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INSIDE



Gov. Bentley honored guest at Legislative Prayer Luncheon

◆ Page 7



Rashional Thoughts: Anyone out there feeling tired?

◆ Page 9



Pakistani Christian leader killed over blasphemy law

◆ Page 17

'Fresh start' State Evangelism Conference concludes with Will Graham rally

By John Evans
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

"I cannot do one thing for you," pronounced Will Graham, associate evangelist with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and grandson of the famed evangelist.

"I want you to experience a fresh start," he said. "I want your misery to turn to joy, but you have to do it through the person of Jesus Christ."

Graham pointed an audience of more than 550 people to Jesus on March 1 at the State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First Baptist Church.

Before he took the stage, southern gospel trio The Booth Brothers performed and Rick Stone, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Jasper, and the Hunter Street Choir from Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, led the audience in worship.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), introduced Graham, who holds mass evangelistic rallies called "celebrations" around the world.

"He is a preacher of the Word in his own right," Lance said. "You can tell the influence of his father (Franklin Graham) and grandfather, but he himself has been called of God, saved by the Lord Jesus Christ and has been preaching the Word of the Lord around the world."

Spiritual change

When Graham opened his Bible, he addressed the audience on a topic that has seen a lot of attention over the past few years: change.

"What I'm talking about tonight is spiritual change, moral change," Graham said. "Oftentimes we want change but it seems to be so elusive at times. We can't seem to grasp it."

He told the story in 1 Samuel 1 of a woman named Hannah. She was

one of two wives of a man named Elkanah, who worshiped the Lord regularly. But beneath the religious observance was conflict: Hannah could not have children, and Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, who did have children, tormented her about it.

"Though Elkanah was very religious, his family was experiencing turmoil," Graham said.

He reminded the audience of when Jesus compared the religious-looking Pharisees to whitewashed tombs and urged audience members not to hide their struggles behind clean appearances.

"Some of you tonight put on a good facade," Graham said. "You look good on the outside ... yet on the inside, it's death, destruction, misery and decay."

He asked audience members to identify something that makes them bitter and steals their joy. Graham encouraged them to respond

to their troubles the same way Hannah did: by going to the Lord.

What we need

"We'll let every one of our friends know twice how miserable we are, but yet we always fail to go to the Lord," he said. "He seems to be the last resort, but Hannah went directly to Him. My friends, that's what we need to do."

When Hannah poured out her heart to the Lord, Graham said, she was given hope, even though her circumstances hadn't changed.

"She encountered God and her life was forever changed," he said. "You see we cannot come in contact with God and leave the same way we came."



GRAHAM



Photo by Doug Rogers

BENDED KNEE — People come to the altar in response to the invitation given by Will Graham, grandson of Evangelist Billy Graham who preached in the closing session of the Feb. 28-March 1 State Evangelism Conference.

Graham transitioned into a gospel presentation, describing man's sin against God and vain efforts to make things right.

"Religion is every man's attempt to get back to a righteous God and they all fail," he said.

Instead, Graham continued, God sent Jesus to die in our place on the

cross, satisfying His wrath, and rise from the dead three days later.

Jesus took our sin, he said, and we got His righteousness.

"Now when we stand before God, God doesn't see our own sin," Graham said. "He sees the blood of His own Son covering us."

(See 'Invitation,' page 6)

RAs to return to Woman's Missionary Union

By Sondra Washington
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Royal Ambassadors (RAs) is going back to its roots.

For the past 13 years, "day-to-day operations and oversight" of the RA and Challenger programs have been handled by the North American Mission Board (NAMB). But NAMB announced at its March 1 annual missions education roundtable meeting that it would give

those responsibilities back to national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), which founded RAs in 1908 and transferred the program to the Brotherhood Commission 49 years later. The Brotherhood Commission became part of NAMB in the 1997 merger of three Southern Baptist organizations to create the mission board.

"We believe missions education is foundational to effective missions

work and deeply value both NAMB and WMU's joint efforts in providing leadership and curriculum for children and youth that have helped raise up generations of Southern Baptist missionaries," said Mike Ebert, vice president of communications for NAMB. "While NAMB has the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) assignment for missions education and will continue to do so, the reality of tighter budgets, fewer staff and a narrowing of focus (See 'State,' page 7)



COMMENT

Trading One Tyranny for Another

If words had the same meaning for all people, then most of the people of the world would be living in freedom. That is because most nations have signed the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 18 of that document reads, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

In addition, the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights obligates each signatory nation "to ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy."

Signatory nations — including Arab nations — recognize the legitimacy of religious freedom and pledge themselves to support that freedom.

Unfortunately words do not mean the same thing in different cultures. And, in this writer's judgment, some nations simply lie. They make a show of supporting lofty statements but this practice evidences little, if any, interest in practicing such things as religious freedom.

As Christians, we understand that freedom comes from God. It is not a right granted by government or even the United Nations. When God placed His image in humanity at creation, He gave every person a dignity that no civil power can take away. No government, no political system, not even a religion can invade that sacred space between God and a human being.

Still some nations strive to limit or even deny religious freedom.

It may be a despot who fears any people thinking for themselves. It may be a political system like communism that denies the very existence of God and, thus, spurns all religion. It might even be religious zealots so convinced of their correctness that they try and stomp out any and all who disagree with them.

This latter type of oppression was displayed in Pakistan recently when the government's Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, was murdered by Islamists on March 2 (see page 17). It was not an isolated act. Two months earlier — Jan. 4 — Salman Taseer, governor of the Punjab province in Pakistan, was shot to death for defending a Christian woman against blasphemy charges.

The stories from Saudi Arabia where the religious police — the Mutaween — regularly per-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

secute Christians are vile and frequent. Iran's execution of Christians is widely known. In Yemen Southern Baptist medical missionaries were murdered by Islamists and in country after country across the Arab world, stories of religious persecution abound.

That is one reason some observers of the current turmoil surveying the Arab world wonder if these nations will end up simply exchanging one form of tyranny for another.

Risking violence and death

Those who love democracy can only rejoice when despots and dictators fall. It is encouraging to see people risk violence and death in order to be free. Democracy values human rights. Dictators do not. But will the new era be any better than what it replaces? Will the freedoms for which people call include religious freedom?

The shah of Iran was a despot but was the Iran of Ayatollah Kohmeini any better? Is the Iran of today, with its political, economic and religious oppression, the goal of reform?

Right now in Tunisia, regime change has meant new religious freedoms. Evangelical Christians report new opportunities to share their faith individually and publicly preach Jesus.

In Egypt, protesters broke into the "women only" cars of commuter traffic saying it was not freedom where women were discriminated against in such ways. In country after country, Baptist leaders have been welcomed as public leaders in protests against oppression.

Arab Baptist leaders in many nations celebrate in the accepted participation of Christians and the new publicity and new freedoms being experienced. Yet all warn that this spring of religious freedom could be short lived. They point to the clamp down on Christians after the ayatollahs replaced the shah in Iran. They mention the extremes imposed by the Taliban while they ruled Afghanistan.

Observe and look at recent announcements by the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt to impose Shariah law on all Egyptians and worry about what comes next. A survey from one North African Arab nation recently reported by Fox News found that 85 percent of respondents agreed that

one who left the Muslim faith to become a Christian should be put to death.

It is hard to reconcile that cultural norm with the religious freedom explained in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Democracy is based on freedom — individual freedom reflecting the value of individual human beings. At the core of this freedom is the freedom of religion and from that first freedom comes the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly.

For the first time since the armies of Islam rolled across the Middle East and North Africa in the closing centuries of the first millennium, there is a general uprising in favor of freedom. May God grant that the final outcome is not just trading one form of tyranny for another in that part of the world and that religious freedom does not remain only a high sounding phrase on a piece of paper while citizens continue to live with nothing less than religious tyranny.

Having states that endorse events like those in Pakistan mentioned above is an outcome that is not out of the question.

God has not left Himself without a witness even in such different places. Pray for the national Christians in these countries and pray for outcomes where the gospel can be freely practiced and proclaimed in the Arab world as it was for the first 600 years after Christ and as promised in the U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights.



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

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State Evangelism Conference



Photo by Neisha Fuson

ANSWERS — Steve Gaines (left) and James Merritt (right) share their experiences Feb. 28 at the State Evangelism Conference, organized by Sammy Gilbreath (center).

Baptists tackle tough topics in Q-and-A session

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

Preparing and giving a sermon is like having a baby, said Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn. "God literally puts the seed of God's Word in your heart," he said. "Then there's gestation. You stay with that text until it has mastered you. Then when you get up (to the pulpit), you are birthing a baby."

Gaines and James Merritt, senior pastor of Cross Pointe Church, Duluth, Ga., kicked off the annual State Evangelism Conference, held at Gardendale First Baptist Church Feb. 28–March 1, by taking part in a question-and-answer (Q-and-A) session that took place during a catered lunch.

Sammy Gilbreath, director of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, asked questions on a variety of topics, such as handling criticism and managing time, that were submitted by the audience.

"There is something you can usually learn (from criticism)," Merritt said. "But never ever respond immediately. Some of the best letters I wrote in my life I never mailed. People who criticize you won't remember their criticism, but they will remember how you responded to them."

Gaines encouraged ministry leaders not to fight criticism.

'Good company'

"The Lord was criticized," he said. "It puts you in pretty good company if you think about it."

When it comes to time management, Merritt said, "Give God your best when you're at your best. The biggest battle we fight in ministry all the time is to let the urgent dictate the important. Someone is going to manage your calendar, but who is going to do it?"

Following the Q-and-A session, both men took the pulpit Monday afternoon.

Preaching from 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Merritt stressed the importance of communicating the gospel clearly. "More and more churches are preaching less and less of the gospel."

'Gospel truth'

"The gospel is the only message that can take a person from sin to salvation, hell to heaven, from death to life, darkness to light," he said, noting the gospel's message is that Christ died for our sins, was buried and was resurrected. "If certain messages are not understood, it's no harm, no foul," Merritt said. "But some messages, if not communicated clearly, can mean the difference between life and death."

"How important really is the gospel? ... If the gospel is not true, nothing else really matters. If the gospel is true, that is the only thing that matters. And that is the gospel truth."

Repentance also needs to be preached clearly, Gaines said.

"Repentance has fallen on tough times," he said, preaching from Matthew 4:11–17. "No one wants to talk about repentance. I'm all for churches growing, (but) I can tell you it's not growing the right way if repentance is not being preached."

Gaines said for many today, repentance is not a prerequisite for salvation but something one deals with after he or she is saved. "You don't repent after you get saved, but you repent, believe and then you're saved," he said. "Have you ever repented?" And if Baptist pastors are not going to preach the message of repentance, then who will, Gaines asked. "Brothers, if we can't preach that, then we don't have a reason to preach."

(Neisha Fuson contributed)

God's Plan for Sharing 2012 preparation under way, to focus on attractional events

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Do attractional evangelistic events work?

Jerry Pipes, president of Jerry Pipes Productions in the Atlanta area, says absolutely they do.

Addressing Alabama Baptists during the Feb. 28–March 1 State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First Baptist Church, Pipes came to motivate. His message? God's Plan for Sharing (GPS) and the next focus in the decadelong emphasis: Reaching Across North America, or Reaching Across Alabama, as Alabama Baptists will call it.

The way to "reach" across the state is through attractional events, said Pipes, who was with the North American Mission Board when it developed GPS.

"Why did the 3,000 people in Acts 2 say yes (to the gospel)?" he asked. "Because they were there."

And they were there because there was an attraction, Pipes explained, noting the 120 disciples scattered about the city telling what they knew about Jesus and the crowds were amazed.

The event connected with the culture, he said. Some argue missional or attractional but it's not either/or; "it's both/and."

"Churches that are reaching the most people are missional and attractional," Pipes said, noting a recent study found that more than 92 percent of the most effective churches hold attractional evangelistic harvest events.

But successful events don't come from hard work alone, he said, noting prayer also is vital.

"When you work really, really hard, you get what you can do, but when you touch heaven, you get what God can do," Pipes said.

He and Sammy Gilbreath, director of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, want to see what God can do in the state with GPS.

The initial GPS campaign kicked off in 2010 and was "a huge success," Gilbreath said, noting nearly 1 million homes received an information packet about the gospel.

Pipes added that 10,500 Southern Baptist churches nationwide participated in the 2010 GPS event, distributing 15 million packets and touching nearly 45 million people.

"Ninety-five percent of Southern Baptist churches won't lead one person to Christ," he said. "But when you get God's people doing God's stuff, He shows up in amazing ways."

"GPS is not a program," Pipes explained. "It's an opportunity to engage people in God stuff. It's an



Photo by Lauren Chow

PREPPING FOR GPS — During a March 1 dinner event, Jerry Pipes, of Atlanta, describes the various resources available to churches for the 2012 emphasis God's Plan for Sharing: Reaching Across Alabama.

opportunity to train people. And people reach people."

Going forward, the plan is for churches and associations to partner in media buys in their particular markets in March and April 2012.

Advertisements are available for the theme, "Hope. Find It Here." (www.findithere.com).

The idea is for the campaign to create a question in people's minds and for the local church to answer it, Pipes said.

"Do something that reaches your culture, your community," he noted.

But the overall media campaign is already set and will be used nationally. There's no need to re-create it or the theme, Pipes added.

The attractional event is what will be unique to each individual church and/or association, he said,

noting the event should be held in March or April 2012.

For more information, visit www.gps2020.net and click on the Reaching Across North America 2012 button on the right.

Resources available

Preparation guides for pastors, churches and associations can be downloaded for free. Ads can be viewed and downloaded. Teaching presentations are available for both PC and Mac users. The attractional events tool kit provides manuals for four types of events that can be downloaded or purchased. And Outreach Inc. offers a number of resources such as banners, bulletins and postcards.

"We are building off the momentum Alabama Baptists created in 2010," Gilbreath said. "Let's saturate this state with the gospel."

"I'd love to see every person in Alabama presented the gospel by 2020," he said. "It's not just that we can (do this); we must do this."



PIPES

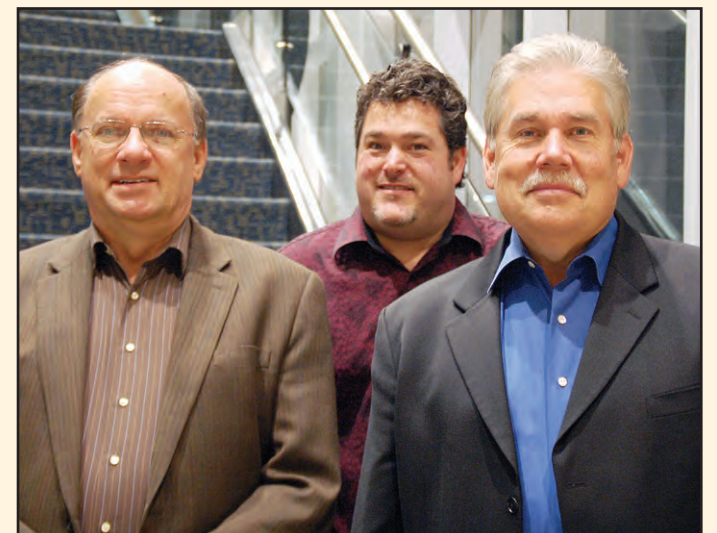


Photo by Chris Mills

NEW EVANGELISTS' OFFICERS NAMED

The new Alabama Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists officers are (l to r) John Bush, president; Dean Forrest, music director; and Bob Smith, secretary/treasurer.

Avoid becoming 'spiritually superior'

Preachers urge pastors to simply share Christ, make sure seekers find a church that is alive,

By Jennifer Davis Rash
and Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

He may own the rare title of pastor to famed evangelist Billy Graham, but Don Wilton, pastor of First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C., says his ministry is simply simple.

"I just want to be one person telling one person about Jesus, one beggar telling another beggar where to find the food," said Wilton, who headlined the Monday night session of the Feb. 28-March 1 State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First Baptist Church.

"I find myself back at the beginning of my ministry when I was called. ... God was so real to me. ... when [He] told me to get up and go, I just simply got up and went," he said.

Preaching from Judges 7 where the Lord tells Israel it has too many men to be delivered from the Midianites, Wilton said, "We've become a consumer nation.

"We've got it so mixed up in our theological circumstances," he said. "We put the emphasis on what God does for me."

But God said the number of men had to be reduced "in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her. ... Only a handful actually went into battle."

"There's not a single person here tonight that God needs," Wilton told the crowd. "People need the Lord.

"We've got to be honest with one another that we are losing the battle," he noted. "With all of our incredible blessings, when it comes to the things of God, this nation is no longer a Christian nation who fears the God Jehovah."

Wilton said God has been dealing with him and his own preoccupation with preaching.

"God took me back to that place where I stood just a sinner desperate to know God ... and He began to call me out again," he said. "I went to my church and said, 'Let's just tell people about Jesus.'"

And so they did, simple and straight up what it means to identify with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The result?

"I stood in the baptistry for two hours and baptized 137 people [in one] night," Wilton said. "The power of God came down upon that place that night. It was so beautiful and refreshing and uncomplicated.

"For two hours [our church members] cheered and worshipped and thanked God," he said.

And from that experience, "I've made a decision to stop running around like a chicken with its head cut off, putting up signs, begging people to sign up," Wilton said. "I went to my [church] and shared early this year that it's as simple as two (questions).

1. "Would you share the gospel with one person a month?"

2. "If you cannot tell someone about Jesus, would you invite them to come to church on Sunday and we'll tell them about Jesus?"

Also preaching during the evangelism conference was Nelson Price, pastor emeritus of Roswell Street Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., who agreed with Wilton's emphasis on simply sharing the gospel.

Preaching from John 16, Price said, "We make this matter of witnessing too complicated. It's simple. Those of you who know tell those of you who don't know.

"You have reason, with great joy and holy boldness, to share the message. ... Let's get



MERRITT



GAINES



Photo by Lauren Chow

FISHERS OF MEN — Jay Wolf, senior pastor of FBC Montgomery, shares an illustration of being intentional by going fishing with Jesus.

back in the field," he said. And remember that the church is the Lord's, not any person's, Price noted.

"Don't ever get the feeling it's your church," he said. "We are simply the stewards of it, and He wants to use us."

Price also warned of three things:

1. The devil knows the church is a living organism, but the church is also an organization made up of committees, leaders and structure, he said. "The devil likes to come along and get everyone to put the emphasis on the organization, to neglect the organism aspect."

2. The devil wants to confuse people with what the ministry is supposed to be and will try to divide the church into individuals and their own ideas, Price said. "Don't let them get their eyes on one another. [Christ] is the only thing that unites your church."

3. The devil will try to make pastors bitter with their congregations, he said. "Don't ever try to fight an opponent with the weapons of the opponent, like bitterness, hostility, hatred. [The enemy] will defeat you every time."

Robert Smith, professor of preaching at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, said while Satan's work is not fun to experience, "you ought to be grateful there are vultures in your life and ministries."

"Generally the symbol of evil means Satan sees some potential in your life and ministry and he wants to swoop down and stop it," he said. "I thank God for the vultures, it is a sign that God is up to something in ministry."

Preaching on the "dry bones" in Ezekiel 37:1-14, Smith focused on "the God who makes the impossible possible."

Detailing the redemptive salvation story, Smith said the teachings on the doctrine of sin are softening.

"All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God," he said. "We need to recapture a biblical doctrine of sin.

"Christ came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. ... We need to preach a gospel where people see their sin," Smith explained. And the best way to do that is to see God.

By seeing His holiness, "I see my sinfulness," he said.

Just like the bones are "very dry ... and dead" in verse 11, "the people we preach to ... are biologically dead ... until they abide in Christ," Smith said. "Works cannot save us. We are saved by faith and grace alone, but they are never alone, they are always accompanied by works."

Smith urged pastors to never assume everyone in their congregations are saved.

"There must always be an evangelistic thread in our presentation," he said. "Tell the story every time you preach."

He also reminded pastors they will never know everything about the Bible.

"We know this text," he said, pointing to his Bible. "We've heard it and taught it and preached it. ... The greatest obstacle of the knowledge of the Bible is the knowledge of the Bible, what we think we know.



Photo by Lauren Chow

NOT IMPOSSIBLE — Robert Smith of Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham preaches on 'the God who makes the impossible possible' from Ezekiel 37:1-14 during the State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First Baptist Church Feb. 28-March 1.



Photo by Lauren Chow

IN HARMONY — The Booth Brothers, of Spring Hill, Tenn., sing for the Evangelism Conference March 1. Ronnie Booth (left), Michael Booth (center) and Jim Brady have been singing and sharing their faith full time since 1998.

State Evangelism Conference

trust totally in God

"You don't ever get the Bible," Smith said. "The Bible gets you."

And for those who are saved but are "bound up and limited," he said they need to loosen up. "Something has to happen to us in worship not looking like you've been baptized in vinegar or are chewing on concrete," Smith said. "I'm not talking about crazy stuff, just thinking about what Jesus has done for you."

"You can't come here without a smile on your face and activity in your body," he said. "There ought not be more joy at the ball field than in the church. ... Be inspired to let go."

"It's time to get up, lift up your hands, lift up your voice and give Him praise because He's the God who makes the impossible possible."



HAMM

Kevin Hamm, senior pastor of Gardendale First, also preached on opening one's self up to worshipping the Lord.

Preaching from Luke 7, he explained four characteristics of attracting God's presence in worship:

1. "We must be desperate for God."

In Luke 7:36-38, a woman, desperate for forgiveness, took all of her sins and her expensive perfume to a dinner Jesus was attending, even though she had not been invited, Hamm said, noting she just had to see Him.

"We don't need more Oprah; we need more Jesus," he said.

2. "We must ignore criticism."

The Pharisee who was hosting the dinner thought if Jesus knew who was touching Him — a sinner, maybe even a prostitute — He would leave, Hamm said, noting [the Pharisee] ridiculed the woman who had nothing and gave all. He compared him to today's choir member, deacon, usher or Sunday School teacher.

"No wonder our churches are drying up," Hamm said.

3. "We must remember God's forgiveness."

Jesus taught the Pharisee about forgiveness, Hamm explained.

"When I get worn out, I just think back to what Jesus Christ has done for me. I just think back to the great gift of His forgiveness," he said.

4. "We must give God our very best."

Luke 7:44-47 deals with emotions, Hamm said, pointing to the woman weeping at Jesus' feet.

"When you're in the presence of God, you've gotta feel something," he said. "Jesus isn't dead. He is alive!"

"Worship is about giving, not getting. ... Worship is not about us. It's about Him," Hamm said. "We've been trying to do the work of God without the presence of God."

Jay Wolf, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, entered the pulpit with a fishing rod and reel and used Luke 5 to encourage pastors to go fishing with Jesus.



NELSON



PITMAN



Photo by Lauren Chow

WORSHIP — The Gardendale First Baptist Church choir sings Monday night of the Feb. 28-March 1 Evangelism Conference as Rick Stone (far left), minister of music at First Baptist Church, Jasper, leads the choir in 'Jesus We Crown You With Praise.'

"You don't catch a fish with your bait in the boat," said Wolf, adding that pastors have to be intentional about evangelism and the hope is that church members will follow the example.

First you have to connect with nonbelievers.

"My greatest connecting tool is my telephone," Wolf said, noting he can make 30 phone calls in the time it would take to make one visit. "On Saturday, I call everybody who visited (the church) last week. I don't have to find their house, get through security or navigate dogs."

Pastors also have to be consistent and creative in sharing Christ.

The combination of these three aspects of "fishing" — connectivity, consistency and creativity — releases God's power in a congregation, Wolf said.

He can testify to that — his 181-year-old church is "on fire for the Lord."

"Last year, we had the largest growth in our history," Wolf said.

So "what are you doing to reach people?" he asked.

Evangelist Bob Pitman, of Muscle Shoals, preached from John 20:19-23, in which Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples.

"We have been commissioned by God and selected by His Son to go forth and share the beautiful message," he said. "I don't care what your theology is on evangelism. If you don't have a passion for souls, you need a fresh breath of Jesus on your life."

A fresh breath from Jesus might be needed

► if you have lost the sense of God's presence.

When Jesus comes into your life, He never leaves, Pitman said. But sometimes you can lose

the sense of His presence just as David did in Psalm 51 or Job in Job 23.

► if you have become gripped by a spirit of fear.

"You can live in fear," he said. "Just because God does not ever give a spirit of fear doesn't mean it doesn't still come."

► if you are not experiencing God's peace.

"This is the most restless world I have seen. It's in our churches, blaming and fighting and criticizing," Pitman said. "God has something better for us than that."

He noted that God said, "Peace be unto you," twice in John 20:19-23.

► if you have lost your joy. "People lose their joy when they forget where their joy came from," Pitman said.

In John 20:20, Jesus showed His disciples His hands and His side and then they were glad.

"It is in the reality of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross that our joy abides," he noted.

► if you have lost your passion for lost souls.

After all, Jesus came to seek and save the lost, Pitman reminded attendees.

Preaching from 1 Kings, Reginald Calvert, pastor of New Jerusalem Baptist Church, Bessemer, focused on God's provision in the good and bad times.

Israel had turned away from God to worship other gods, Calvert said.

"We have a God who is sovereign in all His ways, and these people believe God is not enough, as if He needs help."

Also preaching were Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn.; James Merritt, senior pastor of Cross

Pointe Church, Duluth, Ga. (see story, page 3); and Jerry Pipes of Jerry Pipes Ministries (see story, page 3). (Donna Wright contributed)



CALVERT



Photo by Neisha Fuson

'PEOPLE NEED THE LORD' — Don Wilton, pastor of First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C., headlines the Monday night session of the Feb. 28-March 1 State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First Baptist Church.

Workshops provide practical tips for ministry

By John Evans
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As a woman waits in the drive-through line to pick up her fast food, she's about to get some hope.

She carries heavy burdens; she lost her husband and one of her daughters to long-term illness, and her other daughter was diagnosed with a genetic disorder recently.

When she reaches the window, the worker tells her that her meal has been paid for by the person in front of her and passes on a Gardendale First Baptist Church card from the mystery buyer. The card has the church's contact information and reads, "We just wanted to show you the love of Jesus in a practical way."

"This was an unusual act of kindness to a total stranger," the woman later wrote to the church. "But for me, it was the only thing that has given me hope in a very long time, hope that someone in a cold world cares even if they don't know you."

Community outreach

This method of community outreach, called Fast Food Friends, was among the ideas presented during the Great Commission Ministries Track at the Feb. 28-March 1 State Evangelism Conference at Gardendale First.

The approximately 30 workshops covered issues ranging from church finances to youth ministry to social networking in ministry.

Phil Cronin, minister of new members and outreach at Gardendale First, told the Fast Food Friends story during his workshop, Community Outreach — Get Your People in the Game ... "Show It, Prove It, Do It!"

Stay consistent

He explained that it is important to engage the community, because if believers in Christ don't, then other groups such as cults will.

"Every day we're not engaging with community outreach, engaging with the gospel, our churches are losing and our communities are losing," Cronin said, noting consistent, ongoing efforts work best. "Big events are great but the reason we sprinkle smaller outreaches all year long is that we're trying to stay in front of the people all the time."

Staying consistent also trains church members to be effective all year long, he said. "If you can get your people out of the pews, what you will find out is you'll get some faithful people."

Cronin suggested a number of ways to reach out to the community from giving out free hot



Photo by Doug Rogers

LEADING BY EXAMPLE — Phil Cronin, minister of new members and outreach at Gardendale First Baptist Church, shares about Fast Food Friends, a community outreach, during his workshop.

chocolate at Christmas parades to providing hand sanitizer to schools during flu season.

Noting these types of outreach efforts don't have to cost a lot of money, he told the story of one church that took doughnuts to the faculty of a local school. The school principal followed the church volunteers to their cars afterward and ended up being saved.

Bob Freeman, senior pastor of Southside Baptist Church, Talladega, appreciated the workshop's practical suggestions for outreaches that don't need huge budgets.

'Big impact'

"These things don't cost a lot, but they make a big impact on the community," he said.

Phil Winningham, an associate in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' (SBOM) office of evangelism who organized the workshops, said the various workshop topics were selected from feedback received from church leaders across the state.

"Each session was led by gifted

men and women who not only know how to be effective in their field of expertise but are successfully implementing the principles they teach," he said.

While the workshops took place simultaneously with the evangelism conference's preaching sessions, scores of Alabama Baptists still took advantage of learning from this year's workshop staff, who were from Gardendale First; Cross Pointe Church, Duluth, Ga.; Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn.; and the SBOM.

"For those who did take advantage of this great opportunity, their ministries and personal lives were refreshed and revived," Winningham said.

Ministers' wives encouraged to overcome

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

You can't do it on your own, girls," Lisa McKay told a room full of ministers' wives. Roll "your anxieties onto the capable shoulders of Christ."

McKay was the featured speaker for the Ministers' Wives Luncheon on March 1, which was held during the State Evangelism Conference and sponsored by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union.

McKay, author of "You Can Still Wear Cute Shoes" and wife of Luke McKay, pastor of Ider Baptist Church, told the women that in addition to being called to serve as a pastor's wife, mother and Bible teacher, her "special affection lies with pastors' wives."

"It's so fun for me to come and spend time with you," she said. "We get each other. I feel like we can all get together and encourage life in ministry." That's because they have all gone through trials at some point, McKay said.

"What the Lord has shown me is these trials that you have are necessary," she said. "The Book of 1 Peter is one we can rely on. The whole theme (of the book) is we can be people who are overcomers as we are undergoing."

Using 1 Peter 5:1-7, McKay taught her fellow ministers' wives how to overcome as they undergo.

First "we overcome feeling unconnected by seeking fellowship



Photo by Neisha Fuson

COMMUNITY — Lisa McKay, wife of Luke McKay, pastor of Ider Baptist Church, speaks with ministers' wives at the Evangelism Conference.

with those who share common ground," she said.

"For pastors' wives, there are so few opportunities where we can share our hearts with someone like us," McKay said.

A challenge

"What I want to challenge you is this: Look around this room and I want you to get the name of one other pastor's wife that you didn't get today. Know where she lives and get in contact with her after today."

Second "we overcome feeling unqualified by remembering the intentionality with which God appointed us to our particular congregation," she said. McKay told the women

they must remember that their congregation is their inheritance even when things don't seem to be going well. And the only way they can do that and get through those tough situations is to remember they are "safe in [God's] arms."

"When [my] husband is hanging his head, all I know to do is to pray like a mad woman," she said, adding, "We have to be strong, confident women so that we can hold our man up when he feels alone like no one else can do it."

Third "we overcome feeling unappreciated by being examples of humility," McKay said.

"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another," she said. "If that is the garment we wear, it will change the way in which we serve our churches if we put that on before entering the church each week."

Lastly "we overcome feeling unable by rolling our anxieties on to the capable shoulders of Christ," McKay said.

"The ultimate sign of humility is to take our cares and roll that onto Christ and trust that He will take care of it," she said. "Anything we roll onto Him is going to have the proper resolution."

McKay encouraged the women to learn to pray to the Lord: "I trust who you are; I'm not going to manipulate this. I'm not going to direct it; I'm going to trust you and leave it with you."

(Neisha Fuson contributed)

Invitation to 'surrender your misery unto the Lord'

(continued from page 1)

Graham invited the audience to come to the altar.

"My friends, this invitation is literally for everyone," he said. "This invitation is for you to come simply to pray up here, to surrender your misery unto the Lord; the hurt and pain you've been carrying, you can give it to the Lord. There might be some of you here today who want to experience Jesus Christ for the first time. I want you to come stand right here in front of me. ... All I want is to have a word of prayer."

As the piano chords of "Just As I Am" echoed through the auditorium, nearly 80 specially trained counselors made their way to the stage as people filtered forward to kneel at the altar to pray and receive prayer.

"Will you come before God?" Graham asked. "He's waiting

with open arms to receive you."

After he led a prayer for salvation, the audience sang a brief medley of praise songs.

Lance dismissed audience members with prayer, urging them to remember that Jesus entrusted the Great Commission to His followers and empowers them to carry it out.

Visible change

"May something happen in your life and in the lives of others that can really be change we can believe in," he said.

Sammy Gilbreath, director of evangelism for the SBOM, believes Graham's message and the sight of people coming to the altar showed this year's evangelism conference was about more than talking a good game.

"For the first time in the history of this event, we didn't just talk about evangelism," he said. "We did evangelism."

'Could be most exciting years of service'

Elected officials hear challenging message to seek wisdom, be 'shining light' for others

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Is it really a new day in Montgomery as Gov. Robert Bentley claims?

Alabama Baptists are waiting to see, while Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, thinks the state's elected officials could be on the brink of something big.

"You've got a shot to make the state a shining light among other states ... an example of how to govern and lead ... to take government to another level," Wood said as he delivered the message during the annual Legislative Prayer Luncheon on March 2 in Montgomery. "But it will never happen if you can only depend on your own abilities and political savvy."

"It will only happen if you depend on wisdom from above," he said. Nearly 500 people attended the luncheon sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Along with elected officials from all branches of government, many Alabama Baptist pastors, directors of missions and other leaders attended as did leaders of other denominations. The luncheon included Scripture readings from the Old and New testaments as well as special music, a message and, of course, prayer.

"Good intentions and a good heart are good but wisdom is irreplaceable," Wood said. "It is something you need."

James 1:5 says to ask God for wisdom because He gives generously.

"He will give you the motherload of wisdom," Wood said. And "you can keep coming to Him again and again."

But the key is asking in faith, he noted. "If you doubt, then you can't count on getting anything."

"There's an instability there when there's doubt," Wood explained. "All of a sudden, we are looking to God and asking why we are not getting answers to the wisdom we desire."

Single-minded is key

Being single-minded, not double-minded, is the key, Wood said. "If [you] could have that single focus on Jesus Christ ... then [God] will generously and graciously give [wisdom] to you."

And if that happens, then "these could be some of the most exciting years in your life of service," he noted.

Bentley also challenged the state's elected officials to step up in their roles.

"To be a true leader, we've got to be true servants," he told the elected officials present at the luncheon. "We should have a servant attitude."

There's no better way to start a new legislative session than to begin it with prayer, Bentley said.

"I came to this meeting for the last

eight years as a representative and always looked forward to it," he said. "I appreciate it so much and all of you who have prayed for us. ... I truly do believe in prayer. I believe prayer changes things."

"Continue to pray for us," he added. "I feel your prayers every day."



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

LOOK UP — Shades Mountain Baptist Pastor Danny Wood urges elected officials to have one focus.



Photo by Doug Rogers

PRAYERFUL — Nearly 500 people join in the annual Legislative Prayer Luncheon, sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, on March 2. Gov. Robert Bentley thanked Alabama Baptists for praying for elected leaders.

Bentley, who delivered his first State of the State address the night before, shared a glimpse into the prayers he prayed earlier that day.

"This morning as I was praying, first, I thanked God for allowing me to get through that speech last night but to do it in a way that I delivered it so it came across with a spirit of concern for the people of this state," he said, noting he also was thankful he could have "a spirit of realism to let the people of Alabama know where we really are."

"People want the truth," he said. "I tell it the way it is."

'Privilege' to serve

Bentley said he also thanked God for the people working with him in his role as governor. "But most of all, I thanked Him for the privilege that I have been given to be a

public servant and be the governor of the state of Alabama," he said.

"In Alabama, we do face many challenges, and you heard me give a very somber State of the State message (detailing the need for major budget cuts)," Bentley noted.

"It was not an upbeat message ... but I truly believe Alabama is on the verge of some great things. I'm optimistic."

"Things are going to get better in Alabama," he said. "I believe God is going to take care of us. ... He takes care of this state. He ordains us to serve in positions."

"In the Old Testament, we can see how God placed people in positions of authority for a reason," Bentley said.

"Brighter things are coming to Alabama," he said. "Things are gloomy right now, but we are going to get through it."



BENTLEY

State RA leaders foresee enhanced missions education

(continued from page 1)

means we must find new ways of fulfilling the missions education assignment."

In a March 2 press release, Wanda Lee, WMU executive director, said, "RAS was born out of our heart and our soul. We gave it lovingly to the Brotherhood Commission. Now we welcome them back and pledge our support and partnership with both mission boards (NAMB and the International Mission Board) to continue the work as best we can."

At press time, WMU and NAMB were working on the specifics of the partnership, but they hoped the details would be finalized "in time for the September 2012 curriculum delivery." The release added that NAMB would "continue to operate Baptist Men's ministry work" and "maintain close ties with the development" of the RA curriculum.

Ebert said benefits to the transfer to WMU include "coordinated curriculum" for the Girls in Action and RA programs, as well as

the Acteens and Challengers ministries. He noted that the change also would give churches "one central place for ordering materials for children's and youth missions education organizations."

Steve Stephens, RA and Challenger leader for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said state RA leaders responded positively as the information was announced at the roundtable meeting.

'We are happy'

"The main task of WMU is missions education," he said.

"With NAMB, that is not going to be a priority, and it hasn't been a priority. So for us to be under WMU whose task is missions education is why we are happy. ... We need to educate our young people on how to support, pray, give and be involved in missions, and that needs to be the priority."

Stephens believes WMU also will

help expose RAs to more churches.

"I think we will be able to have quality magazines because WMU has produced quality material," he said.

"It has been hard to find RA materials, and now they (churches) will know where to go to get the material. The content of our material will be more towards supporting the offerings — Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon — and praying for missionaries."

And while WMU typically serves women and girls, Stephens is not concerned about it producing "boy-oriented, gender specific" materials. "We feel confident they will give it the masculine structure that it needs," he said. "We believe WMU will work as hard as they can ... to educate boys in the way they learn. They will be able to take it back and do that as they originally did."

Stephens just hopes the switch will take place "as quickly as possible."

World Changers to come under LifeWay umbrella

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) and LifeWay Christian Resources have jointly announced a new partnership in which LifeWay will assume day-to-day operations of World Changers and PowerPlant — NAMB's longtime student mobilization initiatives.

The shift in responsibility for World Changers and PowerPlant from NAMB to LifeWay is scheduled for 2012, and will not affect the 2011 summer projects. Under the partnership, announced Feb. 24, World Changers and PowerPlant will build on LifeWay's existing student mobilization efforts through Centrifuge and M-fuge, Bible study/missions camps.

(BP)

Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► **Boone's Chapel Church, Prattville**, will host Reggie and Ladye Love Smith of the Gaither Homecoming family in concert March 27, 11 a.m. Mike Johnson is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Dawson Memorial Church, Birmingham**, will host a Stephen Ministry workshop April 9, 9 a.m.–1 p.m. Check in and registration will begin at 8 a.m. The sessions will include Ministering to Those Experiencing Grief, An Introduction to Stephen Ministry and How to Care in a Distinctively Christian Way. To register visit www.stephenministry.org/workshop or call 314-428-2600. Gary Fenton is pastor. ► **Hilldale Church, Center Point**, will hold Internet classes in April. On April 3, 2–3 p.m., the topic will be Introduction to the Internet. On April 10, 2–3 p.m., the topic will be How to Find What You Really Want on the Internet. On April 17, 2–3 p.m., the topic will be How to Stay Safe on the Internet. For information call 205-853-3000. Ron Pate is pastor. ► **First Church, Hoover**, will hold a picnic March 13, 4 p.m. Danny Funderburk will be in concert at 6 p.m. For information call 205-823-3472. Randy Atkinson is pastor. ► **First Church, Overton**, in Birmingham, will host To the End on March 20, 10:30 a.m. Lunch will follow. To the End also will sing at 1 p.m. Jimmy Ray is pastor.

DEKALB

► **Ryan Hitchcock** is the new music minister for **First Church, Geraldine**. A native of Aurora, Mo., he has served churches in



HITCHCOCK

Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana and Alabama. Hitchcock holds a bachelor's degree in music with an emphasis in church music and conducting from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. He and his wife, Heather, have three children. Kirk Griggs is pastor.

EAST LIBERTY

► **Jackson Memorial Church, LaFayette**, will hold revival April 4–6, nightly at 6:30 p.m. Jerry Boswell will speak and Going Home will provide music Monday. Derk Hubbard will speak and The Set-Free Ministry will provide music Tuesday. Dale Wood, director of missions for East Liberty Association, and Pastor Al Cougill will speak and Charles Story will provide music Wednesday.

ESCAMBIA

► **First Church, Flomaton**, will host the LifeWay Women's Ministry event Going Beyond: Life Interrupted simulcast with Priscilla Shirer and Anthony Evans, April 1–2. Registration will begin Friday at 6 p.m. Child-care will be provided for infants through age five. For information call 251-296-2453 or visit www.fbcflomaton.com. Dustin Stockstill is pastor.

HALE

► **Gallion Church** will celebrate homecoming April 3. Sunday School will be at 9:30 a.m. Worship will be at 10:30 a.m. Scott Stevens, of Moundville Church, will speak. Reign will provide music. A covered-dish lunch will follow. Hank Atchison is pastor.

MADISON

► **Harvest Church** will hold a Messiah and Passover presentation April 10, 10:45 a.m., with Chosen

People Ministries. For information call 256-837-4129. Eric Fuller is pastor.

MARION

► **Marion Association** will hold a men's wild game banquet March 26 with Brother Billy Bob Bohannon at First Church, Guin. Registration will begin at 5 p.m. Scott Stokes is pastor of First, Guin. Mark Gallups is director of missions for Marion Association.

RANDOLPH

► **First Church, Roanoke**, will host an areawide women's conference March 11–12. The theme will be Divine Detours — When You're Going One Way and God Has Another Way in Mind. Debbie Childers, of First Church, Sylacauga, will speak. Donna Allen, music director for First, Roanoke, will provide special music. Registration and a reception will begin Friday at 6 p.m. The program will be at 7 p.m. On Saturday, there will be a continental breakfast at 8 a.m. The program will be from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Lunch will be served in the fellowship hall at noon. For ticket information call 334-863-4109. Mike Ramage is pastor.

SELMA

► **Northside Church, Selma**, will hold a gospel singing March 30, 6 p.m., with The Hyssongs. Kenny Hatcher is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Westwood Church, Alabaster**, will hold a Women of Worship Conference called Loss, Love & Legacy, April 29–30 with author and recording artist Kelly Minter. The conference for all women is based on the life of Ruth. Doors will open Friday at 6:15 p.m. The conference will be from 7 to 9 p.m. On Saturday, it will be from 8:30 a.m. to noon. For early bird registration visit www.ewestwood.org/wow by April 15. Group discounts are available. For information call 205-664-0122. Les Hughes is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Catching Kids Puppet Ministry of Northridge Church, Northport**, will host The Answer Guys on April 3, 6 p.m. Special guests Bob and Herb will answer questions about God and the Bible. Experience worship as the Catching Kids Gang Brings It — Old School. For information call 205-758-5599 or visit www.northridgebaptistchurch.com. Brad Smith is pastor.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Bethany Church, Crane Hill**, will hold revival April 3 and 6, 6:30 p.m., with renowned evangelist Phil Waldrep and Sanctified. For information call 256-747-6435 or visit www.bethanybysmithlake.com. Rick Deerman is pastor.

Want to know God?

By Pastor Phil M. Boyles
Sage Avenue Baptist Church, Mobile

In a 2009 study released by Barna Group, 88 percent of American adults said their religious faith is very important in their life. Seventy-five percent said they sensed that "God is motivating people to stay connected with Him but in different ways and through different types of experiences than in the past." Despite our changing societal morals and ethical standards, people are still searching for God.

In Jeremiah 29, God promises that He can be found. Verse 13 states, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." To know God requires a heart that is open to real truth. Paul told the church in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That truth, simply stated, means that everyone is separated from God by sin. Romans 6:23 tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But Paul goes on to reveal an even greater truth in Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus died on a cross, not for Himself but for us. He paid the price of sin so that we can have a relationship with Him. That relationship begins when we first confess Him as our Lord. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

You can know God if you will

► admit that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness for your rebellion against God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

► believe that Christ offers forgiveness and He is who He says He is and is always faithful in keeping His promises.

► confess Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. "For with the heart, a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth, he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

Knowing God is a lifelong endeavor that begins with inviting Jesus into your life as Lord. Won't you make that choice right now?



By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

Someone You Should Know

JIMMY GARNER

*Skyland Boulevard Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa Baptist Association*

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: Hebrews 13:6
FAVORITE HYMN: "Amazing Grace"
HOBBIES: Spending time with grandson

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Nancy Carolyn for 52 years, one daughter and one grandson



GARNER

Jimmy Garner has served as pastor of Skyland Boulevard Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, for nearly 22 years.

Q: How did you become a Christian?

A: I was a member at Woodville Baptist Church, near Huntsville, but I wasn't saved. Because of the faithfulness of the ministry of that church and the Lord touching my heart, I accepted Christ at the age of 38.

Q: What led you to become a pastor?

A: After I was saved in 1975,

two years later, I felt in my heart God was calling me and I couldn't get away from that and I surrendered. I began preaching in 1979.

Q: Why have you continued serve as a pastor?

A: I have stayed because when I surrendered to the ministry, I knew that was what God wanted me to do for the rest of my life. I wouldn't be happy doing anything else.

Q: What have you gotten from serving in the ministry?

A: It has meant fulfillment in

my life and contentment. It's a joy to know I'm doing what He has called me to do.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My wife, daughter, son-in-law and grandson all are believers and support me in prayer.

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

A: I don't have any plans now of retirement. I want to pastor as long as I can effectively serve the church and serve my people.

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

by Jennifer Davis Rash • managing editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Anyone out there feeling tired?

Sleep — how much is enough? Why can't we skimp on it here and there?

Rest — such unproductive time. Or is it? What does it really mean to rest? And how can we rest without feeling guilty?

Countless friends and family members have told me for years that I don't get enough rest, that I'm not sleeping enough.

I admit when I have more than I can truly accomplish in 16 of the 24 hours in a day (which is often), the easiest thing for me to cut from my daily agenda is sleep.

And rest outside of sleep is pretty much nonexistent. Rest for me is sleep.

My mom has always said if I discovered 30 free seconds in a day, then I would make an appointment to fill them up. I think she might be right.

Skimping on sleep has been a way of life for me for most of my adult life. In fact, the clock just ticked past the midnight hour as I write this particular column.

I know it's not healthy nor is it productive but I've not yet figured out how to balance it all — time with God, time with family, time with friends, work, household responsibilities, errands, church responsibilities, civic duties, community service, missions and ministry opportunities, etc.

Finding time

How can we actually rest with so much weighing on us? And how can we possibly sleep away one-third of each day when there's just so much to do?

It seems we are always running from one activity to the next, finishing up the laundry only to find the sink full of dishes, working late to wrap up a project and then at-

tempting to buy groceries and run other errands before making it home just in time to kiss our spouse goodnight and quietly tap the laptop keys in an attempt to finish one more pending assignment.

Don't get me wrong. I thrive on activity and love the challenge of trying to achieve all that is in front of me more productively today than I did yesterday. But living in overdrive, overdosing on adrenaline can't possibly be the healthiest journey.

So how can we do it all with balance and proper rest?

Benefits of exercise

One thing I have discovered these past couple of months since returning to somewhat of a consistent exercise routine is that the more I exercise, the more sleep I need. So exercising seems to be helping me sleep better, while getting enough sleep allows me to exercise better.

Proper exercise also leads to healthier eating and sharper mental capabilities, which helps me focus and be more productive so I can get more done in less time.

Amazingly it all seems to work together in somewhat of a domino effect.

The domino effect also works in reverse — lack of sleep hampers our ability to exercise and eating habits worsen. We need more sugar and caffeine to keep our energy up, and late-night snacking helps keep us awake to work on whatever project we are attempting to complete. And with all of this, we aren't as sharp or focused. Thus we lose productivity and need more time to do what needs to be done.

If you are interested in learning more about the health benefits of sleep and rest as well as how to get enough of each, then check out next week's issue. We'll have coverage on both. And in April, we'll deal with time management and balancing life's responsibilities.

I really want to hear from you on this issue and would love to share some of your stories. E-mail me at jrash@thealabamabaptist.org.

Also be sure to check out our blog at thealabamabaptist.wordpress.com.



Rashional EXTRAS ...

What topics are on your mind?

E-mail jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

How's the fitness plan for 2011 going? Have you hit a brick wall yet? Already given up?

I hope not. I sure need for you to share with us how you are keeping up the good work and staying consistent.

I did really well in January and early February, but I let other demands crowd my exercise time in mid-February and have had trouble recovering. It is amazing how easy it is to get out of the routine of exercise.

I'm not giving up and I still squeeze in exercise here and there. I just haven't perfected a daily exercise routine yet. I did make it to four miles on the treadmill in early February though — two miles walking and two miles running. Now it's time to see if I can get there again.

I'm including a few more fitness facts and tips here just to provide a little motivation for all of us.

Thanks for reading and sharing!

Jennifer

Is it necessary to see your doctor before beginning to exercise?

Dr. Heath Hale, primary care sports medicine doctor at Shelby Baptist Medical Center in Alabaster, says not necessarily.

"[Seeing your doctor] is more for these folks who have not exercised before, who have high risk for heart disease and are planning on starting a vigorous exercise program," Hale said. "Most of your individuals don't need to get an EKG (a test that looks at the electrical activity of the heart) or blood work done. That is a common misconception. For most patients who are asymptomatic (have no symptoms) or not at risk for heart disease ... they can be freed up for starting an exercise program."

"Reshaping It All: Motivation for Spiritual and Physical Fitness" by actress Candace Cameron Bure ("Full House," "Make It or Break It") has debuted at No. 13 on *The New York Times'* paperback advice and miscellaneous best sellers list. Bure recounts in the book her inspirational victory over food addiction and explains how she keeps a healthy outlook on weight despite Hollywood's toothpick-thin expectations.

The book — released Jan. 1 by the B&H Publishing Group of LifeWay Christian Resources — helps women begin to embrace a healthier lifestyle by moving faith to the forefront, making some wise fundamental choices about diet and exercise, and finding their worth in God's eyes.

To order the book, go to www.thealabamabaptist.org and click on the LifeWay link at the bottom right. (BP)

Alabamians who are Baptist hit twice with "fattest" label

The state of Alabama was ranked as one of the fattest states by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2010.

The Southern Baptist Convention has been labeled as one of the fattest denominations in America.

The Alabama Baptist State Convention acknowledged the state's ranking in a resolution passed at the 2010 annual meeting. The resolution called for Alabama Baptists to repent of overeating and practice moderation as they eat.

Fitness facts

▶ According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics, 60 percent of adults in America are overweight.

▶ Only 20 to 25 percent of adults get enough exercise to actually experience health benefits.

▶ Exercise counseling is performed by fewer than 35 percent of physicians.

▶ Approximately 50 percent of individuals who begin an exercise program quit within six to 12 months.

▶ A sedentary lifestyle puts an individual at a 30 to 50 percent greater risk of higher blood pressure.

Source: Dr. Heath Hale, primary care sports medicine doctor at Shelby Baptist Medical Center in Alabaster

UPCOMING TOPICS

include simplifying life and meaningful devotional and prayer times. Send us your experiences and suggestions on these topics. E-mail jrash@thealabamabaptist.org or comment on our blog at thealabamabaptist.wordpress.com.

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SBC membership declines for 3rd consecutive year

Pentecostals, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses gained ground, mainline churches continued to decline and growth in the largest two denominations — Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists — remained stagnant, according to new statistics compiled by the National Council of Churches (NCC).

The 2011 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches contains few surprises, with growing churches continuing to grow and churches that have been declining continuing to lose members, said Eileen Linder, editor of the annual report card ranking growth in the largest 25 religious bodies. The 79th annual edition of the Yearbook noted that rates of both growth and decline have slowed in recent years.

The Catholic Church, the nation's largest denomination with 68 million members, grew by about one half of 1 percent, while the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the second-largest, declined by .4 percent, to 16.1 million members.

This is the third straight year the Yearbook has noted a loss in membership for Southern Baptists, which until recently reported decades of uninterrupted growth.

Membership figures reported in the 2011 Yearbook were collected by churches in 2009 and reported to the NCC in 2010. The SBC's membership totals are compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources. Churches report vital statistics through Baptist state conventions that are then given to LifeWay.

Southern Baptists count only the professed and baptized believers as members, compared to groups like Catholics who number communicants from infancy. About one-third of Southern Baptists included in the count of total membership are "nonresident" members, who joined a local Baptist church but moved away and never transferred their membership. Southern Baptists don't count inactive members, people who belong to a church but never attend, but about a third of the total membership is in church on a given Sunday.

The Yearbook does not count nondenominational churches, which reportedly are the second-largest group of Protestant churches in America and the fastest growing. (ABP)

CORRECTION

The photo outline for the 'Anniston/Oxford hosts 2011 RA/Challenger basketball tournament' printed in the Feb. 17 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* had an incorrect church name for the winners of the Young Challengers and the Older Challengers. The correct name is Woodridge Baptist Church, Mobile.

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States 'fleshing out' CP

Great Commission Ministries committee on track for report

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

State conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have embarked on a partnership like never before, said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Delivering his report to SBOM members meeting at Gardendale First Baptist Church on Feb. 28, Lance said, "We are engaging on a national campaign for the Cooperative Program (CP) ... that will unify both the SBC and state conventions."

"This has never before happened the way it is happening," he said, noting the partnership is vital and one he is excited about. "This is needed now more than ever, to be unified around the message of Jesus Christ and the methodology of the CP."

Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, announced Feb. 23 that the SBC will partner with a network of state convention stewardship directors to produce CP and stewardship materials.

Page's announcement came at a daylong meeting of the Stewardship Development Association (SDA), a consortium of state stewardship specialists. Alabama's SDA representatives are Jim Swedenburg, director of the SBOM's office of CP and stewardship development, and Randy Driggers, vice president for development for The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

"SDA will be our preferred provider for production of stewardship and Cooperative Program materials," Page told the gathering in Nashville. "You are much better at some things than we are. We can't keep doing what we've been doing."

Costcutting

Last November, as a cost-cutting measure, he eliminated the Executive Committee's CP and stewardship division and moved responsibility for CP promotion into his office.

C. Ashley Clayton, the Executive Committee's associate to the president for CP and stewardship, said, "We are at the beginning of this relationship, so there are a lot of things we don't know. But what we do know is what we have been doing to promote the CP hasn't been working."

Clayton said the Executive Committee is getting rid of its inventory of CP promotion material including videos and brochures.

"We are getting out of the resource business, although we will continue to produce the printed Missionary Moments prayer guide. We exist to help [state SDA representatives] promote the CP and do stewardship education," he said.

Lance said he wasn't sure how everything "would flesh out in Alabama," but he noted during the SBOM meeting that he and all other state convention executive directors affirmed the 1925 historic relationship of the 50-50 split for CP dollars (between state conventions and the SBC) including shared ministries.

"Every state convention is different, and each one will come to its own determination about how that will be fleshed out," Lance said.

Part of how the CP percentages will be dispersed will depend on what role the North American Mission Board (NAMB) plays in Alabama Baptist life.

"We are working out the details of what used to be called cooperative agreements, basically a strategic partnership agreement," Lance said. "It will not be as generous as it was in the past, but it is a good effort to work together."

Another aspect in figuring out the new CP percentage formula for Alabama Baptists will come from the Great Commission Ministries Study Committee.

This committee, which is the existing SBOM executive committee, was created in November by outgoing Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC) President Jimmy Jackson.

"As we begin a new decade ... we want to have thoughtful and deliberate planning, to help Alabama Baptists focus our resources and conduct Great Commission ministries through the coming decade," Jackson said to messengers attending the state convention annual meeting in Birmingham.

Noting the economic pressure a new committee would put on the convention budget, Jackson said he decided to appoint the existing executive committee as the committee.

"It is made up of ministers and laymen from every district of Alabama who have a close proximity to grass-roots Alabama Baptists," he said. "It is the most efficient choice in time management and conserving CP dollars."

Better focus

Charged to study ways to better focus convention resources, committee members will serve for at least two years and bring a preliminary report to the 2011 convention and any appropriate recommendations to the 2012 convention.

John Killian, first vice president of the ABSC, reported to SBOM

members that the committee is on track to deliver the preliminary report.

The committee met in January with Robert "Bob" White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention and member of the SBC Great Commission Resurgence Task Force.

"Right now, we are in the fact-gathering stage," Killian said. "We will meet with Frank Page and Kevin Ezell (president of NAMB) later this year."

To give the committee enough time to do its job, a motion was passed during the SBOM meeting to change the Aug. 12 SBOM meeting to Oct. 14. This is the meeting in which the

convention budget is submitted to SBOM members.

Other news

► the properties subcommittee reported on potential property for the disaster relief site and the Taylor Road property.

Negotiations are ongoing for the disaster relief property, said Mitch Gavin, chairman of the properties subcommittee. And the SBOM "is back to the beginning as far as prospective purchasers of the Taylor Road property," he said.

The original developer withdrew his offer following the recent litigation concerning the property.

► Lance is encouraging Alabama Baptists to set aside March 27 as a Day of Prayer for the Middle East.

"While the Middle East has always been a hot spot, we have never seen this type of overall impact and unrest," he said.

"Pray for those areas and the people in general and particularly for Christians as they try to be salt and light in a very extreme, difficult time."

One blog that has already been set up by one Alabama Baptist is mepay.net.

► Lance also encouraged churches observing Sunday, Sept. 11, as I Will Remember Day to remember not only the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks but also what Jesus Christ has done for us.

(BP contributed)

"This is needed now more than ever, to be unified around the message of Jesus Christ and the methodology of the CP"

Rick Lance
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

About Alabama

Public Opinion on Issues Related to State Government

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Each year, the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama conducts a public opinion survey on issues related to state government. While some questions are unique to a particular survey, many are consistent from year to year. This allows us to see the continuity of attitudes and monitor shifts in opinion as they occur.

This year's survey recorded the answers of 536 people who were representative of Alabama both demographically and geographically, providing statistical confidence in the results.

When asked to name the top issue facing the Legislature, Alabamians most often listed jobs and the economy, as they have for the past three years. Education, the top issue prior to the Great Recession, remained a solid second.

Budget priorities

Respondents were asked to rank their own budget priorities among four major state investments: education, health care for the poor and elderly, public safety including law enforcement and corrections and highways. Half ranked education first and a third listed health care first. Less than 10 percent of respondents picked either public safety or highways as their first priority.

We also asked people if they would pay more to avoid budget cuts for any of these four big programs. Only education and health care received majority support. These priorities have been consistent over the years in our surveys.

The survey asked about a wide range of options for resolving Alabama's budget shortfall. Three were approved by a majority: reorganizing state agencies and cutting state employment (68 percent), increasing employee contributions for retirement benefits (65 percent) and releasing nonviolent offenders from prison (55 percent). Increasing class sizes and reducing school days were rejected by big majorities, as were increases in taxes and college tuition.

About half of respondents favored revising the Alabama Constitution; those in favor were divided evenly between a constitutional convention and an article-by-article revision by the Legislature.

More than two-thirds were in favor of giving counties more power to manage their own operations and regulate nuisances with appropriate statewide standards.

This year's survey found respondents less negative about "officials in Montgomery." Two-fifths were optimistic that recent ethics reforms will bring about a positive change in state government, and almost two-thirds said electing new people will make some difference in results.

A more detailed discussion of survey results will be available soon at <http://parca.samford.edu>.

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.



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Disaster relief continues in Chile thanks to Southern Baptists

A year ago, one of the most powerful earthquakes on record rocked Chile. Since then, working in Baptist quake relief efforts has led Baptist representative Alfredo Valencia to many suffering families.

But he'll never forget one family in particular. Valencia found them living in a partially collapsed home on a hillside in Cartagena, Chile, a coastal town hit hard by the 8.8-magnitude quake that shattered central Chile early Feb. 27, 2010.

The family with eight children — ranging from ages two months to 17 years — “were living in really, really bad conditions,” recalled Valencia, who serves with the International Mission Board (IMB) in Santiago, Chile.

It was months after the disaster had struck, and Baptist quake relief efforts were drawing to a close. By then local officials had deemed the family's house uninhabitable and had asked them to move out. But the family had nowhere else to go.

When Valencia saw their need, “I said, ‘God, You’ve got to provide for

us to be able to help this family.’”

God's answer came when Valencia's cell phone rang. It was a member of a team of California Baptist volunteers heading to Chile to build “mediaguas” — prefab temporary shelters — for quake victims. Valencia told the volunteer about the family.

The two discussed options for helping and agreed the family needed more than a 10-by-20-foot temporary shelter. The volunteer said his team was willing to rebuild the house.

The California Baptists spent seven days — working from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. — reconstructing the house with the help of Marcos, the father of the family. When their work was completed, the group celebrated with a thanksgiving service. During that service, Marcos prayed to receive Christ. Today he and his family are studying the Bible at a Baptist mission congregation in Cartagena.

“The eight kids in this family will grow up one day, and they will have a story to tell about how they sur-

vived the earthquake — and what God did with their house,” Valencia said. “They will remember us as those who came to their house with the gospel, because God allowed us the time and resources to rebuild.”

“But what God really rebuilt for that family was their lives — their hope. And He used us to help them understand they truly mattered to God.”

Since the devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunami that claimed the lives of 524 people in

Chile, hundreds of Chileans have received that same message through Baptist relief efforts. Together Chilean Baptists, Southern Baptist volunteers and IMB representatives have met countless physical, spiritual and emotional needs in Jesus' name. A total of \$722,000 in Southern Baptist disaster relief funds helped finance the relief effort.

“As we mark the anniversary of this powerful earthquake, we are eternally grateful to Southern Baptists for addressing the human

needs of people around the world, particularly here in Chile in light of this disaster,” said IMB representative Charles Clark, who headed up Southern Baptist quake relief in Chile. “We appreciate so much the many Southern Baptists who gave sacrificially of their time and money to meet the needs of Chileans. And we are equally thankful for our Chilean Baptist partners who we joined forces with to meet the immediate needs of those most affected by the quake.” (BP)

Retired Alabama Baptist pastor Miller dies at 84

George William Miller, a retired Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 12. He was 84.

A Birmingham native, Miller was ordained in 1949. He graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham with a bachelor's degree in religion and English; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., with a bachelor's degree in divinity and a master's degree in theology; and Luther Rice Seminary & University in Lithonia, Ga., with a doctorate in theology.

Through a ministry that spanned 62 years, Miller served as pastor of churches in Kentucky, Florida and Alabama.

His Alabama pastorates were Cave Springs Baptist Church, Attalla; West End Baptist Church, Gadsden; Hopewell Baptist Church, Pinson; County Line Baptist Church, Trafford; Village Springs Baptist Church, Remlap; and First Baptist Church, Remlap.

He also served as interim director of missions for Friendship

Baptist Association and interim pastor for Pleasant Mount Baptist Church, Remlap.

He instituted chaplaincy programs and was director of pastoral care at Western Baptist Hospital in Paducah, Ky., and Baptist Hospital of Miami.

Among Miller's leadership roles, he served as president of the Southern Baptist Association of Hospital Chaplains and the Baptist Association of South Florida Chaplains.

Miller served as a petty officer third class in the U.S. Navy during World War II and received the bronze battle star, World War II Victory Medal, China Service Medal and Ribbon and Combat Action Ribbon.

At the time of his death, he was a member of Eastside Baptist Church, Birmingham, where he taught the Joy Sunday School Class for adults.

Miller is survived by his wife of 61 years, Sarah; two children; and four grandchildren. (TAB)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Antioch Baptist Church, a congregation of approximately 250-300, in Oxford, Ala., is prayerfully searching for God's man to serve as full-time pastor. Forward resumes and recommendations no later than March 31 to: Antioch Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 3290, Oxford, AL 36203, or e-mail to: churchsec@antiochoxford.com.

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: 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.

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PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Carrolls Creek Baptist Church in Northport, Ala., is seeking part-time music minister. Send resume to: broalan@charter.net, or mail to: Carrolls Creek Baptist Church, 14247 Hwy. 69 N., Northport, AL 35475.

MINISTER OF YOUTH & RECREATION: Traditional, conservative, growing Southern Baptist church in Memphis, Tenn., metropolitan area seeks minister of youth and recreation. Send resume by April 15 to: Personnel, Covenant Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1165, Collierville, TN 38027-1165.

YOUTH MINISTER: Fairview Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a part-time youth minister. Please send resumes to: fairviewbc@knology.net, or 600 River Road, Valley, AL 36854.

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OTHER POSITIONS

FULL-TIME STUDENT/COLLEGIATE MINISTER: For Etowah Baptist Association Collegiate Ministry at Gadsden State Community College. Resumes accepted through April 1. Send to: EBA Search Committee, P.O. Box 490, Gadsden, AL 35902 or cheryl@etowahbaptist.com.

FULL-TIME CAMP DIRECTOR: Camp Whispering Pines, a 225-bed ministry of Mobile Baptist Association in Citronelle, Ala., accepting resumes for camp director. Seeking gifted administrator committed to evangelistic ministry, preferably with SBC seminary degree and minimum five years camp management experience. Visit www.campwhisperingpines.com for job description, candidate requirements and additional information. E-mail resumes before June 15 to: rec@mobilebaptists.org.

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PATRIOTIC SINGING FLAG FOR SALE: Six-tier lighted patriotic singing flag (Elizabethtown, Ky.). Used for choir cantatas. Manufacturer's construction/lighting instructions included. Photos available. Contact John Rice, john@severnsvalley.org or 270-765-7822.

ALABAMA BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES & FAMILY MINISTRIES

Legacy

March 2011

Words from the *heart* about your future

By Bob Dewhurst,
ABCHVP, Ministry Development

In my 18 years of service with this ministry, I have shared many joys, sorrows and losses with people like you and have sought to help you prepare for your future and that of your loved ones. One of my greatest losses was a year ago when my mother lost her battle with cancer. That experience brought home to me the importance of ensuring the future for my loved ones after my death.

With her death came much grief and many responsibilities, as I was named executor of her small estate. Fortunately, she had a Last Will and Testament. But even with a small estate and a will, there can be many challenges.

Why did my mother name me executor? I am the oldest child, a choice that many parents may make out of tradition or sense of birthright. Could there have been a better choice? Probably. I have a considerable distance from my birthplace for the better part of 40 years. On the other hand, my youngest sibling lived close to her and is very responsible. Mom could have named a trusted Christian friend or a co-executor. As sole executor, I have had the responsibility for meetings and travel several times. This is not a complaint, but a matter of Christian stewardship since this has impacted the time and costs related to following my mother's wishes.

Also, my mother had made a relative co-owner of her bank accounts, a life insurance policy and the title of her car. She took this action so that someone else could manage her business affairs. But legally, this meant all those assets became the property of that relative at the time of my mother's death, even though she wanted them to be included in the estate. The relative named on those immediately transferred the funds and property to the estate although they were not legally required to do so.

My mother also wanted her children to equally divide what she left behind. While she wanted certain property to go to specific children, these were not specified in her will. Therefore, a small farm that she owned will be owned jointly by her three children, instead of each child receiving specific parcels of land.

The choices my mother made may not have been the wisest, but are not uncommon. I would like you to prayerfully consider the choices that you have or have not made related to what God has entrusted to your stewardship.

- 1) The majority of people in Alabama do not have a Last Will and Testament. Do you have a current will that reflects your current desires for the distribution of your estate?
 - Have you identified personal items or property for specific beneficiaries?
 - Is the individual(s) chosen as the Executor(s) best suited for the job and accepting of the responsibilities?
 - Have you considered the specific needs of the individuals and ministries you love and whether or not they will be good stewards of the gifts you give?
- 2) Do your life insurance policies name beneficiaries and the percentage that each is to receive? If not, the first individual listed will normally receive 100 percent of the proceeds. This transfer takes place no matter what the will says.
- 3) Do you have specific powers of attorney for medical and other issues? A general power of attorney is unlimited in scope and should not be given without a thorough understanding of the authority you are granting.
- 4) Do you have property, bank accounts or other assets that you hold with co-owners who you do not wish to receive those assets at the time of your death? If so, contact your financial institution or other authority to make necessary changes.

And finally, remember that God owns it all. Therefore, we are accountable to Him to be faithful in our stewardship.

If you would like more information or stewardship materials, please contact me at bdewhurst@abchome.org, or 1-888-720-8805.

GraceGifts

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(Memorialized person's name is bolded.)

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Robert Webber: Lathem & Sarah Sibert
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HONORS

(Honored person's name is bolded.)

Oak Grove BC Family of Hayden: Bonnie Wilemon



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For more information, call or email Amy
Nelson at 1.800.264.1225, ext. 258,
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This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through
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Pakistani Christian leader killed over blasphemy law

The only Christian in Pakistan's government was assassinated March 2 after pushing for reform of harsh laws that mandate death for people who leave or "insult" Islam.

Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's minister for minorities, had declared he was prepared to die for his convictions after Salman Taseer, governor of the country's Punjab province, was killed Jan. 4 by a bodyguard who said he was angry that the politician opposed Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Bhatti was on his way to work in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, when unidentified gunmen sprayed his car with bullets, according to news reports. A radical Islamic group associated with the Taliban terrorist movement reportedly claimed responsibility for the assassination in a note left at the scene.

Bhatti had been campaigning to reform the blasphemy laws, which had been in an international spotlight since a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, had been sentenced to death for "insulting" Islam.

Taseer, the Punjab governor, had publicly advocated a pardon for the woman, also called Asia Noreen in press reports, before he was murdered. In February, Bhatti acknowledged he was receiving death threats and told the *London Telegraph* newspaper he would not stop speaking out against the blasphemy law.

"I have been told by pro-Taliban religious extremists that if I will continue to speak against the blasphemy law, I will be beheaded," Bhatti reportedly said during a trip to Canada. "As a Christian, I believe Jesus is my strength. He has given me a power and wisdom and motivation to serve suffering humanity. I follow the principles of my conscience, and I am ready to die and sacrifice my life for the principles I believe."

'Borrowed time'

Bhatti knew he was "living on borrowed time," said the president of an international Christian organization focused on human rights.

"It is heartrending to receive this news but is unfortunately not unexpected," Jeff King, president of International Christian Concern, said in a press release. "The last time I was with Shahbaz in 2010, I asked him about his security and if the Islamists were closing in. He had lived under the cloud of this eventuality for many years and he knew he was on borrowed time."

Bhatti "courageously defended the rights of persecuted Christians in Pakistan despite living under the constant threat of death," King added. "He died as a martyr for a cause he believed in."

Bhatti's murder is not just tragic, but horrifying, said Nina Shea, a commissioner on the U.S. Com-



BP photo

COURAGEOUS — Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's minister for minorities and a Christian, was killed March 2 by a radical Islamist group after he had been pushing for reform of harsh blasphemy laws.

mission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

"Death threats were a constant in Bhatti's life for many years. He once told me that he had never married because he did not think it would be fair to a wife and children to subject them to this concern," Shea said in a press release. "His work was his life: At the end

of each day, he left his government Cabinet office and headed over to his office at the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, where he continued to help Pakistan's persecuted minorities until late into the night."

Shea recalled a comment Bhatti made in September 2009, when he received USCIRF's first religious freedom medallion: "I person-

ally stand for religious freedom, even if I will pay the price of my life," Bhatti said. "I live for this principle and I want to die for this principle."

Shea said Pakistan's blasphemy law "stands in the way of other key reforms and secures the place within society of an ever-radicalizing political Islam." (BP)

The Cooperative Program makes it possible for churches of every size and location to be involved in missions every day. By partnering together, we can do much more together than we could ever do separately.

For more information and resources about the Cooperative Program, please contact State Missionary Jim Swedenburg, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 283, jswedenburg@alsbom.org.

PARTNERSHIP

IMB Missionary Mike Ray leads a team of Alabama volunteers in Ukraine.

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Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Baptists support New Zealand after earthquake

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand — Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief-and-development arm of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), has granted an initial sum of \$10,000 for earthquake relief in New Zealand.

BWAid sent the funds in response to the devastating magnitude 6.3 quake that struck Feb. 22 in the city of Christchurch in the Canterbury region on New Zealand's South Island. The earthquake caused widespread damage and multiple fatalities with at least 154 confirmed deaths and 240 people missing.

On Sept. 4, 2010, a 7.1 earthquake occurred near Christchurch causing significant destruction of property, including damage to several Baptist churches. The Feb. 22 earthquake is regarded as an aftershock of this earlier occurrence.

Peter Mihaere, general director of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society, said the earthquake was "felt in every New Zealand home. We are stunned as a nation as we experience one of our darkest moments as a country." He reported that "all of our pastors and their families are safe but some of their congregations and their families are still missing. We pray their rescue is soon." He also said "a number of church buildings have suffered much damage and we know of one historic building and all buildings near it (that) are completely destroyed."

Rodney Macann, national leader of the Baptist Union of New Zealand (BUZ), said the nation "is reeling in the wake of a disaster which by world standards is not huge but nevertheless devastating for the people of the Canterbury region." Macann said the disaster "poses questions for the city and the future ministry of our churches."

Kelvyn Fairhall, national administrator of BUZ, conveyed gratitude to BWA and all Baptists for their support and help. "Thank you very much for this expression of support; we certainly appreciate this coming from the worldwide family of Baptists."

Church secretary, son admit stealing \$1.5 million

MORRISTOWN, Tenn. — A mother and son pleaded guilty in federal court Feb. 19 to stealing more than \$1.5 million from a Southern Baptist church where the mother worked for 47 years.

Barbara Whitt, 69, and Michael Whitt, 43, pleaded guilty in U.S. district court to bank fraud and money laundering related to funds embezzled from First Baptist Church, Morristown, Tenn.

According to the *Morristown Citizen Tribune*, the pair remain free on bond until their sentencing is set in July.

A widow and trusted financial secretary of the 1,800-member church, Whitt was accused of writing 1,647 checks to herself between January 2008 and April 2010. She was arrested in May after a church audit found \$500,000 was missing.

Whitt, who is not a church member but attended a neighboring Baptist church, took funds from an account that funded things like scholarships and ministries. She would make them out in the church's accounting program to cash, get one of the church's authorized officials to sign them, and then add her name on a type-writer before cashing them on her lunch breaks at a nearby bank.

Her son was arrested last July for allegedly converting stolen money into spendable cash by loading them onto a prepaid credit card.

The *Tribune* said First, Morristown, had two insurance policies that covered \$1 million of the \$1.5 million loss.

CP giving totals 1.20 percent below last year

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee are 1.20 percent below the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank Page.

As of Feb. 28, Cooperative Program (CP) gifts received by the Executive Committee totaled \$82,893,069.47 or \$1,003,117.86 behind the \$83,896,187.33 received at the end of February 2010.

Monthly CP receipts totaled \$17,240,609.30 while designated gifts received last month amounted to \$48,674,050.66.

Month-to-month swings reflect a number of factors, including the timing of receipts from state conventions.

For the SBC CP Allocation Budget, the year-to-date total of \$82,893,069.47 is 99.56 percent of the \$83,259,204.24 budgeted to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America.

The SBC operates on an Oct. 1–Sept. 30 fiscal year.

'Active, conservative Protestants' less likely to divorce, experts say

Christians divorce at roughly the same rate as the world!" It's one of the most quoted stats by Christian leaders today. And it's perhaps one of the most inaccurate.

Based on the best data available, the divorce rate among Christians is significantly lower than the general population.

Here's the truth: Many people who seriously practice a traditional religious faith — be it Christian or other — have a divorce rate markedly lower than the general population.

The factor making the most difference is religious commitment and practice. Couples who regularly practice any combination of serious religious behaviors and attitudes — attend church nearly every week; read their Bibles and spiritual materials regularly; pray privately and together; generally take their faith seriously, living not as perfect disciples, but serious disciples — enjoy significantly lower divorce rates than mere church members, the general public and unbelievers.

Professor Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, explains from his analysis of people who identify as Christians but rarely attend church, that 60 percent of these have been divorced. Of those who attend church

regularly, 38 percent have been divorced.

Other data from additional sociologists of family and religion suggest a significant marital stability divide between those who take their faith seriously and those who do not.

"Those who say they are more religious are less likely ... to have already experienced divorce."

Scott Stanley
University of Denver

W. Bradford Wilcox, a sociologist at the University of Virginia and director of the National Marriage Project, found from his own analysis that "active, conservative Protestants" who regularly attend church are 35 percent less likely to divorce compared to those who have no affiliation. Nominally attending conservative Protestants are 20 percent more likely to divorce, compared to secular Americans.

inally attending conservative Protestants are 20 percent more likely to divorce, compared to secular Americans.

Commitment levels

Professor Scott Stanley from the University of Denver, working with a team of leading sociologists on the Oklahoma Marriage Study, explained that couples with a vibrant religious faith had more and higher levels of the qualities couples need to avoid divorce: "Whether young or old, male or female, low-income or not, those who said that they were more religious reported higher average levels of commitment to their partners, higher levels of marital satisfaction, less think-

ing and talking about divorce and lower levels of negative interaction. These patterns held true when controlling for such important variables as income, education and age at first marriage."

These positive factors translated into actual lowered risk of divorce among active believers.

"Those who say they are more religious are less likely, not more, to have already experienced divorce," Stanley said. "Likewise those who report more frequent attendance at religious services were significantly less likely to have been divorced."

The divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population — not even close. Being a committed believer makes a measurable difference in marriage.

Saying you believe something or merely belonging to a church, unsurprisingly, does little for marriage. But the more you are involved in the actual practice of your faith in real ways — through submitting yourself to a serious body of believers, learning regularly from Scripture, being in communion with God through prayer individually and with your spouse and children, and having friends and family around you who challenge you to take your marriage seriously — the greater difference this makes in strengthening both the quality and longevity of your marriages.

Faith does matter and the leading sociologists of family and religion agree. (BP)

Bike ride to raise ministry funds

Once again, Samford University's Old Howard 100 Bike Ride will offer bicyclists a pleasant springtime tour through portions of historic Alabama. The seventh annual event, sponsored by Samford's Howard College of Arts and Sciences, will be April 16.

The ride, with routes of 30, 45, 75 or 100 miles, will begin and end at Judson College in Marion, where Samford was founded as Howard College in 1841.

Proceeds from the ride will benefit Sowing Seeds of Hope, a ministry that seeks to improve the quality of life and work in Perry County through better education opportunities, health care, tourism, transportation and economic development.

As a result of the first six rides, more than \$15,000 has been raised for the cause.

For information and registration, call 205-726-4033, e-mail coordinator Ken Kirby at rkkirby@samford.edu, or check the website at www.samford.edu/oldhoward. (SU)



Photo courtesy of Judson College

JUDSON STUDENT WINS FIRST PLACE

Judson College student Jordyn Blackwell, of Grand Bay, wins first place in the regional championship at the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association competition at Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga., on Feb. 26–27. She'll travel to Canyon, Texas, on March 26–27 for the advanced individual Western horsemanship competition.



BP photo

GO FOR THE GOLD — NAMB missionary Derek Spain ministers to Olympic athletes in Lake Placid, N.Y. In 2010, Spain served as an official chaplain for the U.S. Winter Olympic team in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The ultimate prize

NAMB missionary shows Christ to Olympic athletes

Lake Placid is full of people going places and at great speeds. The resort town was made famous by movies, high rollers, Olympic events and now by top-flight winter athletes honing their skills on its bobsled tracks and ice rinks.

The people who stand out, though, for North American Mission Board missionary Derek Spain are athletes like U.S. bobsled-der John Napier who have been changed by the gospel and now represent Christ at global sporting events.

"John was 14 when I moved here," said Spain, who relocated to the area in 2001 as a Southern Baptist resort missionary. "Only in the last few years have I begun to know [him] personally."

Nestled in New York's Adirondack Mountains, Lake Placid hosted the Winter Olympics in 1932 and 1980. Now home to an Olympic Training Center, the small town receives athletes from all over the world — training in winter sports such as hockey, figure skating and bobsledding. Many athletes, like Napier, move with their families during their early years to train.

When tragedies strike

Developing relationships with athletes in the fast moving and regimented world of Lake Placid is often supplanted by the necessities of sleeping, eating and training. But tragedy and difficulty often can slow life down enough to open a door.

When Napier's father, William, was dying of cancer, Spain was able to minister to Napier for the first time.

Later, Spain bumped into Napier

and invited him to a weekly Bible study. After several weeks, he became a regular at the Bible study.

"I had the opportunity to baptize John last year," Spain said. "His whole life had been bobsled and pursuing gold medals and success through the sport. Now he realizes that God is transforming his life in every way and that even bobsled is a way for him to be a witness for Christ."

This is what's driven Spain for nearly a decade — helping athletes see beyond their sport and find their ultimate purpose in Christ.

Spain is one of more than 5,000 missionaries supported by the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

Last January, he was tapped to serve as an official chaplain for the 2010 U.S. Winter Olympic team. In Vancouver, British Columbia, Spain was able to minister to athletes when tragedy struck. On the morning of the opening ceremonies Nodar Kumaritashvili, a luger from the Republic of Georgia, died when he crashed during a training run and hit a metal pole.

The accident rocked the entire Olympic community. As officials investigated the death and made adjustments to the track's safety, chaplains like Spain responded to athletes reeling from the loss and fear in the tragedy's wake.

And in the pall cast on the games by that cracking blow, Spain had the privilege of being there with a hope much greater than athletic prowess and regimen — a hope he'd seen Napier find less than a year before.

The road Spain traveled to connect with athletes like Napier began with a desire to serve the Lake Plac-

id community. Spain now heads up North Country Ministries, made up of members of Lake Placid Baptist Church and Southern Baptist missions teams that travel to the resort from other churches throughout North America.

'Many open doors'

"At North Country Ministries, we were willing to do the jobs nobody wanted to do," Spain said. "We've found many open doors through serving and volunteering at sports events. We just say, 'Hey, how can we help? We want to be part of the event and help to make it better.' And while we're there serving at events we have the opportunity to talk to people. So we just strike up conversations, talk about anything — the weather, their families — anything that would help us make a connection."

Through a growing reputation for serving and loving the community, Spain has been invited to serve as chaplain to the U.S. bobsled team and he's started Bible studies with athletes. Lake Placid Baptist, which he serves as pastor, has grown as a result.

"It took years for these opportunities to happen and years of serving," Spain said. "Years of praying, years of being patient and just waiting on God's timing for Him to open the doors at the right time."

Spain's prayer now is that God would open the door for a revival among the world's athletes.

"We're praying that hundreds or thousands of athletes in these winter sports would come to Christ," Spain said. "Our prayer has also been for athletes who know Christ, that they would know they're not alone out there." (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

House OKs spending bill with pro-life provisions

WASHINGTON — Pro-life leaders cheered passage by the U.S. House of Representatives of spending legislation that bans federal money for abortion providers and promoters, including Planned Parenthood.

The House voted 235-189 early Feb. 19 on a continuing resolution to extend funding for federal agencies until the end of the fiscal year. Congress failed to pass a budget last year, adopting instead a resolution that continued funding for the federal government through March 4. The newly approved resolution would provide funds for the government to operate through Sept. 30.

The bill included the following pro-life measures:

- Prohibition of all funds under the resolution for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) and its affiliates, a network that constitutes the country's No. 1 abortion provider.

- Reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy, which would bar federal money for organizations that perform or promote abortions overseas.

- Restoration of a ban on funds for the United Nations Population Fund, which has been found to support China's coercive population control program.

- Reinstitution of a prohibition on the use of federal and congressionally approved local funds for elective abortions in the District of Columbia.

Christian film 'The Grace Card' has solid opening

MEMPHIS — The church-made movie "The Grace Card" had a solid opening on its first weekend in theaters Feb. 25-27, finishing in the Top 10 on a per-theater average with a gross similar to that of the 2006 hit "Facing the Giants," according to studio estimates.

Made largely by volunteers from Calvary Church, a Nazarene congregation in Memphis, and directed by church member David Evans, the film finished No. 8 on a per-theater basis with an average gross of \$3,099. By comparison, "Facing the Giants" grossed an average of \$3,046 its first weekend.

Although Hollywood often spotlights a movie's total gross, Provident Films — which released "The Grace Card" — pays more attention to average gross because it opened in only 352 theaters, compared to the normal 2,000-3,000 or so theaters in which a typical Hollywood film opens.

Evans, who directs the church's passion play, was inspired to make the movie after watching the 2008 film "Fireproof," made by Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga.

"The Grace Card" has received positive reviews from Baptist Press, PluggedInOnline.com and Christianity Today, and even from some secular media. Variety said the movie was "blessed with fine performances, credible dialogue and slick production values" and "ranks among the better religious-themed indies released in recent years."

Supreme Court rules in favor of Westboro Church

WASHINGTON — In an 8-1 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled March 2 that the "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" protesters from Westboro Baptist Church have First Amendment rights to protest military funerals.

The majority determined that the Rev. Fred Phelps and members of his small church in Topeka, Kansas, had free-speech rights to picket within 300 feet of the funeral of Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder, who was killed in Iraq in 2006. The court's lone dissenter, Justice Samuel Alito, argued it was wrong for protesters to continue "inflicting severe and lasting emotional injury on an ever growing list of innocent victims." Legal experts differ on whether Westboro will now be a role model for other religious groups with strong views deemed offensive.

Hawaii governor signs bill to legalize gay 'marriage'

HONOLULU — Barely a year after some 15,000 Christians successfully rallied in opposition to same-sex civil unions at the Hawaii capitol, newly elected Gov. Neil Abercrombie signed a bill into law Feb. 23 legalizing such unions, thus making Hawaii the 12th state to recognize either gay "marriage," civil unions or their equivalent.

The new law — which takes effect in January 2012 — will grant same-sex couples all the state legal benefits of marriage, without the name "marriage." The Hawaii House passed it this year, 31-19, the Senate, 18-5. Opponents of gay "marriage" warn legalization would have a wide-ranging effect on society, impacting the tax-exempt status of religious organizations, the religious liberty of private businesses and the curriculum in elementary schools.