnus of Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Ga.

▶ Jeff Christopherson, 46, is NAMB's vice president of the Canadian Region, based in Toronto, as part of a regional restructuring.

A native Canadian, he has served since 2009 as national church starting team leader for the Canadian National Baptist Convention in Oakville, Ontario. He has worked as a church planter in various areas in Canada since 1995. He also served as senior pastor of First Baptist Church, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, from 1989 to 1995.

Christopherson earned a bachelor of arts degree in communications at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., and a master of divinity at Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta.

▶ Aaron Coe, 34, is NAMB's vice president of mobilization, to be based in Alpharetta, Ga.

Coe served from 2003 to 2008 as a NAMB church planting missionary pastor in New York City, where he helped plant the Gallery Church in 2006. In 2008, Coe founded "City Uprising," mobilizing hundreds of volunteers in the Manhattan area. In 2009, he initiated "SendNYC" for the purpose of mobilizing

Putting NAMB on 'strong footing'

(continued from page 1)

North America. The initial 25 cities are New York, Washington/Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the Northeast; in the South, Atlanta, Miami and New Orleans; in the Midwest, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, St. Louis, Cleveland and Indianapolis; in the West, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, San Diego, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Phoenix and Denver; and in Canada, Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Trustees also approved four candidates for vice presidents (see story, this page).

Ezell said he would cover the Northeast and West regions until vice presidents can be found. Richard Harris and Carlisle Driggers will be NAMB's ambassadors to the South region until a vice president can be named. Harris is a retired NAMB vice president who served as NAMB's interim president leading up to Ezell's election. Driggers is the retired executive leader of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Six work groups — all focused on evangelistic church planting — will exist at NAMB's Alpharetta office: evangelism, mobilization, equipping, ministry controls, communications and missions support. Other NAMB ministries such as Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, mission education

and social ministries remain but will be more specifically focused on supporting the evangelistic church planting process.

Larry Gipson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oneonta, and a NAMB trustee, is encouraged about the future of NAMB.

"I think they were very successful meetings that we had this week, and I believe that the decisions that were made will put NAMB on a strong footing for success as we mobilize Southern Baptists for church planting in the United States and Canada," he said.

Ric Camp, pastor of First Baptist Church, Florence, and also a NAMB trustee, agreed.

"The new structure is encouraging and will offer a greater accessibility to the resources and personnel of NAMB for all areas of North America," he said. "There is a sense that God is putting together a great team to facilitate pushing back the darkness of North America."

"The aspect which is most encouraging to me is that as we strengthen the churches of North America and add new successful church plants, this will afford a stronger base and opportunity to assist in fulfilling the Great Commission of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ globally," Camp added. (BP, TAB)

and equipping people to plant churches in New York City.

▶ Stephen P. Davis, 61, is NAMB's vice president of the Midwest Region, to be based in Indianapolis. He has served as executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana since 2003.

Davis earned a bachelor of arts degree at Dallas Baptist University (DBU), a master of divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and a doctorate of ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary. He also holds an honorary doctorate from DBU. (BP)

'The E-word'

Exercise an important biblical concept; discipline is the key

By John Evans
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

If you want to be more like Jesus, then don't be a couch potato. That's what Rondie Wilks believes.

"I think Jesus was a very disciplined person in the flesh who ate properly and took care of His body," said Wilks, a certified personal trainer and the wife of Bill Wilks, senior pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville.

"If I want to be like Jesus, I'm going to discipline myself," she said.

Wilks, who founded a fitness ministry called Living Fit, is among those urging Alabama Baptists to get more exercise, not only because it's healthy but also because it's biblical.

First Corinthians 6:19 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."

"If the body is God's temple, should we not take care of it?" she asked.

But reports indicate most people aren't. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates 68 percent of all Americans are overweight or obese, common results of poor diet and lack of exercise. And

the state of Alabama is second in the nation for number of obese citizens.

Along with the perils of obesity (higher risks of chronic diseases, stroke, depression and other problems, according to the Mayo Clinic), the very act of not exercising can be hazardous, experts contend.

According to the Jan. 5, 2010, article "The Hidden Benefits of Exercise" in *The Wall Street Journal*, medical experts say not exercising is as great a health risk as smoking, resulting in an increased risk of heart disease, cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension and depression. Adults who weigh a normal amount but don't exercise are still at greater risk of health problems, the article says.

Conversely, for adults who exercise regularly, the article reports a broad range of health benefits cited from the American College of Sports Medicine. Exercise can reduce the risk of stroke by 27 percent, the risk of recurrent breast cancer by about 50 percent, the risk of colon cancer by more than 60 percent, the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by about 40 percent, incidences of high blood pressure by about 40 percent and incidences of diabetes by about 50 percent. It also can decrease de-

"I know He wants us to take care of our bodies so we can do the things He has called us to do."

Julie Morris
Guided By Him



Always consult a qualified medical professional before beginning any nutritional or exercise program.

Graphic by Lauren Chow

pression as effectively as the drug Prozac or behavioral therapy. The article also points to research that says exercise can boost the body's immune system, making it easier to fight off colds and the flu.

"I could go on and on about the benefits [of exercise]," said Wilks, who also noted that exercise helps increase muscle mass and bone density, which are especially important as adults age.

"Just because we get older doesn't mean we have to lose flexibility and muscle mass," she said.

Even with all its benefits, exercise didn't come easy to Julie Morris, a registered nurse and founder of Guided By Him, a Christian weight loss program. "The E-word was something I absolutely didn't want to do," she said. "I was a couch potato diva and didn't want to exercise. I always said I was too tired and weak to exercise." But Morris discovered that exercising actually increased her energy. "I didn't realize until after I started exercising consistently (that) I was tired because I didn't exercise," she said.

Sarah Morris Cherry, a family therapist who is Morris' daughter, said exercise also improves a person's mood because of the release

of feel-good brain chemicals called endorphins. "Exercise is the best way to improve your mood besides seeking God," she said.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services recommends adults get at least two hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a week unless limited by a chronic condition. The guidelines recommend spreading the exercise throughout the week, and it can be done in as short as 10-minute increments.

Start slow

Morris and Wilks emphasize that for those who are inactive, starting an exercise routine should be done slowly, perhaps starting with five minutes a day five days a week and adding five minutes each week to progressively build up to the desired level of fitness. Wilks added that people who smoke or have conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes should consult a doctor beforehand.

"People will begin and one minute is so hard for them," she said. "But in a couple of weeks, we do two-minute intervals, then three-minute intervals, and after awhile, my clients are burning 1,000 calo-

ries in a workout when before they couldn't stay on for a minute."

And exercise doesn't have to be hard core, Wilks added, noting it can be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, jumping rope, doing push-ups or even walking. Finding an exercise partner also helps with consistency, she said.

"A lot of times people say, 'I don't have time,'" Wilks said. "What I say is, 'You make time to do things that are important to you.'"

If serving God is important to you, then exercise should be, too, Morris said. "Many of us can't complete the things He's called us to do because we're not well enough," she said. "I know He wants us to take care of our bodies so we can do the things He has called us to do."

Wilks added that the discipline developed in exercise can be applied to spiritual matters as well and it is all a gift from God.

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength," she said. "I can be disciplined because of the gift He's given me."

For more information about Living Fit, visit www.livingfitonline.com. For more information about Guided by Him, visit <http://guidedbyhim.com>.

Focusing on blood sugar

Body 4 Believers is based on Greg Locklear's weight loss journey (see story, this page) and 1 Corinthians 6:19, which says, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit."

It's also based on Locklear's studies on insulin and blood sugar.

Blood sugar, or blood glucose, is the amount of glucose in the blood at any one time. Glucose is the body's main source of energy. The pancreas releases insulin to keep blood sugar from reaching dangerously high levels after consuming a candy bar or sugary drink.

Locklear describes insulin as the "trash truck" of the body, carrying energy from food and storing it as fat. But if blood sugar is controlled and insulin levels are kept low, then the body will use food energy instead of converting it to flab.

Body 4 Believers participants receive a business card with

seven key food combinations to prevent blood sugar spikes:

- ▶ Lean protein
- ▶ Lean protein and fibrous carb, such as green beans or turnip greens
- ▶ Lean protein, fibrous carb and natural carb, such as potatoes
- ▶ Fatty protein and fibrous carb
- ▶ Balanced foods, such as peanut butter, some cereals and certain beans, that contain a balance of proteins, carbs and fats
- ▶ A balanced food and fibrous carb
- ▶ "Believer-approved" options, which include homemade recipes carefully calculated to ensure a healthy balance of carbs, fats and proteins

With these combinations, the pounds slide off quickly — and healthfully.

"It works every time, for every Believer," Locklear said.

(TAB)

Two pastors turn weight battle into ministry

By Lindsey Robinson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As he stood in the parking lot of a New Prospect Baptist Church #2, Centre, Pastor Greg Locklear overheard a conversation that would change his life.

"He sure can preach," Locklear heard one man say. "Yeah. But he sure is fat," another said.

At 6 feet and 360 pounds, Locklear realized he was known as much for his size as for the fire in his sermons. After a lifetime of struggling with his weight, he had become "the fat preacher."

That was three years ago. Since then, the 42-year-old has dropped 140 pounds. "Last week, I jumped on the trampoline with my two daughters," Locklear said.

In August, he started Body 4 Believers, a free health ministry based in Fort Payne, with fellow pastor Danny Flora.

Flora, who also battled his weight, retired from 30 years of pastoral work to help run the ministry. Body 4 Believers is based on the biblical teaching that our bod-

ies are the temple of God, Locklear said.

Body 4 Believers classes are held for an hour and a half one night a week in churches across the state. In four weeks, participants learn everything they need to know about losing weight without sacrificing nutrition. The program stresses a healthy combination of lean proteins, fats, high fiber and basic carbohydrates.

Each class also provides a clear-cut gospel message.

'I feel better now'

Heather Tierce took the class at Centre's Grace Pointe Church of God in October. Since then, the self-described "big steak eater" has lost 54 pounds. "I feel better now than I've felt in years," she said.

Tierce, who said she's done "every diet out there," had lost 73 pounds before she started Body 4 Believers, but in the classes, she learned she was cutting too many calories because eating right is about energy, not deprivation.

Now Tierce knows how and

what to eat and plans to never diet again.

"I don't see me ever doing anything else," she said.

Flora, who also teaches Body 4 Believers classes, calls the program "nutritional evangelism."

Not long ago, he weighed 211 pounds and suffered from high blood pressure, high cholesterol and acid reflux disease.

Within 13 weeks of following the program, Flora, 57, was down to 157 pounds. His blood pressure and cholesterol were under control, and his acid reflux was gone. "I have an energy level that reminds me of back when I was 20," he said.

Locklear and Flora's wish is that Christians would take seriously their physical and spiritual health so that nonbelievers will look at them and want the life they have.

"God's presence is inside our bodies," Locklear said. "We are the church."

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/pages/Body-4-Believers/180324178672325.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Former NAMB trustee O'Guin sentenced for fraud

ST. LOUIS — A former Southern Baptist pastor and North American Mission Board (NAMB) trustee was sentenced Feb. 4 to eight months in prison for mail fraud. The United States Attorney's Office in St. Louis announced the sentencing of Danny O'Guin, former pastor of Parker Road Baptist Church, Florissant, Mo. O'Guin pleaded guilty in November to one of four federal charges stemming from a scheme to get money from church members under false pretenses.

Prosecutors say O'Guin exploited his position as a religious leader to convince church members to loan him money despite their reservations about the transactions.

According to his indictment, O'Guin would tell elderly church members he needed loans to repair residences he owned out of state. He advised church members to "keep quiet" about the loans, and when they inquired about repayment he would borrow money from other church members to settle the debt.

In some cases he wrote letters promising repayment or sent checks with "mistakes" on them. In one instance, authorities say, he wrote a check for \$1,125 to satisfy a debt of \$10,125. When the lender pointed out the error, O'Guin sent a substitute check that bounced.

O'Guin was pastor of the suburban St. Louis congregation from 2006 until February 2009. He resigned after allegations against him prompted conflict in the church. Before that O'Guin was pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church, St. Louis, for 10 years. He was elected as a trustee of NAMB in 1999 and in 2003 and chaired the Missouri Baptist Convention's credentials committee in 2008. In addition to prison, O'Guin was ordered to pay restitution of more than \$100,000. The case was investigated by the FBI and the Postal Inspection Service.

Court rejects 'birther' challenge by former SBC officer

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Supreme Court declined Feb. 2 to hear a challenge to Barack Obama's election as president filed by plaintiffs including a former officer of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Justices declined to review an October ruling by California's Third District Court of Appeals dismissing a lawsuit by former diplomat Alan Keyes and Wiley Drake, a Southern Baptist pastor who served as second vice president of the SBC in 2006-07, alleging that Obama does not qualify to be president because he is not a natural-born citizen.

Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Buena Park, Calif., ran for vice president of the United States as Keyes' running mate on the American Independent ticket in California in the 2008 election. After the election Drake and Keyes filed a lawsuit, along with party official Markham Robinson, claiming election officials should not have allowed Obama's name on the ballot without verifying that he met eligibility requirements to hold office.

The lawsuit is one of a number of so-called "birther" lawsuits against Obama's election filed by individuals or groups who disbelieve the president's claim that he was born in Hawaii to an American mother, thus establishing his citizenship.

Drake, Keyes and Robinson are also plaintiffs in a similar complaint in federal courts now pending before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

2010 IMB photos reveal hurting, hoping world

RICHMOND, Va. — In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus vowed that when He returns, He will ask His followers if they helped the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the sick, the strangers and the prisoners.

"Truly I say to you, to the extent you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me," Jesus said (Matt. 25:40b).

If He had spoken in the year 2010 rather than the first century, perhaps He might have expressed it this way: "Did you comfort and feed the earthquake survivors of Haiti or the flood victims of Pakistan? Did you visit the homeless boy sniffing glue on a train platform in India? Did you search out the people all over the world who have never heard of Me? Did you befriend the followers of other religions — or no religion — who don't know that I am Lord? Did you encourage My persecuted children who are suffering for My sake?" Southern Baptist workers and their ministry partners did all those things during the course of last year. And International Mission Board photographers were with them.

Visit a slideshow at <http://bit.ly/e8Rk0A> and revisit some of the places and people they touched in 2010, a year that witnessed great human suffering — and glimpses of hope. For more information on hunger-related issues in the United States and around the world, visit www.bread.org.

'How is this going to end?'

Birmingham bombing survivor tells of hope, love

By Ashley Anderton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The title of the Sunday morning sermon was to be "A Love That Forgives."

That was the message 14-year-old Carolyn Maull McKinstry anticipated hearing from John H. Cross on Sept. 15, 1963, at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

But the sermon was never delivered.

Instead, at 10:22 a.m., a homemade bomb placed outside the church by Ku Klux Klan members blew a large hole in a wall of the building. Killed instantly were Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins and Cynthia Wesley — McKinstry's friends who were in the girls' rest room.

Just minutes before the bomb exploded, she had been speaking with her friends in that same bathroom.

Long before the bombing occurred, Sixteenth Street Baptist, the first black church built in Birmingham, had become a regular meeting place for civil rights leaders. Because of its connection to the civil rights movement, the church became a target of the Klan.

After the bombing, McKinstry struggled to make sense of the crime, asking herself over and over again, "Where were all the good people — the Christian people — who sat in all the churches on Sunday mornings and heard the message of loving their neighbor? Where were those people? Why didn't they come to help?"

This was not the only bombing that she would experience. Later a bomb exploded just across the street from her house, knocking her younger brothers out of their bunk beds. Her home was damaged, as were neighbors' homes.

"Bombing was a way of life in Birmingham," McKinstry said recently. "But no one even pretended like they were fixing anything. The bombs just kept going off. And I kept thinking, 'How is this going to end?' You're puzzled because you don't see an end."

These events motivated her to

share her story of forgiveness in a new book, "While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age During the Civil Rights Movement," published by Tyndale House.

After the bombing that damaged her home, McKinstry began to feel a calling upon her life and believes God started preparing her for a special ministry.

She went on to graduate from Fisk University in Nashville and work for BellSouth in Birmingham for 22 years. In 2002, McKinstry's calling prompted her to retire from her job and enroll in Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham.

In 2008, she received a master of divinity.

"Part of my going back to divinity school had to do with the pain I still felt," McKinstry said. "I said, 'I'm going to go back and study and see if I can figure this thing out.'"

She met Denise George, who teaches a writing class at Beeson, where her husband, Timothy George, serves as dean.

Historical importance

"Carolyn was a student when I met her," said Denise George, who helped McKinstry write the book and get it published. "We sat down to have lunch and started talking. I grew up in the South and had heard of the church bombing, but I never put it into perspective. It was like all the pain and hurt didn't matter to anyone. I knew her story had to be told."

Both women realized how important it is that younger generations know what happened during that era so that history does not repeat itself.

For George, helping to write the book proved challenging in several ways.

"First, it was such a powerful

story and because Carolyn was my friend, I wanted it to be told just right to be effective," she said. "Second, it was all historical and everything had to be documented accurately. Last, it was such a deeply and emotionally painful topic to talk about. A lot of these people were church-going people. They would go to church on Sunday and hear about loving their neighbor and then would be involved in bombings and beatings."

Finally, there was the endeavor to avoid the dryness with which some historical accounts are conveyed in books.

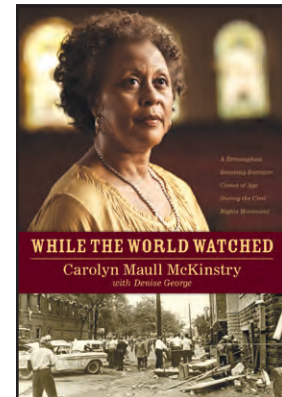
"I wanted it to read like a story," George said. "I want people to see how God doesn't cause pain and tragedy, but He always brings something good from it. When we go through something like this, if we allow God to use us, we can become 'wounded healers' and can offer people hope. Carolyn is now ministering to other people in Christ because of it."

In fact, for 25 years now, McKinstry has been offering her message of love, forgiveness and reconciliation by sharing her story around the country whenever she has been asked to do so. Last week, she was in Virginia for a live "700 Club" appearance.

"People like hearing the story because of the good ending," McKinstry said.

"And it seemed, every time I spoke, I felt better too because the story touched people's hearts. They would cry with me and hug me. I think the greatest blessing God has given me is to see there are more people like me in the world than those who planted the bomb in Birmingham."

To purchase the book, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and click on the LifeWay Christian Stores button. To contact McKinstry, e-mail cmckinstry@bellsouth.net.



Shea honored by Grammy Awards

Prominent gospel singer and longtime Billy Graham associate George Beverly Shea received a lifetime achievement award at the 53rd annual Grammy Awards Feb. 12 in Los Angeles.

At 102, Shea is one of the oldest living persons to be honored by the recording academy.

Shea was working at a Christian radio station in Chicago when his baritone voice caught Graham's attention.

"Mr. Graham phoned me and then wrote me and asked me in 1947 to become a part

of his team," Shea recalled.

Shea sang at almost every Graham crusade for 60 years.

According to Guinness World Records, he has sung before more people than anyone else — an estimated combined live audience of 220 million people.

60 years with Graham

Shea said his favorite part of a crusade was watching the waves of people stream forward after Graham gave the altar call.

During his 80-year career, Shea recorded more than 70 albums and

wrote several popular worship songs. He was nominated 10 times for a Grammy and won in 1965.

"Someone said, 'Why have you been doing this all these years?' I put my thumb up to the air toward heaven, and I said I've been doing it for Him," Shea said.

Shea said his faith keeps him going at 102.

"I don't know when heaven will loom up for me, but we have to look forward to it," he said. "I hope there will be an organ up there to play. Oh, boy, I love organ music." (RNS)

Christians 'have special role' in Middle East; Baptists urged to continue praying

(continued from page 1)

freedom, the Southern Baptist representative said. It could lead to more oppression just as likely as it could lead to greater freedom.

"We should be in serious prayer that it will lead to freedom," he said.

An Alabama Baptist who has lived and worked extensively in Egypt said the turmoil has never been about religion, but the results will impact religious people.

'Could be tipping point'

"For Christians, it is a clear indicator, that we can do what just yesterday seemed to be impossible," he said just hours after the announcement of Mubarak's resignation.

"This could be a tipping point for the future of Egypt," he said, noting maybe now the three official, Egyptian government-issued Visas available for Baptist workers can be used. "Alabama Baptists should be aware that there are believers in Egypt looking to them as partners in terms of prayer support. It is the political hot button right now, but when this goes away and things stabilize, Alabama Baptists need to continue to pray for what's happening in Egypt (and the Middle East) ... and that there will be a greater awareness on the part of believers, more boldness in sharing the gospel and a sweeping revival."

Arab Christian leader Nabil Costa agreed prayer is needed, especially for leadership that believes in religious freedom.

"I believe that God is very much at work in our region, and we need to see the changes that are happening in Egypt ... and in Tunisia, from this perspective," said Costa, executive director of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development. "I see God opening up new opportunities before us."

"The Church has an integral role to play in the community and for the good of the nation, and so we need to pray for the Church leadership and for our brothers and sisters that they may take courage to pursue the good works that God prepared in advance for them to do in Egypt," he said, adding the same would be true for Tunisian Christians.

The Baptist representatives also asked for prayer for the people of Jordan, Yemen and the Palestinians.

"With democracy comes the freedom of thought and the possibility of considering new ideas," the Southern Baptist representative said. "This revolution could lead to an openness for the gospel that we have not experienced before in the Middle East."

Arab Christian leader Bader Mansour, secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, said, "We hope the regime will be replaced with a real democracy, where the voice of the people is heard and also minorities (Christians are the biggest minority in Egypt) are protected and have freedom to worship as they wish."

"Arab countries have been living under dictatorship for too long,"

he said. "It is great to see Egypt, the biggest Arab and Middle East country, make a big step towards democracy."

"As a Christian Arab, I feel proud ... as Christians in Egypt took part in the great peaceful demonstrations," he said. "I had tears in my eyes watching Dr. Ehab Kharrat, one of the leaders of the Evangelical Church in Egypt, speak to the hundreds of thousands of people (mainly Muslim) at Tahreer Square (Freedom Square). He shared from the Bible, and a group from his church sang a few Christian songs. ... He also told the crowds about another young man 2,000 years ago (Jesus Christ), who went against corruption and injustice."

The Kharrat example demonstrates Christians are actively involved in what is happening in the Middle East, Mansour said. They are contributing in positive ways even though their presence has been weakened in the last few years, he noted.

'Working together'

"Christians have a special role in the Middle East to be salt, and I am glad the followers of Jesus in Egypt were able to contribute and present the love of Christ to all," he said. "I am glad that this has been a victory for Muslims and Christians working together, less than two months after the terrible massacre of Christians at Easter Eve in Alexandria where Muslim fundamentalist groups were involved."

Baptist pastor in Egypt describes life for his church

Thank you very much for your prayers. It is such an encouraging reminder for us that we are not alone but a part of God's one family.

Due to the recently imposed curfew, all our evening services were cancelled. So we decided to hold a prayer meeting every day from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

While we shared our fears during those times, we also shared what we were learning and what God was saying to them. Here are a few examples of what people said:

"I remembered what Nehemiah did when he heard the bad news about the destruction of his city and I repented and wept."

"I recognized that in this hard time I should not think about my own needs but think of who my God is (Ps. 63)."

"I feel that the Lord is calling each one of us to be 'a watchman for the people' (Ezek. 33:7). It is time for us to stop being selfish and go out to encourage those who are afraid."

"The church is safe. Even if we have one loaf of bread, we will share it."

"It is time for believers to test their principles and values."

How different is the way believers see things.

One of the positive things that we gained through these tough days was getting closer with our Muslim neighbors. After the po-

lice disappeared and the chaos started, we had to stand together to watch and protect our homes and neighborhoods, and that was the first time after years of tension between Muslims and Christians. We see the crisis as a bridge for us to reach them.

Prayer requests

Please pray with us that the leadership that comes after Mubarak will give more freedom for the Egyptian church and grant us the right to carry on the Great Commission freely and plant new churches without the restrictions we've had.

Pray that we may have wisdom to discern when and how to interact with the government in the coming period.

Pray that the Lord might enable us as a church to restore and maintain our vision. There is a lot of destruction in the country. We need to be positive and active in our communities and serve our people practically to rebuild and restore. The coming days are a golden chance for us to interact with people.

Pray that the Lord may complete His healing for His wounded children from fear and all the negative feelings mentioned above.

(Condensed from a letter written by Mounir Malaty, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cairo, Egypt)

Across Alabama's Associations

BALDWIN

► Eastern Shore Women's Ministry, Inc. will hold its seventh annual women's conference Feb. 25-26 at **Jubilee Church, Daphne**. Sessions will be Friday from 7 to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The theme will be Wake Up — My People. Dove award-winner Clay Crosse will lead worship. Speakers will include Aaron Fruh, pastor of Knollwood Church, Mobile; Margaret Kennedy of Threads of Hope Ministry in Dothan; Linda Johnson of Mount Hebron Church Ministries in Mobile; Marjorie Searcy, speaker, songwriter and vocal coach, of Fairhope; and Renee Crosse, wife of Clay. Lunch is included. For information call Linda Powell at 251-454-9145 or visit www.easternshorowomensministry.com. Paul Matthews is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Green Valley Church, Hoover**, will host The Strength

Team Feb. 20, 4 p.m., at its Upward basketball season celebration in the family life center. The team also will perform during the evening service at 6 p.m. For information call 205-822-2173. Bobby DuBois is interim pastor.

CENTRAL

► **Second Church, Weogufka**, will hold a Valentine's banquet Feb. 20, 5 p.m., with Brother Billy Bob Bohannon. Brandon Baird is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Stave Creek Church, Jackson**, will hold a Getting Back to the Bible campmeeting Feb. 25-26. Services will be Friday at 6 p.m. and Saturday at 9 a.m. Ted Traylor, Lucky Teague, Chris Kynard, Roscoe Wentworth, Don Rushing, Wilton Bennett and Pastor Jamie Lay will speak. Bill Weide will lead the music. Gospel quartet Southern Image will provide special music.

COFFEE

► **Mount Pleasant Church, Enterprise; New Home Church, Enterprise; Union Grove Church, Chancellor; and Westview Church, Enterprise**, will hold joint revival services at Mount Pleasant Feb. 27-March 2. Services will be Sunday at 6 p.m. and weeknights at 7. Steve Bruce is pastor of Mount Pleasant, Cliff Quincey is pastor of New Home, Randall Pearson is pastor of Union Grove and Rick Hayes is pastor of Westview.

ETOWAH

► **Jerald Adams**, pastor of **Paden Church, Gadsden**, will celebrate 15 years as pastor of the church and 40 years in the ministry Feb. 20, 10:45 a.m. Lunch and a reception will follow at 1 p.m. with Gary Cardwell, director of missions for Etowah Association, as guest speaker.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**,

will host Greater Vision in concert Feb. 20, 6 p.m. For information call 256-729-1328 or visit www.clements-baptist.org. Tim Anderson is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Donald Vaughn** is the new pastor of **Mount Zion Church, Collinsville**. He previously served as a pastor in Sand Mountain Association. He and his wife, Linda, have two grown daughters.

MOBILE

► **Mickey Henderson** is the new minister of music and worship for **Dauphin Way Church, Mobile**. He comes from First Church, North Spartanburg, S.C., where he served for six years. He also



HENDERSON

served churches in Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia for 26 years. Henderson holds a bachelor's degree in music voice and master of music from Mississippi College in Clinton and master of church music from New Orleans Seminary. He also has done post-graduate studies at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Henderson and his wife, Teresa, have two children. Adam Dooley is pastor. ► **Sage Avenue Church, Mobile**, will host former University of Alabama football player Siran Stacy Feb. 20, 10:50 a.m. For information visit www.sageavenuebc.org. The church also will celebrate its 60th anniversary March 20, 10:45 a.m. Sid Nichols, former pastor and current director of missions for Calhoun Association, will speak. Lunch will follow. For reservations visit www.sageavenuebc.org. Phil Boyles is pastor of Sage Avenue.

'God wants us here'

NAMB missionaries Tom and Marla Polak reach Indianapolis' inner city

Robert Maul is the Indianapolis 2011 version of the widow best known for her "mite," who Jesus described as having "put in more than all of them. For all these people have put in gifts out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:1-4).

Maul, 62, foraged the sidewalks, curbs and streets of Indianapolis, pocketing lost coins — picking up a penny here, a nickel or dime there. His painstaking work — all on foot — would add up to a sacrificial \$25 contribution to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. By the way, Maul was homeless.

Poor in the pocketbook but not in spirit, Maul is a former heroin addict who liked to fight. He served five different sentences in an Indiana penitentiary. He slept under bridges and interstate overpasses. But through the ministry of North American Mission Board (NAMB) missionary Tom Polak, Maul was redeemed by the Lord.

Polak and his wife, Marla, are only 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's goal is \$70 million, 100 percent of which benefits missionaries like the Polaks.

"Robert came to a block party we had about a year ago," Polak recalled. "He came, had his lunch, listened to music and somewhere along the line, somebody witnessed to Robert and shared the

gospel. He was saved that day, a Saturday. The next day, Robert was in our church service and he began to come every Sunday."

"He was baptized and he's been very faithful. Now, a year later, you see the growth in him — he's very genuine, very sincere. He's really been quite an encouragement to me to see what God can do in a person's life," Polak said.

In 1995, the Polaks left a Kansas City ministry for Indianapolis, where Polak began serving as director of the Metro Baptist Center in the inner city and as pastor of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship.

"We are here helping people, ministering to people, praying, evangelizing and giving people a place to go," he said.

"We minister to the people who live in the downtown Indianapolis area, who are homeless, low-income people — people who are struggling."

Although the 52-year-old Polak pastors an inner-city church and admits "we don't have a lot," he encourages new Christians like Maul to find a way to give.

"These are people who themselves are standing on the corners asking for money. These are people who are homeless. But I encourage them to give what they can to Annie Armstrong. I tell them the money is going to missionaries who are sharing the gospel around the country. I did that for about three weeks, leading up to the Sunday we took up the Annie offering."

Self-sacrificing

On that Sunday, Maul had a surprise for Polak.

"Robert calls me over and he hands me this large cylinder and it has some weight to it. I asked him



NAMB photo

BAPTISMAL WATERS — NAMB missionary and pastor Tom Polak baptizes Joe Massey during a recent service at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in downtown Indianapolis.

what it was, and he told me it was his offering. 'I've been finding this money and have been dedicating it to the Lord,' Robert told me. I thought of the woman with the two pennies who gave all she had," Polak said. "That's Robert."

Polak said Christians don't always meet the "Roberts" of the world. "We may see them on the corner or may bump into them downtown, but do we see them as people who may have made mistakes, maybe have issues or problems? You know God loves these folks and has a plan for them, and He can use them in many ways."

On a typical day, Metro Baptist Center runs a food and clothing pantry for the needy, offers job placement services and substance abuse assistance. Polak and his staff not only try to minister to a person's physical needs — as important as they are —

but also to their spiritual needs.

"When a person comes in and they are in need and hurting, they see we're here for them. They see a genuine concern in us. That makes them more open to hearing the gospel and for prayer. They're more apt to open up and tell you where they're coming from and what their real needs are."

Help from churches

In addition to harvesting the "Roberts" for Christ, Polak also is encouraged by the mission groups — seven last summer — who travel to Indianapolis from Southern Baptist churches around the United States — using sports and construction ministries to reach lost people, especially youth.

"For instance, we had a wonderful adult and youth group from Collinsville, Okla., who came to do a week-long sports camp in one of the low-income housing projects."

Inner-city kids were coached in basketball, football, baseball and golf. More importantly, they heard about Christ.

Born and raised in Syracuse, N.Y., Polak earned a bachelor's degree from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, and a master of divinity from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. Although he went to school and served as a pastor in Texas and Missouri, he said he's more comfortable in the North.

"I'm in a place where I feel God has called me," Polak said. "I have a great assurance that God wants me here for this time and that's a great feeling. I like using my tal-



NAMB photo

HELPING PEOPLE — Tom and Marla Polak are North American Mission Board Week of Prayer missionaries based in Indianapolis.

ents and abilities on the things God has gifted me with so I'm able to put them into practice and help people.

"Indianapolis is a wonderful city," he added. "It's a clean city, an active city with many activities and things to do. The Christian organizations here work together well. We see tremendous needs of homelessness, mental illness and drug addiction. But we're trying to address these issues. We have about 80 churches in central Indiana working together."

Polak and Marla, a native of Topeka, Kan.; an occupational therapist; and a graduate of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, have five children: Hannah, Rachel, Caleb, Moriah and Joel. (NAMB)

WorldCrafts launches new brand, website

WorldCrafts has officially launched its new branding campaign, which includes a new website, www.WorldCrafts.org.

The new website features easier navigation, streamlined products, larger images and new party ideas.

WorldCrafts underwent re-branding in 2010, which resulted in a new vision, mission statement, tagline, logo and colors. The new WorldCrafts mission statement is, "WorldCrafts and its local partners develop fair-trade businesses that provide sustainable income and offer eternal hope for impoverished people throughout the world."

"WorldCrafts represents artisans

whose skills are extraordinary. Our desire is to tell their stories and show their crafts in ways that help our customers understand the needs, the quality of the crafts and the resulting change that comes from the purchase of a WorldCrafts product," said Andrea Mullins, WorldCrafts director.

"Every story is one of dignity and hope because of the ministry of WorldCrafts."

With a new brand and website

in place, WorldCrafts' goal is not only to strengthen the relationship

with their current customer base but also to reach out to potential customers, including those not familiar with national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) or the Southern Baptist Convention, who are interested in

fair-trade, world impact and ministry.

WorldCrafts is a division of WMU. (WMU)





Photo courtesy of CrossPoint Church

GROWING IN CHRIST — Men from area churches gather at CrossPoint Church, Trussville, Jan. 28–29 for Men's Weekend 2011. Steve Farrar was the keynote speaker.

'Spiritual muscle'

Men's Weekend 2011 makes significant impact on attendees

By John Evans
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Churches from different denominations banded together Jan. 28–29 to help men grow in Christ.

Men's Weekend 2011, hosted by CrossPoint Church, Trussville, in partnership with more than a dozen other churches, featured Christian author and speaker Steve Farrar.

Farrar addressed the sanctuary full of men on topics ranging from the evidence of God's work in a man's life to combating anxiety.

"Never in my adult life have I seen so many Christian men so worried and anxious, experiencing sleepless nights unsure what the future holds for them, their children or their grandchildren," he said, going on to encourage the audience to have faith in a sovereign Father.

Life is a poem

"You don't need to lose sleep at night," Farrar said. "God runs the whole world."

Farrar spoke to the men about trials in life, urging them to think of life as a poem.

"If you think there's no rhyme or reason (in life), let me ask you

this," he said. "Does every word in a poem rhyme? You don't get to the rhyme until you get to the end of the line."

Suffering, Farrar said, brings spiritual growth.

"That's how God builds spiritual muscle in His men, through suffering, not through an easy life," he said.

Farrar explored what he said are the 10 evidences of God's work in a man's life, which focused on His sovereignty.

The 10 evidences Farrar gave were God is in control of devastating loss; God is in control of every event in life;

God is in control of all assignments; God is in control of grievous setbacks; God is in control of broken hopes; God is in control of prolonged waiting; God is in control of powerful people; God is in control of all promotion; God is in control of all weather, famine, drought and natural disasters; and God is in control of all that's good and bad.

As an example of God's control of all assignments in life, Farrar addressed what a man can do when he has been placed somewhere he doesn't naturally enjoy.

"Keep a teachable heart," Farrar said. "Say, 'What do you have for me, Lord? What do I have to learn?'"

He pointed to the story in Genesis in which Joseph went to prison

in Egypt even though he did what was right as an example of God being in control of grievous setbacks.

Farrar told the men that God is with believers during setbacks.

"When you can't see your way out, you trust in Him," he urged the men.

Farrar spoke on a number of other subjects including parenting, what to look for in a wife and how to handle a crisis.

"[I was really impacted when Farrar talked] about us having a true Father, how we need to have more faith and less worry, which is a difficult thing to do no mat-

ter how much you read it in the Bible," said Monte Montgomery, an attendee from ClearBranch United Methodist Church in Trussville.

Things to work on

Ryan Whitley, CrossPoint's senior pastor, believes the men's weekend, which is set to happen again next year, had a significant impact on those who attended.

"Some guys left going to work on their marriage," he said. "Some guys are going to work on spiritual discipline. Some left with the strength that they may have lost their job but they're going to trust God."

"So I think all the guys left with things they're going to be working on," Whitley added.



FARRAR

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Hindu nationalists beat Christians for distributing literature

RAJWADA, India — Hindu nationalists beat three Christians who were distributing Christian literature Jan. 6 in Kolhapur district.

The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that Akhil Prasanna, Shiju Mathew and Thomas George of the Satveda Mission were distributing gospel tracts when they were surrounded by nearly 35 Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal.

The nationalist extremists grabbed the tracts, tore them up, shouted profanity at the Christians and falsely accused them of forced conversion before taking them to the Rajwada police station.

Officers forced them to pledge that they will cease any future Christian work, according to the GCIC.

Pastor Johnson George, director of the Satveda Mission, told Compass Direct News that while the Christians were later running errands at a market, the extremists pounced on them and beat them, as well as kicked them, pushed them to the ground and stomped on them. The Christians rushed back to their campus in Nagadev and later went to Kerala for medical treatment.

Prasanna and Mathew were discharged after treatment for minor injuries, but George underwent further treatment for backbone injuries at Sree Sankara Hospital, Changanassery, Kerala, according to the GCIC.

Police raid Uzbek church, plan to prosecute members

SYRDARYA, Uzbekistan — Police in the central Syrdarya region raided an unregistered Baptist church and are preparing to prosecute members of the church. The police confiscated religious literature for "expert analysis," though it was bought from the registered Bible Society.

Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church spoke of the difficulties his church faces in Uzbekistan.

He noted in particular a ban on missionary activity, opening Orthodox schools, and inability to get state permission for new parishes.

The state Committee on Religious Affairs refused to discuss these issues. Elsewhere, two short-term Baptist prisoners of conscience have been released. Judge Bobojonov, as he initially introduced himself, of the court which convicted the Baptists, changed his mind about what his name was after asked why the Baptists were jailed.

Police major Asliddin Mirzayev — who stopped the two Baptists — refused to explain why the men were jailed. "It's our secret," he said.

Indian Christian convert beaten for leaving Hinduism

SIRISGUDA, India — In Sirisguda, Jagdalpur, on Jan. 12, Hindu extremists beat a Christian for leaving Hinduism, seriously injuring him.

Pastor S.S. Jhali told Compass Direct News that Itu Veko of Obedient Life Church decided to trust in Christ for his salvation a year ago and since then, area extremists have been threatening him.

Hindu extremists led by Jintu Gond verbally abused Veko for his faith, ordered him to return to Hinduism and repeatedly beat him, Jhali said, describing an injury to Veko's head as life-threatening.

He received treatment at a government hospital. Area Christian leaders submitted a complaint to police in Badanji Thana, but no arrests had been made at press time.

Hindu extremists attack Christians during prayer meeting

ODISA, India — Hindu extremists from the Bajrang Dal beat Christians during their prayer meeting Jan. 16 in Odisha, Konta, seriously injuring them.

Pastor Wycliff Sayar told Compass Direct News about 15 Christians from Konta Independent Church were praying when a group of extremists stormed in and began verbally abusing them for following Christ.

Sayar said most of those gathered were converts from Hinduism from a tribal background.

The Christians received hospital treatment for injuries on their heads, hands, legs and backs.

CORRECTION

The article "FBC North Mobile education pastor, wife see God's love through Down syndrome child" printed in the Feb. 3 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* had an incorrect phone number for Heather Messick. The correct number is 251-591-3191.

Bieber: 'I believe Jesus died ... for my sins'

With a smooth voice, a signature mop of hair and a string of hits, Justin Bieber has accumulated millions of fans and sold 3.7 million albums in the United States last year.

Now Bieber's handlers are showcasing another side of the 16-year-old pop sensation: Christian icon for the tween set.

Bieber's faith is on display in the new 3-D concert film/documentary "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never," which hit theaters Feb. 11. Paramount Pictures has screened the movie for faith leaders across the country and distributed spiritual



RNS photo

FAMILY OF FAITH — Justin Bieber (left) and his mother, Pattie Mallette, are both born-again Christians.

discussion guides — the same tools used to promote "The Passion of the Christ" and "The Blind Side" as family-friendly fare. "People will walk away [from the movie] knowing faith is very important to him," said Scooter Braun, Bieber's manager and one of the film's producers. "As a Christian, he's someone to look up to ... When [fans] are getting the real person is when they can connect to that person."

Bieber has never shied away from faith. He was singing Christian songs on YouTube before he became famous. His born-again Christian mother, Pattie Mallette, has shared her spiritual conversion on a Christian TV show and openly shares her beliefs and Bible verses with 281,000-plus Twitter followers.

Bieber's come-from-nowhere climb to become the fourth top-selling artist of 2010 has given a higher profile to his Christian beliefs and background, which he also ad-

ressed in last fall's autobiography, "First Step 2 Forever: My Story."

"I believe that Jesus died on a cross for my sins," Bieber told Billboard last November.

"He's the reason that I'm here."

On his November single "Pray," a departure from his typical pop oeuvre, Bieber sings, "I close my eyes and pray / I close my eyes and I can see a better day." The music video, seen more than 21 million times on YouTube, ends with the written message, "God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer."

In the new 3-D film, fans will see Bieber expressing his faith — several scenes show Bieber praying before concerts, and Mallette discusses how God brought stability to her life as a single teenage mother.

Paramount's spiritual resource guide suggests the movie "provides an opportunity to teach our children about the power of hope, prayer, faith and family."

It lists discussion points and Bible verses related to the movie, such as "the power of prayer" and "the importance of godly friendships."

David Tai, one of the pastors at the Christian Assembly of Suburban Chicago, Carol Stream, Ill., said after a recent screening that while the film's faith message is subtle, he might use the movie as an illustration to discuss "how authority and responsibility go hand in hand."

Diane Winston, a scholar in media and religion at the University of Southern California, says its "perfectly natural" for Paramount to market "Never" to spiritual leaders.

Justin Bieber's mother opens up about faith, church, spotlight

Phil Boatwright, author and movie reviewer, recently sat down with Pattie Mallette, Justin Bieber's mother, for an interview.

Q: When did Justin make his profession of faith?

A: He was really young, around 5 or 6. ... I told him it was his decision. He couldn't make it because of Mommy. It has to be because of your own heart. And he kept telling me that he understood. And when he was 8 or 9, he wanted to be baptized. So, I let him.

Q: I assume it's difficult to attend church on a regular basis with your schedule.

A: When we can, we go on Sunday mornings wherever we are. And there are some churches that have live streaming webcasts that we watch and pray through.

Q: What's the most diffi-

cult aspect of this new celebrity?

A: The pressure — for both of us. Justin is under a tremendous amount of pressure as a role model to an entire generation. So many kids are looking to him. As teenagers, we all make mistakes. Fortunately and unfortunately, he's in the public eye.

Q: And the best part?

A: Favor with people. Freedom to be able to travel. We feel like we're on this incredible journey. We're so incredibly blessed.

Q: You're a single mom.

A: I was never married. I came to the Lord when I was 17, but shortly after accepting Christ, I went back to making my own decisions and got pregnant. Realizing what I had done, I came back to God wholeheartedly, begging Him to forgive me. It's really an incredible testimony of God's mercy and grace. And the genuine love of people at the church who encouraged me.

Q: Does Justin have a father figure in his life?

A: Oh, his dad is a part of his life. He doesn't travel with us and he's not with us all the time, but his dad's in his life. They talk on a regular basis and he visits when he can.

Q: How do you keep your son grounded?

A: Through prayer. By surrounding him with good people, people who will hold him accountable, and by constantly reminding him that he's here for a reason. "To whom much is given, much is required." So, we just have to keep him lifted up in prayer.

Q: I understand that there are prayer groups who pray for him, daily.

A: As a mother, that is so good to hear, because prayer is so powerful. (BP)

"Many [Christians] might not have known Justin Bieber was one of them," she said. "[This campaign] reminds them [the movie] is a wholesome product they can take a child to see."

It's also not unusual for teen pop stars to use "the language of faith to widen their audience and project a clean pop image," Winston said, citing Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers as examples.

A different message

"For young stars, particularly in those murky young teenage years, it's a quick, reliable way to show parents you are not going to be offering a sexually explicit message," Winston said.

In other words, it's a different message than the one by pop sen-

sation Katy Perry — the daughter of Christian pastors — in her song, "Peacock": "Come on baby let me see / What you're hiding underneath."

While Braun said the movie may earn Bieber more Christian fans, he dismissed the idea Bieber's faith is being used as a marketing tool.

"There are some stars who speak their faith because they're trying to do outreach to that audience and there are others who share that side of their lives because that's who they are," Braun said, "and I think that's just who Justin is."

"When there are 20,000 people chanting your name night after night after night, if there's no sense of faith, if there's not a sense of something bigger than yourself, you can get lost."

Braun, who's Jewish, said he encourages Bieber's faith because "I think it's so important." He said the two regularly pray the Shema, Judaism's most central prayer, before the start of each concert.

Winston said one potential setback to Bieber promoting his Christianity is that he may be held to a higher moral standard; Cyrus' wholesome image, for example, took a beating after a pole dancing episode at a 2009 awards show.

Braun, for one, isn't worried. "There's going to be mistakes I'm sure [he'll] make as a young man, like we all make," Braun said. "But overall he has a really good heart and he's a very intelligent kid ... For him it's about living his life to be the best example he can be for others." (RNS)

Anniston/Oxford hosts 2011 RA/Challenger basketball tournament



CRUSADERS — FBC Pinson in Birmingham Association won the Crusaders (4th–6th grade) division at the Feb. 4–5 basketball tournament.



YOUNG CHALLENGERS — Woodbridge Baptist Church, Mobile, in Mobile Baptist Association won the Young Challengers (7th–9th grade) division.



OLDER CHALLENGERS — Woodbridge Baptist Church, Mobile, in Mobile Baptist Association won the Older Challengers (10th–12th grade) division.

Photos courtesy of Steve Stephens

A monthly advertising supplement — February 2011

Church Resource Guide



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The Alabama Baptist will feature "Travel for the Season: Spring" March 10.

This advertorial advertising package will feature spring events, tourist attractions, historical sites and cultural events geared towards church groups and family excursions. For more information, contact the Advertising Department at 205-870-4720, Ext. 102, Pam Holt at 205-870-4720, Ext. 113 or James Plunkett at 205-747-0564 or by e-mailing: ads@thealabamabaptist.org, pholt@thealabamabaptist.org or jplunkett@thealabamabaptist.org.

Deadline to reserve your space is Feb. 25.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

COMMUNION SHARED — Deacons pass the Communion plates down the rows at Pleasant Hill Church, Moundville, on Feb. 6.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

EVERYTHING NEW — More than 200 people attend the dedication service for the new building of Pleasant Hill Church, Moundville. The previous building was lost to a fire nearly two years ago.

Moundville's Pleasant Hill rebuilds after suspicious fire

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

The four deacons reverently made their way toward the altar, Communion plates in hand. Their feet moved in unison as they walked shoulder to shoulder. One man handed the bread plate to the pastor; he took the bread and prayed as the congregation remembered Christ. The first Communion in Pleasant Hill Baptist Church's new building was a meaningful event.

On April 14, 2009, the Moundville church burned to the ground. Authorities suspected arson because the fire started in both wings of the church, which also had been

robbed the night before. The case is still open.

Assured by God's sovereignty, Pastor Chuck Weaver and his congregation did not give up. Two weeks after the fire, the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) provided a mobile chapel, courtesy of Cooperative Program funding.

The Hale Baptist Association church missed only two Sundays of worship; it began gathering again May 3 in the mobile chapel on its property.

In March 2010, 112 Carpenters for Christ volunteers, Bold Mission Builders and Johnson City Brick Layers of Tennessee began

constructing a new building, a task that seemed impossible for the rural church. Rebuilding came with the hefty price tag of \$125 per square foot.

"We didn't know all it would take to rebuild but God did," SBOM Disaster Relief Strategist Mel Johnson said.

Outside help

The community and other churches also served Pleasant Hill Baptist in its time of need. Moundville United Methodist Church and Indian Mounds Baptist Church, Moundville, provided housing, showers and food for the volunteers who came to construct the building.

After many prayers, lots of planning and thousands of hammered nails, more than 200 people gathered Feb. 6, 2011, for the building dedication service. Smiles, hugs and tears filled the sanctuary that still smelled of fresh paint. "Keep me in your will, so I won't get in your way" played through the sound system as Weaver made his way to the front.

"That song's been our theme song around here since the fire," he said.

"Without Him, nothing you see today would be possible," Weaver shared through tears. "We got out of His way and let Him do what He wanted. Today we're here to celebrate Him."

But the dedication service was not just for the church building.

"Before you got here, this was just a building," Weaver said to those in attendance. "You are the church. We can dedicate this new, beautiful space, but it can't go out and tell others about Jesus.

"As I see you examining this building, I challenge you today to examine yourselves and see how you measure up," he said. "I challenge you to dedicate yourselves today and say, 'Unless the

Lord builds me, I build in vain.'"

Bill Wallace, director of missions for Hale and Cahaba associations, was one of those in attendance.

"The spirit here is amazing. I'm grateful to God for what He's doing in this church," Wallace said, noting that as he visited during the reconstruction, he saw deacons, members of the community and congregation and even children helping serve the church and rebuild.

Bright future

Since the fire, Pleasant Hill has grown from around 40 to 50-60 in regular attendance.

Seven believers took the plunge Jan. 2, when the church held its first baptism service in its new building.

Joe Shaw, a deacon at Pleasant Hill and the oldest member of the church, garnered loud applause when he said, "Before the fire, we were not in debt. Today we are in this new church building and it is paid for."

Johnson added, "This is a special day. Take this as marching orders: Change this community for Christ."

'Shocking' Planned Parenthood videos renew calls for federal defunding

Another series of videos secretly recorded at Planned Parenthood clinics — in this case apparently showing its employees agreeing to aid sex traffickers whose prostitutes are in their early teens — has renewed calls for the federal government to defund the country's largest abortion provider.

From Feb. 1-8, the pro-life organization Live Action released video footage from hidden-camera investigations at six clinics that showed Planned Parenthood staff signaling cooperation with a self-described pimp in testing for sexually transmitted diseases, providing birth control and/or abortions for his alleged, under-age sex workers. The pimp and, in some cases, a prostitute who accompanied him to the clinics were actors doing undercover work for Live Action.

The clandestine videos were shot at Planned Parenthood

clinics in New Jersey, New York and Virginia from Jan. 11-14, according to Live Action.

Rep. Mike Pence, R.-Ind., called for passage of his bill, the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act, to eliminate federal funds for Planned Parenthood after the first video was released.

'An outrage'

Calling the activity of a clinic worker on the video "an outrage," Pence said Feb. 2, "Every American should be shocked that an employee of the largest recipient of federal funds under Title X has been recorded aiding and abetting underage sex trafficking.

The Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), which has 95 affiliates and 865 health centers nationwide, showed in its 2008-09 report it received \$363.2 million in government grants and contracts during the year. Its affiliates performed more than 324,000 abortions in 2008, the latest year

for which statistics are available. PPFA recently issued new rules requiring at least one clinic per affiliate to perform abortions.

The video stings showing the willingness of Planned Parenthood staff to assist in the sex trafficking of girls as young as 14 years of age are the latest — and likely most damaging — in a series of undercover investigations Live Action has conducted during the last four years.

A previous hidden-camera project by Live Action caught Planned Parenthood employees in Alabama, Arizona, California, Indiana and Tennessee seeking to cover up alleged child sexual abuse, prompting some state investigations. Another video sting showed a counselor at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Wisconsin providing erroneous information about fetal development. (BP)



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The Alabama Commission on Improving State Government

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

One of Gov. Robert Bentley's first acts in January was to issue an executive order creating the Alabama Commission on Improving State Government. The state is facing the possibility of substantial budget cuts in the middle of its current fiscal year, plus even bigger reductions in the year to come. The purpose of the commission is to study and recommend ways for Alabama government to manage these cutbacks and become more efficient and effective.

Biggest criticisms

There have been a number of such commissions in the past, and the two biggest criticisms of them are that they cost money at a time when we can't afford it and we don't need more studies on the shelf but rather action.

This commission is designed to minimize costs by taking advantage of available resources. Members will include business leaders as well as government officials, and all will serve without pay. Staff work will be done by state employees at no additional cost. Each state agency will analyze its programs to recommend restructuring and reductions. Prior commission reports from Alabama and elsewhere will be analyzed for recommendations that can reduce costs and improve services. The Legislature and the judicial system are doing their own independent reviews.

The Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) and other research organizations will participate. There will be a website for the public to offer suggestions as well.

Everyone wants results but it would be foolish not to examine the options to make sure that recommendations actually will work as intended. For example, in a recent PARCA opinion survey, 68 percent of respondents approve of reorganizing state agencies and 55 percent approves of releasing nonviolent prisoners as ways to cut state costs. However, the governor and Legislature should have an analysis of the expected impact on expenditures, employment, service quality and public safety before approving specific measures in these and other areas.

A number of states have achieved big improvements in government from study commissions of this type. The work of The Commission for a New Georgia stands out, in part because of an implementation staff that turned recommendations into action. Alabama can profit greatly from studying the initiatives of our next-door neighbor and considering those that have the highest value for us.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama. Jim may be contacted at jwillia@samford.edu.

Dream come true

Miss University of Mobile: Epilepsy 'made me stronger'

Cierra Giles, a junior from Gilbertown majoring in early childhood and elementary education, was crowned Miss University of Mobile on Feb. 5. She will compete in the Miss Alabama pageant June 8-11 at Samford University in Birmingham.

"As a little girl I dreamed of holding a title but never thought I would," Giles said.

"I'm just very excited and very honored."

Her main goal as Miss University of Mobile is to promote her platform, Volunteerism in America.

"We often use our time more for ourselves than others," she said.

Giles plans to work with two organizations that improve the lives of children.

She will work in a mentoring program with Wilmer Hall in Mobile, which provides a home for children who have no home or who cannot live with their natural parents.

Helping children

"I want them to know they aren't alone," she said.

Giles also plans to work with Camp Grace in Mobile, which hosts different camps for children with disabilities.

Giles, who was diagnosed with epilepsy when she was 9 years old, said, "Since I have a disability myself, Camp Grace is very close to my heart. I want to let these children know that they can still have dreams. I want to be a support and encouragement to them."

Giles said her epilepsy "has made me stronger as a person. It humbled me and challenged me."

The first runner-up for Miss University of Mobile was junior Rebekah Clements, of Lacey's Spring. Clements also won the



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

CROWNING MOMENT — Cierra Giles, a junior early childhood and elementary education major, waves to the audience after being crowned Miss University of Mobile on Feb. 5.

talent portion of the competition.

The second runner up was sophomore Joanna Canning, of Irvington. Canning also won the swimsuit portion of the competi-

tion as well as Miss Congeniality.

The recipient of the Peoples Choice Award was freshman Alexandra McKinley, of Stone Temple, Ga. (UMobile)

U.K. Catholics concerned about dangers of witchcraft influenced by Harry Potter

The Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, worried about the growing influence of Harry Potter and his team of young wizards, has published a guide aimed at helping teenagers deal with 21st century witchcraft.

The British church's publishing arm, the Catholic Truth Society, said its booklet, "Wicca and Witchcraft: Understanding the Dangers," offers advice to parents who find

their children showing an interest in Wicca, paganism and the occult.

The society said it was concerned by the growing popularity among youths of the Potter stories and other aspects of witchcraft bordering on hero worship.

Elizabeth Dodd, the author and a former Wiccan who became a Catholic, said Catholics should find "ways ... to bring witches and Wiccans to Christ and His church." (RNS)



Photo by Susan Stevens

SHADES MOUNTAIN VOLUNTEERS HELP FEED HUNGRY CHILDREN

More than 1,600 volunteers help pack 320,976 meals at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, for the Feed My Starving Children program. They set up packing stations in the Christian Life Center in late January. Volunteers ranging from fourth graders to senior adults packed enough meals to feed 879 children for one year.

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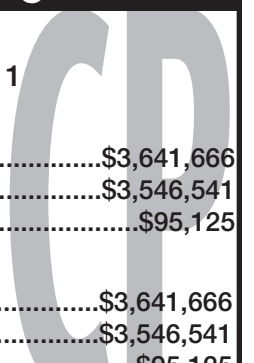
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Want to know God?

By Pastor Greg Cotter
Harmony Baptist Church, Andalusia

It's a wonderful thing to "know" that you are saved. I am sure a statement such as this has crossed your mind before, "When I face death, will I have heaven to call home?"

Do you feel that if you saw exactly what the Bible taught about God's salvation plan you would believe it? And if you read it, then would you be willing to obey the Scriptures?

There are four basic principles to understand and follow:

1. All have sinned. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). If all have sinned, then that means I have sinned and you have sinned. We are all guilty before God.

2. There is a price on sin. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Here is a paraphrase of what that means: "Because man has sinned, he is dead spiritually. If man dies physically while he is dead spiritually (never being born again by the Spirit of God), then he will suffer eternal death." Eternal death means separation from God in hell.

3. Jesus Christ paid for our sin. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus paid the price of sin for all the world (see John 3:16) — that includes me and you.

4. You must receive Jesus by faith. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Do you believe what you have read? Are you willing to give your life to Jesus?



SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Cumberland School of Law to Present Symposium:** Samford University's Cumberland School of Law will present the annual Biotech Symposium on Feb. 18. For more information, call 205-726-2418.

► **School of Arts to Feature Pianist:** School of the Arts' Davis Architects Guest Artist Series and Samford's Fletcher and Nell Morris Piano Competition present pianist Anne-Marie McDermott on Feb. 18 at 7:30 p.m. in Brock Recital Hall. For more information, visit www.samford.edu/arts/tickets or call 205-726-2853.

► **Women Studies Specialist to Give Fowler Lecture:** Samford University will host author Susan M. Shaw on Feb. 22 at 10 a.m. in Reid Chapel. Shaw is a writer and frequent speaker on many topics related to Southern Baptists, feminism and women.

The 2011 Marie NeSmith Fowler lecture topic is "Living Like Wea-

sels: Passion, Risk, Vocation and Your Future."

Sponsored by Samford's Christian Women's Leadership Center, the lecture series honors the late Mrs. Fowler, a Samford graduate from Hartselle. Fowler was one of the first female pharmacists and pharmacy owners in the state.

The Fowler lecture series is open to the public.

For more information, call 205-726-4194 or e-mail cwl@samford.edu.

► **School of Arts to Present Cello Concert:** Wei Liu, a cellist, will perform in Brock Recital Hall on Feb. 23 at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call 205-726-2851.

► **School of Arts to Host Guest Composer Concert:** The Music of Samuel Adler will be presented in Brock Recital Hall on Feb. 24 at 7:30 p.m. For more information, call 205-726-2851.

► **New Accelerated Second Degree Nursing Program:** March 1 is application deadline for Samford's new accelerated second degree bachelor of science in nursing program. The program offered by

Samford's Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing enables those who already hold a bachelor's degree in a field other than nursing to earn a nursing degree in 15 months.

Students complete the nursing degree in four semesters including a full summer term, going into nursing clinical courses the first semester.

Students who apply now will begin classes in the fall. Applicants must hold a baccalaureate degree in another field with a minimum grade point average of 2.8 on a 4.0 scale, and meet certain requirements in several science courses.

Applications are available online or by contacting Jan Paine at 205-726-2746. For more information, go to the nursing school website at nursing.samford.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **Honor Band to Present Concert:** The University of Mobile Honor Band will present a concert Feb. 26 at 1 p.m. in Ram

Hall. For more information, contact the University of Mobile Center for Performing Arts at 251-442-2420.

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Chosen Vessels Dance Group Returns to Judson College:** Judson College will host the performing group Chosen Vessels Dance on March 3 at 7 p.m. in Alumnae Auditorium.

Chosen Vessels is a performance ensemble ministry that fuses dance, drama, music and the spoken word.

The ensemble is dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change and spiritual growth.

As part of its mission and outreach effort, the ensemble presents annual workshops, lecture demonstrations and performances. The concert is open to the public.

For more information, call 334-683-5179 or visit www.chosenvesselsdance.com.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Hatton Baptist Church, Leighton, Ala., is prayerfully seeking to fill the position of full-time pastor. Resumes/videos may be sent to: Paul Johnson, 255 Johnson-Hale Road, Muscle Shoals, AL 35661.

PASTOR: Riddles Bend Baptist, Rainbow City, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. A Southern Baptist congregation of approximately 155. Resumes may be sent to: bedwell3@aol.com or faxed 256-413-0008.

PASTOR: Calvary Baptist Church is currently accepting resumes through April 30 for a full-time experienced Southern Baptist pastor. If possible, send DVD of sermon with resume. Mail to: Calvary Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 740236, Tusculumbia, AL 35674.

PASTOR: Gilliam Springs Baptist Church in Arab, Ala., is prayerfully searching for God's man to serve as pastor. Resumes and recommendations should be sent to: rlamon@gilliamsprings.org.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Steele Baptist Church, St. Clair Association, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumes to: Pulpit Committee, 3811 Pope Avenue, Steele, AL 35987.

MINISTER OF MUSIC/MINISTER OF EDUCATION: The Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister of music/minister of education to lead the music ministry as well as plan and direct the educational programs of the church. For more information, call 205-477-8265 or e-mail resumes to: churchatmcadory@bellsouth.net, subject: Personnel.

WORSHIP PASTOR: Seeking God's man as worship pastor for First Baptist, Jensen Beach, a vibrant congregation

ministering to 700 weekly attendees. The worship ministry's current structure is praise bands and teams with support choral offerings and augments doctrinal expository preaching. For position details and how to apply, check www.fbjb.com.

INTERIM PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: CrossRoads Baptist Church in Hayden, Ala., is prayerfully seeking an interim part-time minister of music. Please send resume to: connie89@me.com or fax to 205-647-3881.

COLLEGE PASTOR: Seeking college pastor with weekly preaching responsibilities at multi-site church. Send resume to: FBC, P.O. Box 400, Jacksonville, AL, 36265, or dstaples@fbcjville.org by Feb. 28.

STUDENT MINISTER: Grades 6th-12th, part-time. Send resume to: Student Minister, Ridgecrest Baptist Church, 912 31st Street East, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

YOUTH MINISTER: Montevallo First Baptist Church is currently seeking a part-time youth minister. Please call the pastor at 205-665-2566.

PART-TIME STUDENT MINISTER: Liberty Hill Baptist seeking part-time student minister. Send resume to: kent@libertyhillonline.org or mail to: LHBC, 5800 Co. Rd. 37, Clanton, AL 35045.

INTERIM STUDENT MINISTER: Central Park Baptist, Decatur. Minimum 25 hours/week. Needs to be available to attend staff meetings. 2020 Westmeade Street SW, Decatur, AL 35601. 256-355-4628. Send resume to: Personnel Committee at address above.

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

ille, AL 35042.

PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Underwood Baptist Church in Montevallo is currently seeking a part-time children's minister to work with our 1st through 8th grade students. Please e-mail resumes to: info@underwoodbaptist.com.

PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR: Spring Valley Baptist Church seeks part-time children's ministry director. E-mail resume and references to: churchoffice@springvalleybaptistchurch.org or mail to: P.O. Box 978, Springville, AL 35146.

OTHER POSITIONS

SECRETARY: Central Park Baptist in Decatur. Maintain our website and records, assist with publications and other general clerical support. Hours: Monday-Thursday, 1-5 p.m. (16 hours/week). 2020 Westmeade Street, SW, Decatur, AL 35601. 256-355-4628.

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

FOR SALE

COACH BUS: 49-passenger coach bus for sale. Year 1996, Van Hool Model: T-840, body: coach, engine: M11 Cummins, transmission: automatic, luggage: over head and under floor, price: \$65,000. Pictures available at www.crowwellbaptist.org. Contact Mike at 205-338-6174 or 205-288-8107.

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Southern Sudan to become world's newest country

Southern Sudan will secede from its counterpart in the north to become the world's newest country this July after the official results from January's referendum were announced earlier this month.

Nearly 99 percent of the approximate 4 million voters chose to separate after decades of civil war. Mohammed Ibrahim Khalil, chairman of the southern Sudan referendum commission, which organized the vote, said the process was "peaceful" and "transparent," noting that no one showed up to appeal the results, according to CNN.

The commission met with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and First Vice President Salva Kiir on Feb. 7 and presented them with the results. National television networks reported that al-Bashir gave his commitment and acceptance of the referendum results.

President Barack Obama also

pledged the United States' support and recognition of southern Sudan as a sovereign and independent country come this summer. Many southern Sudanese refugees living in neighboring countries are expected to return to southern Sudan as it gains its independence.

But less than a week after the official results were released by Khalil, violence broke out in southern Sudan between the region's military and rebel militants leaving more than 100 dead.


Even though the fighting had subsided at press time, there remains concerns about the difficult road that lies ahead as southern Sudan — which is one of the poorest, least developed areas in the world — seeks to govern itself. However, many Sudanese Christians are hopeful that this newfound independence will open more doors for the gospel and Christianity. (TAB)

READ THE BIBLE FOR LIFE


LIFE

a part of the **READ THE BIBLE FOR LIFE** initiative by George Guthrie


April 15-16



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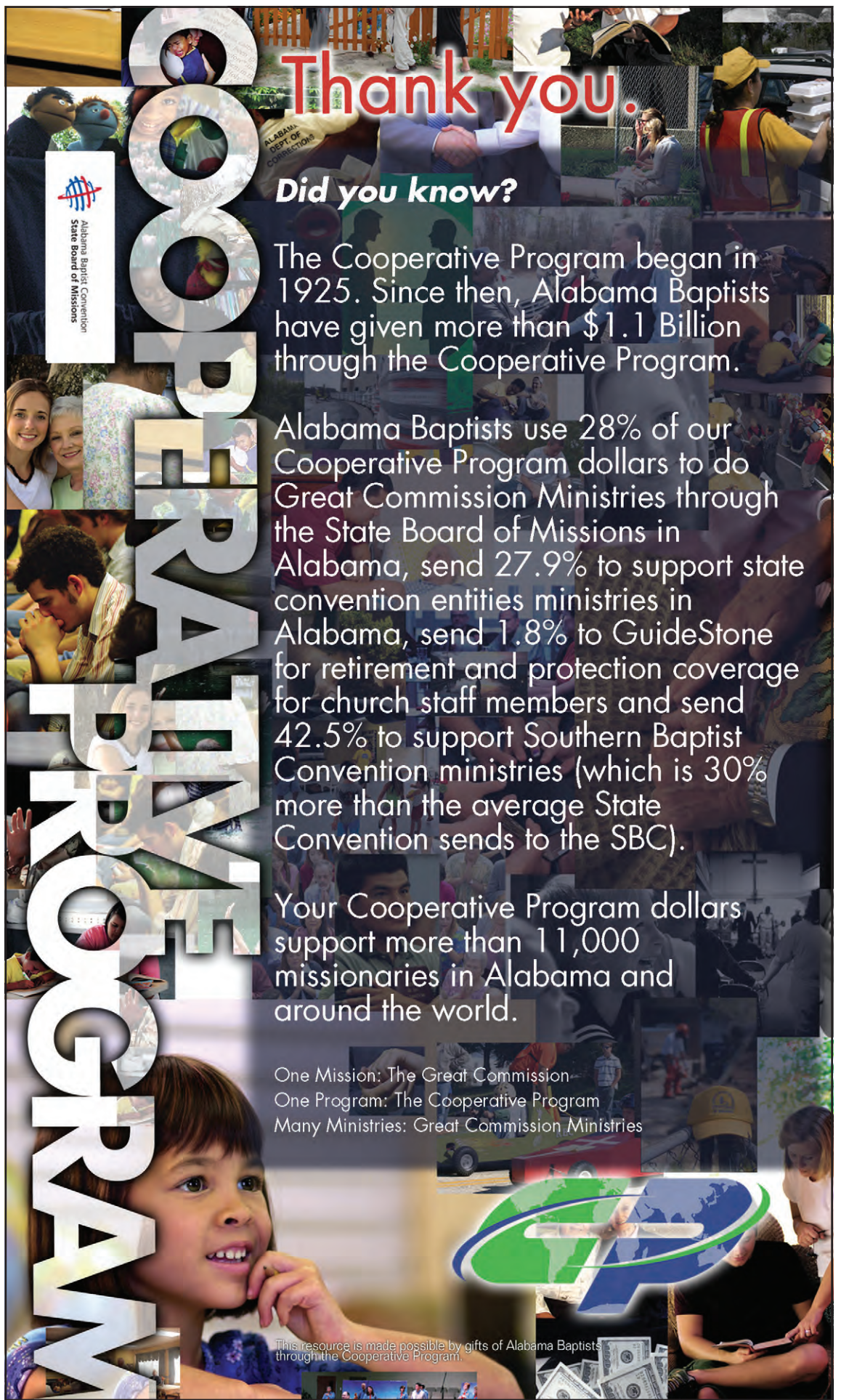
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E-mail your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.



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2010 pro-life Super Bowl ad featuring Tebow wins award

The National Religious Broadcasters has announced it will present its award for Best Television Commercial to Focus on the Family for last year's Super Bowl ad featuring Tim Tebow and his mother, Pam.

The ad, it turns out, helped save at least one life.

"It created a national dialogue about the true definition of choice as it pertains to the issue of abortion," the group said.

The award will be presented in late February.

The Barna Group estimated that more than 5 million people reconsidered their position on the issue of abortion after viewing the ad, and at least one woman contacted Focus on the Family to tell them she decided not to abort her child because of the commercial.

In the ad, Pam Tebow conveyed the story of how she chose, against doctors' recommendations, to continue her pregnancy after contracting a serious illness. The baby was born healthy and went on to become a college football star, win a Heisman trophy and play in the National Football League.

A young woman named Susan sent an e-mail to Focus on the Family, telling how the commercial had changed her life.

"I need to thank you so much. It's not like me to reach out to strangers or agencies for help. I

was truly feeling lost. I saw the ad during the Super Bowl and it stuck in my head," Susan wrote. "I feel like that commercial was made to reach out to me."

Susan watched the ad repeatedly online that week and then went to the Focus on the Family website to watch the related interview.

"I think I was partly afraid that God was mad at me for getting pregnant out of wedlock," she wrote. "While I know He isn't proud of me for it, thank you for reminding me that He still loves me. I didn't need to compound one sin with another. My mistake can't be erased, but I can ask for forgiveness."

The baby's father wanted Susan to abort it, and she knew the relational and financial struggles would be significant if she chose life. But the ad and follow-up support from a Focus on the Family employee helped her continue the pregnancy.

'Thank you'

"I cannot thank you enough for putting me back on the right track and reminding me what actually matters in life," Susan wrote. "I don't know how I forgot something so important, but I did."

After the baby's birth last fall, Susan visited the Focus on the Family headquarters with the child to show them the difference the commercial made. (BP)



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Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Craig Harris and David Bruce Murray

THE PERRYS

Blue Skies

Daywind

With a list of top songwriters dominating the credits, it would be surprising if The Perrys didn't have high hopes for their latest Daywind project, "Blue Skies."

Kyla Rowland wrote or co-wrote (penning Tracy Stuffle's lone lead — "Nothing Was Burned But Their Bands" along with songwriting legend Di-



anne Wilkinson) four of the tracks on the project. Among the most impressive of those is "I Know What I'm Singing About," a tune that features the unmistakable vocal stylings of Libbi Stuffle backed by robust harmonies.

Songwriters Joel Lindsey and Wayne Haun — who also produced the project, managing to recreate a similar, smooth sound to what The Perrys possessed in the early 2000s — teamed up on three songs, including "Blue Skies" and "Celebrate Me Home."

Lindsey and Haun also teamed up with Steven Carey to pen "He Loves To Save," one of the two tracks featuring the group's newest addition, baritone vocalist Bryan Walker. While that song has a considerable country sound due to the steel guitar and fiddle, Walker's other song to shine on is the final track, Keith Tanner and Russell McQuaig's "The End Of The Aisle." Conversely, it has considerably more orchestration, with the lead guitar and organ helping to create a smooth but distinctive punch. Walker's confident,

relaxed vocals are a significant reason for the project's smooth overall sound.

Lead singer Joseph Habedank helped write three songs, combining with Sue C. Smith on "Sounds Good To Me," teaming up with Haun on "Celebrate Me Home" and joining forces with Kelly Garner and Amy Keffer Shellem to comprise "Grace Doesn't Remember," a big ballad with a simple but powerful message that builds in intensity throughout.

The only older cut on the project also is a highlight, Allen Frazier's 1938 "His Love Lights The Way." The convention-style hymn consists primarily of ensemble vocals, though Libbi takes the lead in the chorus as the harmonies tightly trail. It is one of the most high-energy songs among the 11 cuts.

If the up-tempo numbers are a must-have, "Blue Skies" may not be the ideal project. However, despite the fact that the material consists almost entirely of mid-tempo songs and ballads, it is signature Perrys music with a full sound and tight blend. Thanks due in large part to Haun's well-constructed arrangements, the tracks possess energy despite the slower tempos (coming about as a result of both the musical and harmonic configurations). Perrys fans will not be disappointed. (Harris)

MARK LOWERY

Unplugged & Unplanned
Daywind

Mark Lowery's "Unplugged & Unplanned" isn't packaged as part of Daywind's Live At Oak Tree series, but the format is the same. Joining Lowery are Sisters (Valerie Ruppe, Heather Day and Kim Lord), Michael Lord, Amber Balltzglier and Stan Whitmire.

The DVD features eight songs and runs for nearly an hour. The spaces between the songs are every bit as interesting as the songs themselves. Lowery has a unique knack for making you laugh one minute and think seriously the next. Topics of discussion range from funny tour experiences to candid thoughts about mortality.

He talks with the members of Sisters about the loss of their father and recalls a three-point turn they once made in a tour bus at the corner of Hollywood and Vine. He also opens up about some very personal issues his father and mother have experienced in recent years.

"House Of Gold" is a song Lowery recorded in 1998 and has performed frequently ever since, but this is the first time he's sung the song with only a piano for accompaniment. "Going Home" is another song



Lowery has sung for years both with the Gaither Vocal Band and as a headliner at his own shows. "Promises" is a Dottie Rambo song featuring Beverly Lowry (Mark's mother) that Lowery used to sing with her in his first trio. "I'm Gonna Make It" showcases Valerie Ruppe.

Seven of the eight songs are slow; but with just a piano in the mix, the music never becomes too ponderous or tedious to take to heart. The immediate and somewhat raw quality of "Unplugged & Unplanned" is this product's most endearing characteristic.

(Murray)

Christian Marketplace

Top Ten Best Sellers

Fiction

1. **Unlocked**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
2. **The Twelfth Imam**, Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale House)
3. **Her Daughter's Dream**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale House)
4. **Her Mother's Hope**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale House)
5. **Redeeming Love**, Francine Rivers (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
6. **The Shack**, William P. Young (Windblown Media)
7. **The Thorn**, Beverly Lewis (Bethany House/Baker)
8. **Immanuel's Veins**, Ted Dekker (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Fatal Judgment**, Irene Hannon (Revell/Baker)
10. **Girl in the Gatehouse**, Julie Klassen (Bethany House/Baker)

Nonfiction

1. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan (David C. Cook)
3. **Heaven is for Real**, Todd Burpo and Lynn Vincent (Thomas Nelson)
4. **Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence, deluxe edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
5. **Radical**, David Platt (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
6. **Bonhoeffer**, Eric Metaxas (Thomas Nelson)
7. **Choosing to SEE**, Mary Beth Chapman and Ellen Vaughn (Revell/Baker)
8. **Outlive Your Life**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Streams in the Desert**, L.B. Cowman and Jim Reimann (Zondervan)
10. **The Five Love Languages**, Max Lucado (Moody)

Bibles

1. **Text Bible NKJV** (Thomas Nelson)
2. **ESV Share the Good News Outreach New Testament** (Crossway)
3. **One Year Bible NIV paperback** (Tyndale House)
4. **Gift and Award Bible KJV black leatherflex** (Thomas Nelson)
5. **Outreach New Testament ESV** (Crossway)
6. **One Year Bible** (Tyndale House)
7. **One Year Bible NIV** (Tyndale House)
8. **NIV Thinline Bible burgundy bonded leather** (Zondervan)
9. **NIV True Images Italian duo-tone chocolate/bubble gum** (Zondervan)
10. **ESV Thinline Value Bible TruTone midnight/flame design** (Crossway)

Book Reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Pujols: More Than the Game

Scott Lamb and Tim Ellsworth. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011. 272 pp. (Hardback).

Even nonbaseball fans are likely to recognize the name of Albert Pujols, 10-year veteran player for the St. Louis Cardinals. What those of us who do not follow the game closely may not know is the story of his faith and how it has led him to the point where he is, according to authors Lamb and Ellsworth, who say he is "one of the greatest players to have ever laced up a pair of spikes."

This biography tells a remark-

able story of Pujols' life and career, from a difficult childhood in the Dominican Republic to becoming an instant star on a high school team in the United States, then his rise to stardom as a professional baseball player. Woven through the story is Pujols' Christian testimony, sometimes tested, but always steadfast.

Drawn to Buck Creek: Answering the Call

Betty Brewer. Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2010. 140 pp. (Paperback).

Set against the backdrop of a visit back to the author's childhood

home, "Drawn to Buck Creek" is a memoir written by Alabama native Betty Brewer. Brewer's story is one of grinding poverty, a large family, a philandering and sometimes abusive father and the eventual triumph of a family that placed its trust in God and His provision.

The book provides a glimpse of what life was like for rural Alabamians in the years following the Great Depression and are much like the stories told in an earlier generation by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The children, grandchildren and friends of Brewer and her siblings are certain to treasure the book for the memories it preserves.

Hitting straight

Outfielder Cody Strait puts God above baseball career

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Like the signature he burns into the handles of the hunting knives he makes as a hobby, Cody Strait gets “STR 8” to the point for one reason — he plays professional baseball.

“I try to be a trailblazer with my teammates and the places that I go. I want to help them grow in the Lord and do something to try to set a good example. I want to be a spiritual role model,” said Strait, an outfielder with the Montgomery Biscuits during part of the 2009 and 2010 seasons.

And oh, the places he has gone. During his seven-year career in minor league baseball, the 27-year-old has been on the roster of nine teams.

“That is pretty much the story of a minor leaguer. I have never started on one team and finished on the (same) team in the seven years I have played baseball. You’ve got to be flexible,” said Strait, a .253 career hitter.

Where he will play in 2011 is undecided. “We’ll see which way God wants us to go.”

Strait made the Texas League all-star team in 2009 as a member of the Northwest Arkansas Naturals. While at the University of Evansville in Indiana, he was the 2004 Missouri Valley Conference (MVC) Newcomer of the Year and a MVC all-star. He was drafted in the 12th round of the First-Year Player Draft in 2004 by the Cincinnati Reds.

His vagabond career has included stops in Wilmington, Del.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; and Lake County, Ill., in 2010 after he was released by Montgomery, a Double-A Tampa Bay Rays affiliate in the Southern League. In his last at-bat for Lake County, Strait had the game-winning hit with two outs in the bottom of the 11th inning.

Staying on the straight and narrow path in the world of professional baseball requires discipline that he finds in the Bible, prayer and encouragement from his wife, Melissa.

In December 2008, Strait found another way: becoming a parent. Son Asher was born Dec. 5.

God’s love

“Since I became a father, I understand now the type of love God had for His Son. For Him to give up His Son on the cross, that is a whole other level of love for me. I put myself in God’s shoes, and wow, how would I ever give up my son? It’s a new level of appreciation for what God did.”

Strait has appreciated the father-son bond ever since his father, B.D. Strait, of Sour Lake, Texas, put a bat in his hand in the backyard.

Strait’s ability has taken him to the brink of the major leagues.

“To get to the big leagues, you



Photo courtesy of Montgomery Biscuits

SWING — Cody Strait played with the Montgomery Biscuits during part of the 2009 and 2010 seasons. While he is currently waiting for his next step, he knows that ‘God is more important than baseball.’

have to be a complete player. Some things get you in the door. You have to know the game and know the situation,” Strait said.

More consistent

The game’s most important, yet hardest, aspect is hitting.

“How I’m playing is pretty much based on how I think I’m playing. If I think I’m hitting good, chances are I am that day. The mind is a powerful thing. In spring training, I get to rub shoulders with superstars like Ken Griffey Jr. The surprising thing is they don’t have any more tools than I do; they have been able to perform on a more consistent basis than I have,” Strait said.

There was a time when he thought he was inconsistent in his spiritual life and realized he had to step up to the plate.

While at Ranger College in Texas, Strait said pitcher Kelsey Cates showed him how a Christian should act. Strait grew up in Pinewood Baptist Church, Sour Lake.

“I played the good-guy role. I went to church but I didn’t really live like a Christian. Life revolved around me. The decisions I made were based on my own desires. Although I seemed happy with the way my life was going, I knew something was missing. I had a choice to make. Was I going to continue to live for myself, or would I start living the life God intended for me? When you claim to be a Christian, everybody looks at you that much closer; they are trying to find faults with you,” he said.

His coach at Ranger, Brent Leffingwell, began to notice a difference in him not only in his game but also in his spiritual life.

Strait became, well, straightforward. He spoke about his faith. “He lived up to his end of being a Christian. He lived by example. He’s a true Christian. He’s a firm believer.

Not many people can live it. People can say it but not live it. Cody never worried about anything on the field or in his life because he knew there was Someone looking over him,” said Leffingwell, who no longer coaches the team.

Strait’s strong leadership, strong will to win and focus sparked success.

“He was scared of nothing and would face any challenge,” Leffingwell said.

Strait put a cap on his faith challenges. Former Chattanooga teammate Justin Turner pointed to Strait’s baseball cap when asked about Strait’s faith. Written inside is “Number 7 To God Be The Glory.”

‘It’s going to be great’

Armed with a Bible in his pocket, Strait hands out baseball cards at games with Luke 9:24 printed on them: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

In Montgomery, he works with youth at Christ Community Church and manages the apartment complex where members of the Biscuits team live during the season. During the off-season in 2009, Strait was youth minister at First Assembly of God, Marble Falls, Texas.

If he makes his mark in the majors, then it will be because of God, he said. “God is making sure I’m not putting that before Him. God wants to be more important than baseball.”

Strait’s attitude remains positive.

“My strength comes from the Lord. At the end of the day, no matter how I did or if everything is falling apart in my life, it’s going to be great because I always have the Lord. He is there with me, blessing me and enjoying it with me,” he said.

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Consumer protection chief seeks allies in faith leaders

WASHINGTON — The architect of the Obama administration’s new consumer protection bureau met with faith-based groups Feb. 8 in a bid to shape the agency’s work as a moral crusade.

“The most recent financial crisis caused many to question the moral underpinnings of our financial dealings with each other,” said Elizabeth Warren, a former Harvard University law professor who was appointed last year to start the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

“Our laws reflect who we are and they shape who we become. To pursue regulatory change without reflecting on its moral dimension would be wrong,” she said.

Warren met with about 20 Christian and Jewish religious leaders to get their input on focusing the bureau’s work and to hear stories of how the financial crisis has affected their communities.

Her meeting included representatives of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Sojourners and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

A former Sunday School teacher and a United Methodist, Warren said moral and religious traditions have long informed rules about fair lending.

“The Bible speaks about not cheating people,” she said.

She hopes the bureau’s fledgling partnership with religious leaders eventually will extend from the pulpits to the pews to educate Americans on how to avoid becoming victims of risky financial schemes.

“They’re not merely passers-along of information,” she said. “These are people who have thought deeply about a financial crisis that has moral and spiritual dimensions. I want this agency to be informed by the deeper thinking that they’ve brought to these issues.”

‘U.S. Marine for Christ’ prompts suit at Colo. academy

WASHINGTON — Professors at the U.S. Air Force Academy have filed suit in a bid to stop a school prayer luncheon headlined by a motivational speaker who calls himself a “U.S. Marine for Christ.”

Five faculty members joined the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, which has spent years fighting proselytizing at the academy, in filing suit Jan. 31.

The scheduled speaker for the annual National Prayer Luncheon on Feb. 10 was Lt. Clebe McClary, a decorated disabled Vietnam veteran from South Carolina.

“By making a fundamentalist Christian the keynote speaker at this event, the government has promoted, elevated, endorsed and favored Christianity over all other religions,” they argued.

Academy spokesman Lt. Col. John Bryan said McClary was invited after former Secretary of State Colin Powell could not attend. The event is voluntary and paid for with a chaplains’ offering fund and a \$7 admission. As of Feb. 1, 178 attendees from the 10,000 on base are expected.

“He’s not here to pass out Bibles and to have a sermon,” Bryan said of McClary.

“Does he have personal Christian beliefs? Yes, he does. ... We’re committed to protecting somebody’s right to practice any religion they choose, or no religion, provided those practices don’t violate policy or law or impede mission accomplishment.”

Crime in U.S. churches increased in 2010, report shows

CINCINNATI, Ohio — Each week brings an average of two arsons, seven thefts and 19 burglaries at U.S. churches, according to Christian Security Network’s second annual year-end report of church crimes.

The report, which uses news articles, police blogs and verified personal reports to compile its data, showed a slight increase in most church crimes in 2010 from 2009, for a total of 1,783 incidents.

That figure was up 546 from the year before and included 970 burglaries, 397 thefts, 102 arsons and 89 counts of vandalism, the report stated.

The report only covered churches and not other houses of worship, such as mosques or synagogues.

“Two years is not long enough to prove any trend,” said Jeffrey Hawkins, the founder and executive director of the Cincinnati-based group. “We will know better after another year or two if this keeps trending up. Maybe this year was just a bad year. Maybe we got better at finding out what had happened.”

Hawkins hopes the upswing in crimes committed against churches will encourage churches to take security more seriously and will help those who have been victimized to realize they are not alone.