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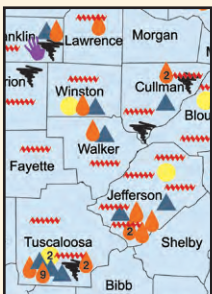
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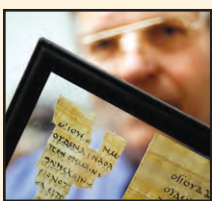
At least 125 people, 2 Baptist churches lost in Joplin tornado

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'We can come through this'

Churches, associations partner as state moves into recovery, rebuild stage

The more than 50 confirmed tornadoes that swept through Alabama on April 27 left behind an unprecedented path of destruction. Forty-two of the state's 67 counties have been declared federal disaster areas.

Relief efforts are taking place in 29 Alabama Baptist associations. Ten Alabama Baptist churches were destroyed, and more than 40 were damaged in some way.

Since April 27, thousands of trained and credentialed disaster relief volunteers from 13 state conventions, including Alabama's, have worked tirelessly. Nine mass feeding units were deployed, serving more than 250,000 meals. Chain saw teams have completed about 1,500 jobs, helping tornado survivors begin putting the pieces of their lives back together.

Shower and laundry, communications and child care units also were deployed across the region.

And, of course, chaplains — more than 150 of them — have been reaching out to the hurting, listening to their stories and praying with them. Chaplains have made nearly 6,000 contacts, and more than 50 professions of faith have been recorded.

In addition, churches and associations across Alabama and beyond have ministered in countless ways: collecting food, clothing and other items; becoming drop-off centers or distribution points; forming cleanup or feeding teams; serving as disaster relief staging areas; housing and feeding volunteers; and on and on.

Mel Johnson, Alabama Baptist state disaster relief strategist, said the relief effort is now moving into the rebuild stage as churches and associations outside the devastation zone partner with churches and associations affected by the tornadoes to provide assistance and encouragement.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, noted, "We have so much more to do in the coming weeks, months and, yes, even years ahead.



Photo by Bethany Rogers

ENCOURAGEMENT — Frank Page (far right), president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, prays with Tuscaloosa-area pastors and others outside what's left of Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, on May 25.

The task seems to be overwhelming, but we do not have to be overwhelmed by it. I believe we can come through this a stronger people of faith."

For those wishing to donate goods, specific needs include sports drinks; baby items including food, formula, diapers and wipes; canned food with easy open lids; large plastic containers with lids; and personal hygiene items.

To learn how you can participate in the relief effort or donate funds or goods, visit www.sbd.org. To read more about relief efforts, see pages 5-9. (SBOM)

'Baptists step up first ... stay the longest'

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The national and international news may have moved on to other topics, but Alabama continues to get a trickle of attention here and there with the steady stream of stars and sports figures visiting tornado-ravaged areas.

That's one reason Frank Page, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Con-

vention's Executive Committee, visited Tuscaloosa on May 25. He wanted to ensure others outside Alabama don't forget what happened.

"It is overwhelming. It is surreal," Page said as he looked across the parking lot of Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. "I'm hoping to encourage our Baptist partners across the nation to continue helping."

(See 'Page,' page 8)

The Alabama Baptist named among top Christian papers

The Alabama Baptist topped the list of the nation's regional Christian newspapers for the 15th straight year.

Based on work published in 2010, Associated Church Press (ACP) gave the paper its top award for regional newspaper — the Award of Excellence.

The paper also won an honorable mention from Baptist Communicators Association (BCA) and an award of excellence from Religion

Communicators Council (RCC). And two specific issues won awards — an award of merit from RCC for the Oct. 7, 2010, issue, and an award of excellence from ACP for the June 3, 2010, front page.

The staff of *The Alabama Baptist* also garnered writing awards from those three organizations plus Evangelical Press Association (EPA).

For the second year in a row, Managing Editor Jennifer Rash and correspondent writer Sondra Washing-

ton won awards for their ongoing coverage of gambling in Alabama. They won an award of excellence from both ACP and RCC and a second-place news-writing award from BCA.

Bob Terry, president and editor of the state Baptist paper, won two honorable mentions from BCA for two of his editorials, "Quran Burning Debate Shows Double Standard" and "God's Goodness Not Determined" (See 'Baptist,' page 10)

COMMENT

Thanks to All the Volunteers

A month after the devastating April 27 tornadoes, the role of volunteers is slowly changing from relief to recovery. Feeding units are being closed down. Shower and laundry units are being deactivated. There are still lots of trees to be cut and debris to be moved to the side of the road where it can be picked up and hauled away. But increasingly, attention is turning to recovery and rebuilding.

Alabama Baptists played a vital role in responding to the needs immediately following the tornadoes. Some of that response was channeled through the Alabama Baptist State Convention disaster relief program, which can document more than 11,000 days of volunteer service during the past month. A great deal of response came from concerned Alabama Baptists who saw a need and responded immediately.

Southern Baptists have the third largest disaster relief response network in the nation — behind the Red Cross and The Salvation Army. In the days immediately after the tornadoes, Alabama Baptist feeding units cooked nearly a quarter of a million meals, most of which were distributed through the Red Cross. Through an agreement worked out by the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board, the Red Cross provides the food Southern Baptist feeding units prepare. Then the Red Cross distributes the food to disaster survivors and first responders. Frequently those receiving the food have no idea of the role Southern Baptists played in providing it, but our Lord knows the way Southern Baptists reach out to those in need.

By being a part of the response plan for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and working with the Red Cross, Southern Baptists are among the first responders providing trained volunteers through chain saw crews, cleanup crews, child care teams, chaplains and many other services. These volunteers proudly wear the yellow shirts signifying they are part of a trained response effort provided by Southern Baptists. Nearly 6,000 people have gone through Alabama Baptist disaster relief training, and about half of those are currently actively involved.

But being a part of a national response strategy also has limitations. Response must be coordinated through FEMA and the Red Cross. Every partner must fulfill its assigned role. Immediate or independent action is limited.

That is one reason a lot of Alabama Baptists simply acted in response to the needs



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

around them April 27 and continue to do so.

In St. Clair County, Ron Warren, who coordinates Alabama Baptists' cleanup/recovery/chain saw teams, had a group of trained volunteers to call on to help him work through the night cutting trees to clear a path for emergency volunteers trying to reach survivors in Shoal Creek Valley.

But in places like Hackleburg and Phil Campbell, church members just grabbed their chain saws and started cutting trees to get to survivors trapped in damaged homes and other places. Such scenes were repeated in countless sites across the state April 27 and the days following.

Taking the initiative

When power went out, numerous Alabama Baptist churches rounded up grills and began cooking hot dogs and hamburgers for people who had no food. Some churches made sandwiches. Before long, stores without power began donating food in danger of spoiling so it could be used to feed people before going bad. Because Alabama Baptist churches took the initiative to reach out to people in need, others joined in and ministries grew.

After the tornadoes struck, a number of churches gathered up volunteers and headed to the areas of need. They were ready for whatever they would find. Church members knew people were in need and were going to be the "presence of Christ" in the midst of trouble. They were there to pull people from the rubble, hug the hurting and pray for those in need.

Alabama Baptist churches became drop-off centers, Red Cross shelters and much more. Volunteers sorted what others donated. Some supervised distribution. Others listened to the stories of those spending their nights in the shelters.

And the efforts continue. Birmingham Baptist Association, for example, worked with the Jeffer-

son County Commission to coordinate two Saturdays of work during which churches were asked to be responsible for helping families in designated areas. More than 850 volunteers ran chain saws, pulled brush and provided other services to help families in need.

In these instances, Alabama Baptist volunteers did not wait to get permission to minister. They simply saw a need and responded as best they could. Did they make mistakes? Probably. One pastor shared that when he did disaster relief training, he recognized how many mistakes he had made before. When the tornadoes struck this time, he knew what to do and how to do it in the best way. Training is always important.

Few of these local efforts will ever show up in statistics about Alabama Baptists' response to the tornadoes. Some volunteer efforts will be known by those on the receiving side. Some will be known only by God. But recognition is not the reason Alabama Baptists volunteer. We volunteer in order to demonstrate God's love for all people in every situation.

Alabama Baptists are indebted to the men and women who wear the yellow shirts, are trained and form a valuable resource by being prepared to respond to great need in a moment's notice. We are indebted to their skills and knowledge that help limited resources make maximum impact. Being a major partner in the nation's disaster relief program is an appreciated contribution.

Alabama Baptists also are indebted to the countless Alabama Baptists who simply allowed Christ's compassion to overflow through them and reached out in immediate ways to help hurting people around them.

One way is not necessarily better or worse than the other. The ways are just different. After all, those receiving the volunteer's ministry seldom know if he or she is trained or not. Most are simply grateful for the help.

A huge "well done good and faithful servant" is due all Alabama Baptist volunteers for the selfless service provided during the past month. Thank you and God bless.

Letters to the Editor

PUBLIC EDUCATION

I don't fear the "harm" to public education you tout in your editorial of April 21.

I view public education as a failing, leftist-thinking and -teaching,

extremely expensive to taxpayers, union-protected job creator whose first objective is employees' benefits, not the education of the children who attend or in any way the conservation

of hard-working taxpayers' money. You rail against taxpayer money being used to fund, in any way, private or parochial schools. Surely
(See 'Letters,' page 14)

THE
ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Someone You Should Know

By Neisha Fuson, The Alabama Baptist

Lena Rylee

Rosedale Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "Amazing Grace"

HOBBIES: Gardening and planting flowers

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after more than 50 years of marriage to Thomas



RYLEE

Lena Rylee has spent years serving her church and community. She has taught Sunday School, led Vacation Bible School and sung in the choir. For 20 years, Rylee has been the director

for Rosedale Baptist Church's Young at Heart senior adult group.

Q: What led you to direct the senior adult group?

A: I enjoy being with our senior adults. ... We have a lot of fun together.

Q: Why have you continued this ministry through the years?

A: They always like me to continue.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: I lead the other members of the team and lead the group in singing, devotion, planning meals and planning games.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: I enjoy serving the Lord.

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

A: I will probably continue as long as I can. It's a part of serving the Lord, and it's what He wants me to do so that's a good thing.

If you know someone who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or e-mail information to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

'Disaster of major proportions'

At least 125 people, 2 Baptist churches lost in Joplin tornado

Pastor John Swadley was still huddled in the crawl space under his house when he began forming the plan for Forest Park Baptist Church's response to the tornado pummeling Joplin, Mo.

Swadley and his family carried a radio with them as they took cover the night of May 22. The local station soon began feeding live reports of the tornado's destruction. They were spared. Joplin was not.

"I knew at that time we were dealing with a disaster of major proportions," he said.

Forest Park is now at the heart of the national relief effort for Joplin. The church is coordinating food, volunteer assignments and donations in the aftermath of an EF-5 tornado (winds of more than 200 miles per hour) that killed at least 125 and injured 750, with nine rescued and an unknown number of people still missing.

The National Weather Service reported it was the eighth deadliest tornado in U.S. history. President Barack Obama was planning on visiting Joplin on May 29.

"We are just helping people like Jesus would," Swadley said. "We are being the church and offering help, hope and healing."

Forest Park's main campus, which runs about 1,000 in Sunday worship, is just a few blocks north of the storm-damaged area in Joplin. The unharmed church building is perfectly situated to serve as a base of operations for relief efforts. Two other Baptist churches were destroyed.

Response began just minutes after the storm as Swadley used his Facebook page to help family and church members find each other. Church leaders determined Monday morning the most urgent need was for food. Hot meals are being prepared in the church kitchen. Forest Park members are also loading sandwiches in the church van and delivering them to people in the city.

The church's "bus barn" storage facility has been designated the receiving and staging area for donated items and where supplies such as diapers, toothpaste and soap are distributed. Offers of help have been pouring in from throughout the country.

"I'm really proud of my heavenly Father and how He is using us for His work," Swadley said.

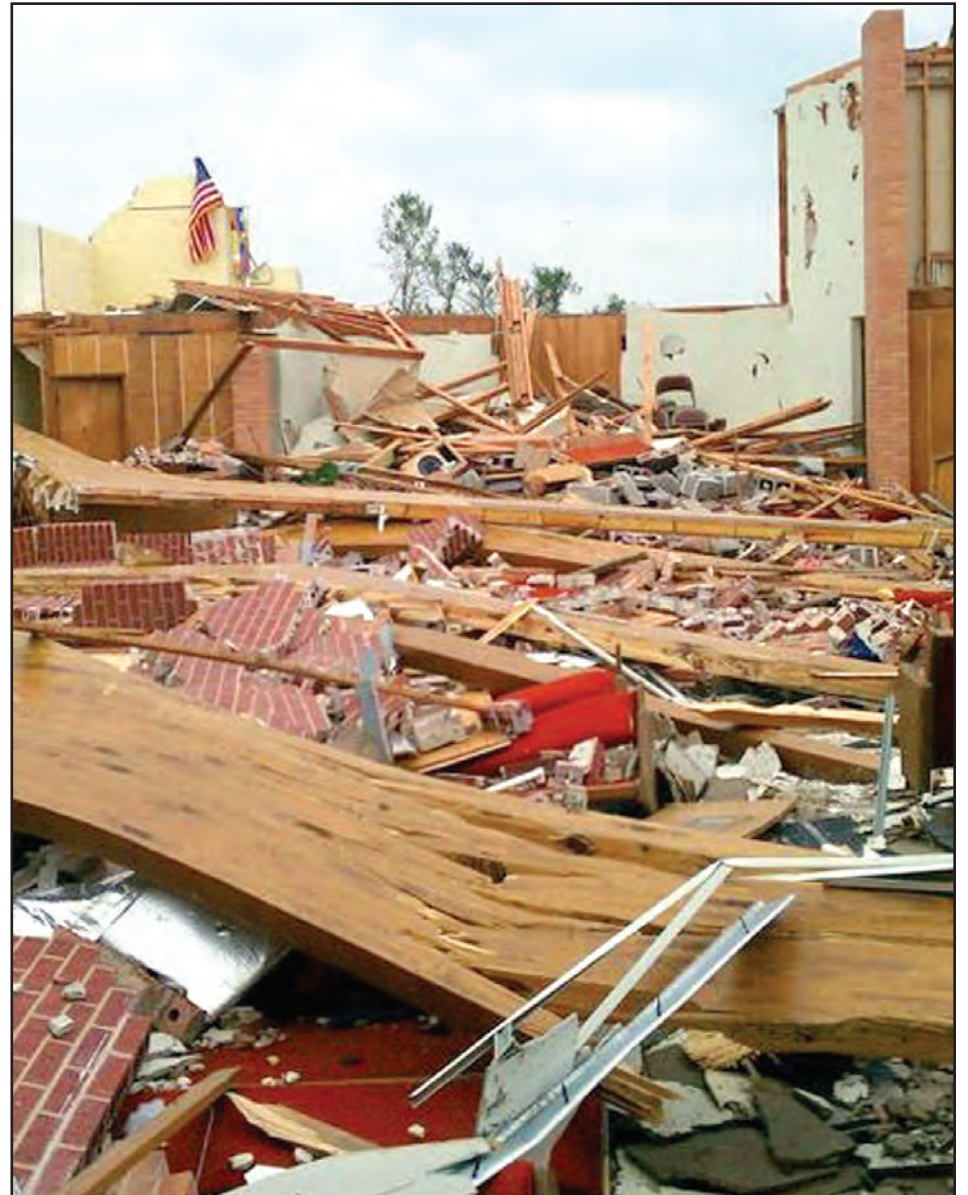
Forest Park is the flagship church for the Missouri Baptist Convention in the Joplin area, said John Marshall, convention president and pastor of Second Baptist Church in Springfield.

"They will be in the thick of it until the end," Marshall said. "They are very community minded. They have three campuses, so they are well-positioned all the way around."

Forest Park members have also experienced great loss. Thirty-one members have uninhabitable homes. Nearly all of them have been taken into homes of fellow members. Many members share stories of how God protected them through the storm.

"When it says in the Bible to show hospitality, our people have stepped up and done that beautifully to help each other and their friends and Sunday School classes," Swadley said.

One of the most urgent needs has been helping members get salvageable belongings collected and out of the rain. (Wednesday included rain showers and scattered thunderstorms.) In addition, grief counseling sessions have been set up at the church and more support groups will be forming. Swadley's message on Sun-



BP photo

DIRECT HIT — The sanctuary of Empire Baptist Church, Joplin, Mo., is a total loss after the May 22 EF-5 tornado. Harmony Heights Baptist Church, Joplin, was also destroyed.

day was titled, "Where do we go from here?"

"We're going to try to construct a worship service where everyone can experience God's presence in a way so that they leave stronger than they came," he said.

Search and rescue

Most debris clearing is on hold while the search and rescue operation is under way, but volunteers are expected in large numbers soon. Samaritan's Purse will use Forest Park as its base of operations, providing expertise and direction while the church supplies workers and resources for the relief effort.

"God sets the agenda for His church. When

something like this happens, we have to set aside our plans and goals in the short term and adjust to what God would have us do," Swadley said.

The recovery and Forest Park's efforts are not short term, Swadley said, but will take many months.

"We're going to have dozens and dozens of people who will be unemployed because the place where they work no longer exists," he said. "We want to be able to help provide financial support so they're not further hurt in their already wounded heart. We want to do our best to cushion the blow as much as we can." (BP)

Storms sweep across US midsection

Violent storm systems continued to wreak havoc in the nation's midsection May 24, as tornadoes killed at least 15 people in three states.

Thunderstorms hampered rescue efforts in Joplin, Mo., where 125 people died May 22 in the deadliest tornado in 60 years (see story, this page).

From there, the system moved west, spawning several tornadoes that touched down in Oklahoma City and its suburbs as Tuesday-afternoon rush-hour driv-

ers struggled to get home from work.

At least 10 people were reported dead, including a 15-month-old boy and his 3-year-old brother who was found May 26 in Falcon Lake near Piedmont.

The May 24 storm system also killed two people in Kansas and three in Arkansas.

This year has become the deadliest year for tornadoes since 1953, with more than 500 deaths from 1,000 tornadoes so far, reported ABC News. (ABP)

Confusion over enforcing the law

State's top officials say they have rediscovered common ground on illegal gambling issue

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

Alabama's gambling scene has been rather quiet lately with the public corruption trial fast approaching. But gambling opponents can't tell whether this means things are under control or being neglected, and the rumor mill is running wild. After all, many have realized through years of witnessing the state's back-and-forth battle with this industry that a lack of activity on the surface doesn't mean powers aren't at work behind the scenes — both for and against gambling.

In the end, opponents have been left hoping Alabama's top legal authorities will enforce the law. But, Attorney General Luther Strange assures Alabamians that he will do his job even though the state's current system for enforcing its gambling laws was recently called into question.

Before former Gov. Bob Riley left office, his system for enforcing the law related to illegal gambling, the Task Force Against Illegal Gambling, forced casino bosses across the state

to shut their doors or face law enforcement actions. But when Gov. Robert Bentley came into office in January, his first action was to dismantle the task force and "fully support" Strange's authority to lead Alabama's fight against illegal gambling.

'Backing away from raids'

Soon Greenetrack casino in Eutaw opened its doors with no opposition, and Bentley's legal adviser, Cooper Shattuck, made a statement to *The Birmingham News*, which at least one Alabama senator says "appeared to be something of a pol-

icy statement backing away from raids." That's when all the excitement began.

Jefferson County Chief Deputy Randy Christian said the Sheriff's Office contacted Bentley and Strange for law enforcement support but "the governor's staff relayed the message to us from the governor that they would not provide any support."

He added, "We asked the governor for support from state troopers and were turned down on two occasions. The second request was for a support of 10 troopers to work the perimeter and provide backup when the search warrant was executed at a gambling establishment in Brighton. We asked the attorney general for assistance with the actual investigation and prosecution and his office was instrumental in assisting us."

Christian said, to his knowledge, no one from the governor's office ever responded explaining the denial of the requests.

Bentley's communications director said both he and, later, Shattuck would give *The Alabama Baptist* comments on this matter, but neither responded by press time.

The Jefferson County refusal led some people to question whether Bentley had also refused law enforcement support for Strange's efforts against gambling. Strange would not comment on discussions he and Bentley have had but said, "He (Bentley) promised to support me, and I expect that he will keep his promise."

Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville, who played a major role in the crackdown on illegal gambling as Riley's policy director and legal counsel, also had his concerns. Taylor was so uncertain that Bentley

would allow Strange access to the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Alabama Bureau of Investigation (ABI) to fight illegal gambling in the state that he drafted Senate Bill (SB) 468 to make sure Strange had the power he needed to enforce the law. The bill "would authorize the attorney general, upon written notice to the governor, to assume supervision and control" over DPS and establish the ABI as a "division of the office of the attorney general."

'Political kingpins'

"I don't want the Legislature to go home in June and all of a sudden the attorney general doesn't have authority to do exactly what the governor said that he wanted him to be able to do," Taylor told *The Alabama Baptist*. "I believe there is no greater threat to the integrity of our elections, our campaign finance systems and good government than the gambling interest. This is a billion-dollar, all-cash, unregulated industry that creates political kingpins. We've already seen it with the trial that's coming up in June. We've already seen the reach of corruption in state government, and I believe it filters down particularly to the local government level. ... When you have so much money in cash going into the pockets of so very few, it appears that it's giving them the ability to stand above the law; and in Alabama, nobody should be above the law."

Strange purposefully steered clear of this bill stating, "My position is to stay out of a dispute between Gov. Bentley and Bryan."

Taylor said he unsuccessfully tried to contact Bentley about his concerns before filing SB 468, but hearing from the governor was not a problem after the bill was on the books.

On May 4, Bentley sent Taylor a letter, which Taylor said he didn't receive until after Bentley sent it to the media.

In the letter, Bentley said he in-

formed his "legislative team to make sure this bill never passes." Bentley called the bill "ill-advised and misguided" and said it "could disrupt the chain of command of the Department of Public Safety." Bentley noted that Taylor, "an officer of the Alabama National Guard," should recognize that as a problem.

One day later, Taylor responded that his bill was not a distraction to anyone since there was no way it could have been considered or passed before the Legislature's two-week break in mid-May. He said his proposal is not unusual and does not disrupt the state's chain of command since the bureau of investigation in other states is a division of the attorney general's office; and on a national level the Federal Bureau of Investigation is a division of the U.S. attorney general's office.

Request declined

"Yesterday morning, as a courtesy, I notified your legislative staff that I had introduced the bill and asked for a meeting with them to discuss it," Taylor told Bentley in his letter.

"My request was declined. Curiously, in the midst of the unprecedented natural disaster facing our state, you chose to inject this issue in the media rather than simply directing your staff to meet with me over the coming weeks to discuss your concerns with this bill. I also note that you had time to call numerous other state officials about the bill yesterday (May 4), but I was not among them."

Taylor added that the transfer of primary responsibility for statewide law enforcement to Strange "would be meaningless ... if the attorney general is not also given the statutory authority to direct and supervise state law enforcement officers when necessary."

Eventually, Taylor said he was able to meet with Bentley's chief of staff and chief legal adviser.

"It was a productive meeting," Taylor told *The Alabama Baptist*. "I'm assured that Gov. Bentley and Attorney General Strange are on the same page, and I think I can say without fear of contradiction that anybody who is interested in reopening or continuing to operate a casino is on notice that the state

is going to enforce the law. I agreed with the governor that I would not press forward with my bill at this time, and he has agreed to support two bills I have."

One, SB 234, changes the severity of possessing a gambling device from a class A misdemeanor to a class C felony, which could result in one to 10 years of imprisonment and up to a \$15,000 fine. The other bill, SB 449, allows Alabama Supreme Court justices and appeals court justices to issue search warrants.

Taylor said the first bill sends a clear signal that "breaking the law will be very serious with significant jail time for operating an illegal casino." He said SB 449 will be helpful in areas

of the state where "judges seem to be very reluctant to authorize a search warrant."

Strange supports both of these bills, which were on the May 26 Senate calendar at press time.

Just in case any questions remain about the state's position on gambling, a May 16 memo sent from Strange to Alabama district attorneys and law enforcement could provide answers. In the memo, Strange explained his office's legal position for "investigating and analyzing the legality of gambling activities in Alabama."

Strange provided the Alabama Constitution prohibition against gambling and slot machines, the Supreme Court's six-point rules regarding legal bingo and the requirement that all bingo whether electronic or paper be operated for charitable purposes.

Meeting requirements

"Under the previous attorney general, an advisory opinion was issued that in effect gutted these requirements," Strange wrote. "I have revoked this opinion. This office will place a substantial focus on ensuring that any bingo facilities operating pursuant to a constitutional amendment meet each and every operational requirement contained in the applicable constitutional amendment. These requirements will be literally and strictly applied."

Strange told *The Alabama Baptist*, "There is no question. We are going to enforce the law." ☐

"We've already seen the reach of corruption in state government, and I believe it filters down."

Sen. Bryan Taylor
R-Prattville

"There is no question. We are going to enforce the law."

Luther Strange
Attorney general

Earthquake in Spain leaves Baptist church damaged; pastor, members homeless

One Baptist church has been badly damaged and a number of Baptists left homeless by the earthquake that affected Spain on May 11.

The buildings of First Baptist Church, Lorca, which was just recently constructed, and the Good Shepherd Mission were damaged by the 5.1 earthquake that caused significant damage in the Region of Murcia in southern Spain.

"The facade and interior walls and partitions have been badly damaged," wrote Daniel Banyuls, director of Social Action Ministries of the Union of Evangelical Bap-

tists of Spain. "Our Baptist work has been seriously affected by the earthquake, but there was no personal injury."

Baptists were left homeless by the tremor that had caused panic among locals and displaced many from their homes. More than 40 families of First, Lorca, including the pastor, lost their homes or fled houses that were badly damaged. Some 90 percent of the congregation has been affected.

At the Good Shepherd Mission, "70 percent of the brothers are homeless after spending the first night in emergency tents," Banyuls

reported. In both congregations, members are staying with family, friends and other church members.

Banyuls expressed gratitude for the support shown by Baptists in Spain and other countries. "We continue to receive e-mails and telephone calls from Spain and abroad inquiring about the situation and consulting on how to help. On behalf of our churches in Lorca, thank you. We continue to pray for them."

The Union of Evangelical Baptists of Spain is a member organization of the Baptist World Alliance. (BWA)

Want to see your news in *The Alabama Baptist*?

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

BAPTISTS RESPOND
Disaster relief efforts continue in state

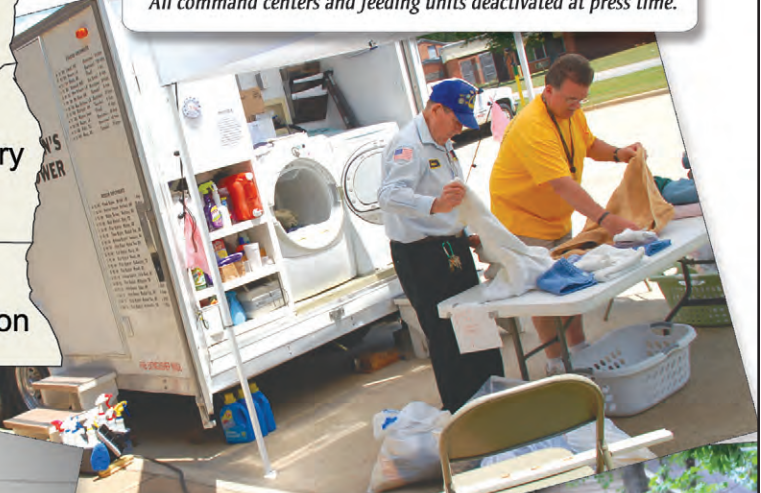
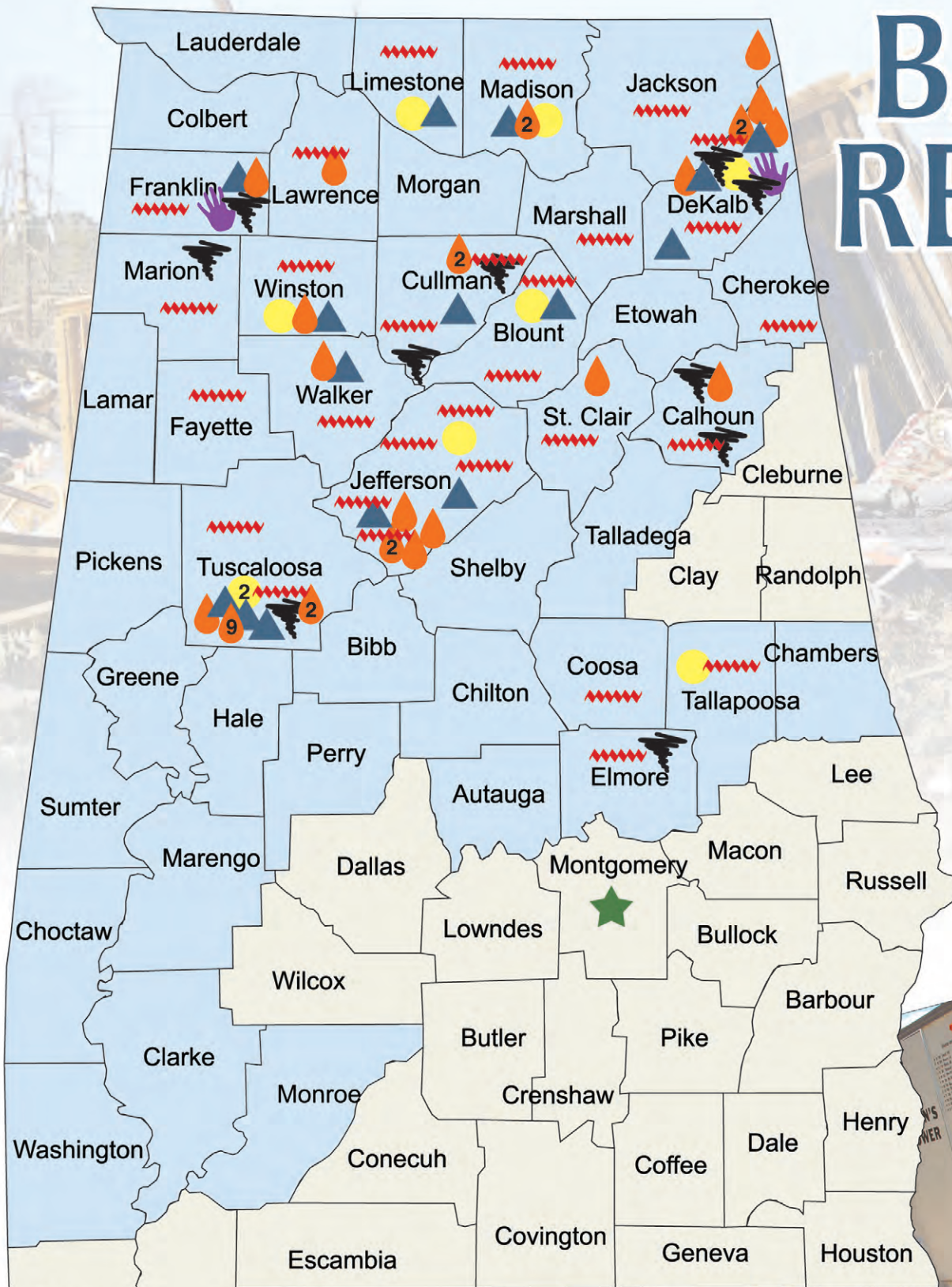
BAPTISTS RESPOND

to April 27 tornadoes

Disaster relief results

-  42 of 67 counties declared federal disaster areas
-  29 associations where Alabama Baptist disaster relief efforts are focused
-  15 on-site command centers (including coordination, housing and shower/laundry units)
-  Main command center
-  9 feeding units
-  20 shower unit locations (locations where units traded out noted by numbers — some shower units also included laundry units)
-  2 child care teams
-  10 Alabama Baptist churches destroyed

All command centers and feeding units deactivated at press time.



'As long as it takes'

Alabama's disaster relief strategist Johnson has 'seen God at work'

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Mel Johnson said overwhelming doesn't even begin to describe the past month, the aftermath of the tornadoes that ripped apart Alabama in late April.

The death toll in the hundreds. The total devastation.

"It's been a tough, tough situation — so many lives lost, and so many needs," said Johnson, disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists.

"It doesn't matter how well you are prepared, you are never equipped to properly mitigate a disaster of that size."

But as he and others have been picking up the pieces in the wake of "our Katrina," he's said he's seen God at work, no question.

'Tremendous openness'

Disaster relief volunteers from 13 state conventions have descended on Alabama, and people recognize the breadth of the ministry and are drawn to Christ and to the church because of it, Johnson said. "We are experiencing a tremendous openness to the gospel."

Local churches in affected areas have had the tremendous opportunity to step into leadership roles in their communities in ways they've never done before, he said. "Com-

munities and churches are coming together in a real way."

And other churches in the state have seized the chance to reach out to their fellow Alabamians in need, and not just for disaster relief, Johnson said.

"Some churches, for example, were going to cancel their Vacation Bible School because so many members were affected by the tornadoes, but other churches have stepped up to the plate to come in and run those for them," he said.

It's part of the second phase of recovery, a new part of the process for disaster relief teams.

This phase will go beyond cleanup and move into long-term rebuild.

"We are working to put together opportunities for pastors and directors of missions to be able to receive some ministry support," Johnson said.

"Not only have they been affected by storms and tragedies, but their church members have been affected too."

State Baptists will also offer some counseling opportunities for those suffering grief and loss, he said.

And disaster relief leaders are also working to partner ministry teams with potential projects, "whether it be rebuilding the church or rebuilding



Photo by Doug Rogers

STRATEGY SESSION — Mel Johnson (top, left) leads the emergency strategy session of Alabama Baptist disaster relief leaders and State Board of Missions representatives at 7:30 a.m. April 28.

the community," Johnson said. "I have seen a tremendous amount of resolve among volunteers, who have done things so far beyond what I would have expected."

How long will Alabama Baptists be involved in the recovery process?

"As long as it takes," he said.

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) has also been providing a huge portion of the broad-brush leadership in the recovery process and will continue to do so, Johnson said. NAMB stepped in to

help coordinate the greater Southern Baptist volunteer response to Alabama, and Johnson said that's "a perfect picture of Cooperative Program support and Cooperative Program spirit."

'Instant concern'

"They expressed instant concern, and when our state was wounded, they came along with other state conventions to the rescue," he said.

"Without that ministry, we wouldn't have been able to respond the way we did."

Mickey Caison, NAMB disaster relief team leader, said Alabama's done a great job at responding, and other states have come in and done well also in the midst of a "very large and very deadly tornado season."

"We have been working to connect the states with sites and will continue to develop long-term recovery plans for that," Caison said. "And as Alabama knows what it needs, we will help put out the call for additional teams to come in and help. It's a large job, but we're all committed to help."

Update on DISASTER RELIEF efforts



Numbers as of press time

Total credentialed personnel deployed	More than 3,000
Total volunteer days worked	11,225
Meals prepared	251,999
Mass feeding units deployed	9
Mass feeding units active	1
Mass feeding units deactivated	8
Showers provided	5,237
Shower units deployed	30
Shower units active	12
Shower units deactivated	18
Laundry loads	1,801
Chain saw jobs completed	1,473
Child care teams deployed	1
Clients served	120
Child crisis response clients served (in schools)	350
Critical incident stress management chaplains	150
Clients served	5,912
Professions of faith	53

Figures for some units and clients served are yet to be communicated to the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Incident Command Center in Montgomery.

Vital disaster relief resource goes live

Ernie Carroll, director of missions for Friendship Baptist Association, has volunteers ready to help. He just needs to know how to connect them to the right need.

Doug Reeves, pastor of East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been running a massive volunteer effort out of his church since April 27 (see story, page 9). But it's time for him to turn the effort over to Tuscaloosa Baptist Association because "this is larger than our church," he said, describing the degree of work still to be done. There are still a lot of unmet needs, he said, but he's not sure how to let others know about them.

Carroll and Reeves are not alone, but the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) and Alabama Baptist disaster relief have found a way to remedy the disaster relief disconnect — a new online resource at www.sldr.org.

"The goal of SBDR.org is to be a functional site helping those interested in disaster relief ministry find their place of service," said SBOM web strategist Chris Mills. "The site provides descriptions of ministry opportunities, training opportunities and connecting points with those on the front lines of disaster



Photos courtesy of the State Board of Missions

areas. The site will provide a link to each association with needs listed in the areas affected by the April 27 storms.

"This site will always be a work in progress," he said. "It is my hope that this be a great resource for Alabama Baptists seeking to find ways to get plugged into disaster relief ministry."

Reggie Quimby, director of the office of global missions (which oversees disaster relief), agreed.

"The main purpose for creating a website for the Alabama Baptist disaster relief ministry is to better tell the story of this growing ministry," he added.

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, said, "Disaster relief ministry is vital, especially in the wake of the April 27 tornadoes. SBDR.org is a tool to assist in training, disaster preparedness resources and connecting volunteers with disaster relief tools.

"One of the key components of this new site will be connecting volunteers with volunteer coordinators and jobs in the disaster areas of across the state," he said. "This will assist us in the rebuild effort."

Along with the online resource at www.sldr.org, disaster relief-related e-mails may be sent to aldisasterresponse@gmail.com. (TAB)

Concord, Pleasant Grove making progress in cleanup

By Lindsey Robinson
 Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The day after an EF-5 tornado ripped through Joplin, Mo., on May 22, student minister and associate pastor Jason Green from Crossroad Baptist Church, Hueytown, made a phone call to First Baptist Church, Joplin. The person who answered the phone was a little surprised.

Hueytown, Alabama? Aren't you? Didn't you?

Yes, we are, Green said. And yes, we did.

On April 27 a super cell storm destroyed homes and businesses in the nearby towns of Concord and Pleasant Grove — the next day, with the support of Pastor Jimmy Bradford, Crossroad Baptist stocked its gym with canned goods, hygiene products, clothes, cleaning supplies and other basic necessities to serve storm survivors in Alabama.

And now it's time to reach out to other states, Green said.

On May 26, Crossroad Baptist sent a church van and a 16-foot trailer filled with the same basic necessities to First, Joplin.

"If we're going to be faithful with what God's provided for us, we have to be faithful to them," Green said.

It's a sign of a step toward recovery in Alabama — that churches can open their doors to provide aid for states suffering from similar disasters.

In Concord and Pleasant Grove, progress is being made. Cleanup crews from the city of Bessemer and Jefferson County, companies and volunteer groups have cleared the largest heaps of debris from properties and moved them to the edges of the streets to be hauled away. The result is a flat, bare landscape dotted with twisted trees and the remnants



Photo by Lindsey Robinson

REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY — Mud Creek Baptist Association volunteers provide a visible presence near Concord with their tent offering free snacks and cold drinks.

of a few homes. It's the next step toward rebuilding, Mud Creek Baptist Association Director of Missions Ken Maddox said.

"You can actually see the ground," he noted. "Before all you could see was rubble."

On the outskirts of Concord, Maddox and disaster relief volunteers Tom Barry and Billy Swindle have manned a tent with snacks and cold drinks for residents for several weeks.

Volunteers still needed

"Our volunteers have dropped off," Maddox said. "We could always use a few volunteers."

Barry has been coordinating

disaster relief in Concord and Birmingham since the tornadoes hit, but he may be called to Missouri or another relief site, he said.

"I'm going to go where He sends me," Barry said.

Near the tent, Concord Highland Baptist Church, Hueytown, stands empty, but with the creak of shifting wooden beams and ceiling tiles in the wind, the building seems full of activity.

The sanctuary is still standing, but the church will have to rebuild in a plot across the street, said Buddy Howell, chairman of the deacons.

He added the church might consider erecting a monument with

some of the bricks from the old church.

The recreation center was reduced to its steel supports, and the parsonage and garage were both destroyed.

Temporary location

Concord Highland Pastor Richard Larson said the church congregation is meeting for Sunday morning and Wednesday evening service at Red River Baptist Church, Concord. Church leaders hope to begin the groundwork on the new Concord Highland in about four months — "hopefully less," he added.

Like most families and busi-

ness owners, leaders at Concord Highland have to wait for the go-ahead from insurance providers before they can rebuild. At First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, Pastor Daven Watkins said many church members are also waiting for insurance allotments to come in. Then people have to decide whether to rebuild or move to a new property, he said.

About one third of the families at First, Pleasant Grove, lost their homes — a fraction that mirrors the overall loss in Pleasant Grove, Watkins said.

"Big decisions are on the horizon for a lot of people," he said.

First, Pleasant Grove, has a food pantry and a FEMA representative on its campus to assist survivors. For many, life is still a struggle, but the worship services at the church echo with celebration and revival, Watkins said.

"I don't hear people getting angry with God or asking why," he said.

"People see God's mercy in the fact that the closet they were staying in was the only thing left standing in their house."

In fact, one church member said the storms were the best thing that ever happened to him, Watkins said. The man had a newfound faith and purpose, and he didn't doubt that God saved him for a reason.

Watkins' prayer is that people in Pleasant Grove and across the state hold on to that sense of purpose and passion for Christ even after all the storms — both literal and spiritual — have passed.

"From day one I've asked people to pray that we aren't missing what God is teaching us," he said. "And pray that we maintain a hunger for God."

First mobile chapel ready for use in Eclectic

The first mobile chapel provided by Alabama Baptist disaster relief is officially on-site at Mount Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic, in Elmore Baptist Association. The chapel was delivered May 20 and set up during the next week.

Mount Hebron East's building was literally blown away during the April 27 deadly tornado outbreak in the state.

While this mobile chapel is the first to come off the line from the factory in Georgia, 12 more units are expected to be placed soon, said Bobby DuBois, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Mobile units are being built for Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell, in Franklin Baptist Association; Emmanuel Baptist Church, Hackleburg, in Marion Baptist Association; and East Side Baptist Church, Cullman, in East Cullman Association.

Other churches getting mobile chapels will be decided as sites are prepared, locations are decided and insurance decisions are finalized, DuBois said.

For more information about mobile chapels and how to help fund this ministry, visit www.sbdb.org.

(TAB)



Photos by Jim Jackson

'God has provided'

Forest Lake ministers through disaster relief center

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

No one can accuse the members of Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, of letting grass grow under their feet.

Within hours of the April 27 tornado, more than 100 survivors living nearby came to the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church for help. A few church members did the best they could to minister amid the destruction. That's when the congregation sprang into action.

Only two days after the storm, Forest Lake Baptist had set up an extensive ministry center in its basement fellowship hall. For weeks, the church has been providing canned food, water, hot meals, baby supplies, clothing, bedding, cleaning supplies, books and some furniture and appliances. It has even provided pet food for animal shelters.

What makes Forest Lake's quick response so amazing is that its facilities, located in the heart of the tornado's path, suffered more than \$1.5 million in damages. But "the Lord has graciously provided," church member Terri Hibbard said. Fellow member and ministry center volunteer Jan Anders agreed. "There is nothing we have needed that hasn't walked through the doors when we needed it."

In fact, God has provided in such an overwhelming way that Forest Lake has even given goods to other churches and organizations. A team of volunteers from Mississippi showed up the first week and provided 1,500 hot dog meals out of a trailer. Volunteers from Florida distributed barbecue sandwiches in the church's parking lot. World Vision, Samaritan's Purse



Photo by Gary Hardin

INSPIRATION TO VOLUNTEERS — Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, members Earline and Boyce Thornton, mother and son, volunteer daily in the church's disaster relief center.

and The Salvation Army have all donated items to the ministry center.

"We're getting supplies from people all over the country," Pastor Donnie Payne said. "A tractor-trailer rig loaded with relief items just rolled onto the church's parking lot a few days ago. The driver came inside and said we could have everything on his truck."

Overflow rooms

The church has received so much, in fact, that many relief items have been stored in overflow rooms.

"We're trying to stock up for the long haul," Payne explained. "We know there will be needs for months to come."

He said the church initially ministered to storm survivors, rescue

workers, police and National Guard troops but is now reaching out to construction workers.

God also has provided volunteers. More than 200 church members have participated in Forest Lake's disaster relief ministry.

"Our church has really come together during this time," member Susan Kincaid said.

In addition to offering relief items, members have listened to and prayed with those needing help. A table in the center of the fellowship hall stacked with Bibles bears a sign that reads, "Take one."

Payne is quick to credit the response of University of Alabama (UA) students.

"University students have risen to the occasion," he said.

"Hundreds have come by the church offering their help."

Church member Earline Thornton, who is in her 70s, has been an inspiration for all volunteers. Even though Thornton lost her home to the tornado, she shows up every day to help in the ministry center.

Billy Gray, interim director of missions for Tuscaloosa Association, said, "When you walk into Forest Lake's ministry center, you think you are in a store. One half looks like a department store, and the other half looks like a grocery store. They are so organized."

The first Sundays after the storm, Forest Lake held worship in the Baptist Campus Ministries chapel on the UA campus. For the past several Sundays, worship has been held in the church's damaged sanctuary.

"We will rebuild," Payne said. "But for now, our main focus is on people who need us." ❧

Page visits Tuscaloosa, prays for pastors

(continued from page 1)

And Page is not just bringing lip service to his plea for help. He's going to model it.

As interim pastor of First Baptist Church, North Augusta, S.C., Page plans to challenge the congregation to pay for a mobile chapel for one of the damaged Alabama Baptist churches.

Several Alabama Baptist churches are in need of mobile chapels (see story, page 7) and one costs between \$60,000 and \$95,000 according to what is needed plus hookup and insurance fees, said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Lance and Page met with five

Tuscaloosa-area church leaders and two associational representatives while at Alberta Baptist Church. Both spent time with the men encouraging them. Page also led the group in a time of prayer.

"I've been involved in disaster relief my whole ministry," Page said. "It is exciting to see what God does to bring Romans 8:28 to fruition."

An opportunity

"God is bringing good from bad, and it's an opportunity to reshape a community for Christ," he said.

"Baptists step up to the plate first and will stay the longest," Page noted. "This is going to have a long-term impact."

Gary Bonner, Tuscaloosa As-

sociation's associate director for new work/missions, said, "It means everything for (leaders like Frank Page) to visit. We've had such great support from our state convention also.

"It lifts you up," he said. "When you know someone loves you that much, it makes you want to do even more.

"It feels hopeless sometimes and it helps to know that he let go of what he was doing to let the people of Tuscaloosa know he cares," Bonner said. "It means a lot."

Other Southern Baptist leaders have expressed concern as well. And Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, visited Tuscaloosa in mid-May. ❧



Photo by Gary Hardin

FOOD FOR THOUSANDS — Volunteers from Baldwin Baptist Association assist the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention feeding unit in Tuscaloosa in May.

Tuscaloosa area receives help from other states

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Duane Bechtold understands his mission. "We didn't come here to cut trees but to tell people Jesus loves them. The chain saws give us the tools to share that message."

Bechtold, the volunteer disaster relief coordinator for Texas Baptist Men's (TBM) efforts in Tuscaloosa, is part of a group of nearly 200 Texas Baptists who assisted in Tuscaloosa for most of May.

TBM came with chain saws, compact tractors, trailers, trucks and other equipment. East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been hosting this group, providing meals and sleeping quarters inside the church.

Another group affiliated with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) brought a mobile feeding unit, chain saw equipment and shower

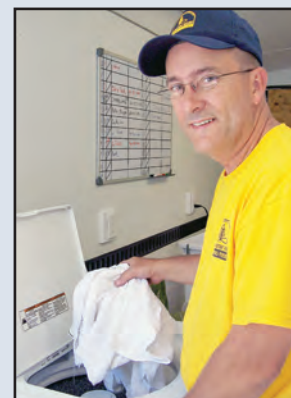


Photo by Gary Hardin

60 LOADS A DAY — Chad Barnes works in a laundry unit in Tuscaloosa.

and laundry units. Two Tuscaloosa churches, North River and Emmanuel Baptist, have hosted the SBTC volunteers.

"We have been washing about 60 loads of clothing each day," said Chad Barnes, who coordinated the shower and laundry units.

Diana Boelman, of Bryan, Texas, said when she heard about the needs in Tuscaloosa, where more than 40 people died and thousands of others had their homes destroyed or badly damaged, she knew God was leading her to go there to help.

Grace Partin, of Pleasanton, Texas, acknowledged a similar prod from the Holy Spirit.

"When you sense God saying, 'Go,' you go," she said.

But Texas Baptists have not been the only ones feeling that call.

A team of 12 from Baldwin Baptist Association, led by Mac Duck, arrived May 17 to assist the SBTC group with the feeding unit. Several Red Cross emergency vehicles arrived in the North River parking lot twice a day, bringing food for the disaster relief volunteers to prepare in the feeding unit. They prepared thousands of plates and then packed them in insulated containers so the Red Cross could distribute them throughout the area.

On June 13, a World Changers group of 200 youth from Georgia is coming to help with cleanup and recovery.

Of course, Tuscaloosa Baptist Association churches have been faithfully ministering to their communities since the EF-4 tornado hit April 27 even though seven of them were damaged (see story this page).

Gary Bonner, the association's associate director for new work/missions, said while it has been stressful, the people of the greater Tuscaloosa area are in a "recovery mood" now.

The initial shock of the storm is beginning to subside, according to Interim Director of Missions Billy Gray, and now people are asking theological questions and seeking answers and meaning to what has happened.

"We have an opportunity here in Tuscaloosa County for our churches to do some great things," he said. ❧

Tuscaloosa churches see tornado as opportunity to minister

Standing outside tornado-battered Alberta Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Larry Corder recaps that it was the church where he and his wife grew up in the 1960s.

He returned seven years ago as pastor, prayerful of revitalizing a church surrounded by poverty, crime and illegal drugs.

The devastation of a tornado now has upended the lives of Alberta Baptist's pastor and its members.

Corder and other Tuscaloosa church leaders gathered in Alberta's parking lot May 25 for a time of encouragement from Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Frank Page, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee (see story, page 1).

"The definition of standing in the gap — you're seeing the best of it here," Lance, an Alabama native and former Tuscaloosa pastor, said to the group amid the noise and dust of bulldozer operators clearing away remnants of tornado-obiterated houses on all sides of Alberta Baptist Church, just two miles from the University of Alabama. In one block adjacent to the church, five people were killed.

Corder and Donnie Payne were from congregations that, as Payne put it, "took a major hit" from Tuscaloosa's April 27 tornado. Payne is pastor of Forest Lake Baptist



Photo by Doug Rogers

'WE'RE GOING TO BE STRONGER' — Larry Corder, pastor of Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, stands in the church's sanctuary a month after the April 27 tornado destroyed the building.

Church in the geographic center of the city.

Other pastors were from churches that rushed into action that evening — Doug Reeves of East McFarland Baptist Church; Dale Glover of Cottondale Baptist Church; and Scott Reynolds of North River Church — along with Tim Foster, chairman of Hopewell Baptist Church's deacons. Also on hand were Billy Gray, interim director

of missions for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, and Gary Bonner, the association's associate director of missions for new work/missions.

Nearly every church, apart from structural damage, had families whose homes or rentals were demolished by the tornado.

"Wounded" was Lance's descriptor for "what has happened on April 27 and since April 27."

"We've been wounded as a state; I have felt wounded emotionally, personally, but not to any degree of ... [others] in the directly impacted areas," Lance said. "I've traveled the state and been in most of the affected regions, which are many, and the evidences are the same: People have been traumatized — but we will recover and we will rebuild and we will renew as the time goes on."

In immediate recovery, for example, mobile chapels are being placed at various sites where churches need a meeting place during the rebuild phase that may entail two or more years (see story, page 7), Lance said.

"Then the renewal part of it ... We hope that we can have a sense of renewal in Alabama — in Alabama Baptist life and our state life — because this is an opportunity in the midst of a crisis to be the people of God, people of faith, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ," Lance said.

Payne said, "We've been praying for God to give us a way to connect with the community ... and share the gospel and meet people's needs. 'We never dreamed that a tornado would give us that opportunity, but it has.'"

'Here for a reason'

The message Payne hopes tornado survivors will hear from fellow survivors in Tuscaloosa's churches: "You're here for a reason and we want to help you find that reason."

Three of the church's senior citizens died of the overwhelming trauma stemming from the tornado, Payne said, while many members were miraculously spared as the tornado tore through their neigh-

borhoods. The church facility sustained an estimated \$2 million in structural damage, the pastor said.

At Alberta Baptist, the tornado buffeted the spiritual breakthroughs the church had been experiencing in recent years, Corder said.

The church had participated in Southern Baptists' pre-Easter "God's Plan for Sharing" evangelistic initiative in 2010 and seen results from its prayerwalking, door-to-door visits and its invitations to worship.

African Americans, high school and middle school students and older children have been baptized in the aging, predominantly white church — including nine on one Sunday, "more than the previous two years combined," Corder said.

And the church had dedicated a \$1.8 million renovation of its sanctuary and education space last October.

Despite the tornado, and a multiple myeloma cancer diagnosis of his wife, Brenda, Corder said the church's spiritual growth seems to be accelerating.

"It seems like Satan always rears his head in the midst of all the good that's happening, so other than a few exceptions, we're seeing our church really pull together," the pastor said.

"I'm challenging our people from the Word of God every week, trying to encourage them and let them know this is not going to be a short-term recovery, it's going to be long-term," Corder said. "We're running the race. We've been given the baton. Our church has accomplished, with God's blessing, so much good over the years. Many people have gone out in the ministry from this church, including myself."

"I believe that our future is bright," he said, "that we're going to be stronger in the future."

Additional Tuscaloosa-area churches damaged by the April 27 tornado are Fleetwood, New Eastern Hills, Pilgrim Rest, Rosedale and Temple Baptist. (BP)

East McFarland Church spared from tornado, jumps into action

Even though the April 27 tornado spared East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, there was no time to spare.

"We just made ourselves available," Pastor Doug Reeves, said of his church, which immediately became a hub of Southern Baptist relief efforts.

Church members began preparing meals in the church kitchen for tornado survivors, first responders and, soon, an influx of Southern Baptist disaster relief workers from multiple states.

"All of a sudden, it just mushroomed," Reeves said.

The church began providing housing for a number of the workers, stretching beyond 100 guests several nights in its full-size gym and Sunday School classrooms.

The meal count grew and churches from as far away as the Birmingham area began to bring in meals.

At 6 each morning, workers could prepare lunches of donated lunchmeat and bread.

At 6:30, breakfast was served. And at 6 each evening, a

"dinner on the grounds" type of meal was served to the over-nighters and others, including a 20-student crew from Auburn University and 40 students from Louisiana State University.

The church pared back its regular activities to one Sunday service a week.

Volunteer coordination

Meanwhile Reeves was keeping track of arriving volunteer teams and tornado survivors needing assistance, matching the available labor with the multitude of local requests such as chain saw help to clear away fallen trees. Reeves is now turning the volunteer coordination over to Tuscaloosa Baptist Association.

Reeves "improvised like no one I've ever seen and turned the church into a staging area," marveled Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Other Tuscaloosa churches that escaped tornado damage, Reeves noted, were quick to join in housing and feeding volunteers, too. (BP)

Gov. Bentley frustrated with Birmingham cleanup delay

It took Birmingham city officials nearly four weeks to agree on a portion of a plan to remove debris from public areas in disaster-stricken Pratt City. Only days before, Gov. Robert Bentley publicly expressed his frustration with the leaders in a May 20 news conference to update Alabamians about tornado disaster relief work around the state.

Bentley said, "Birmingham needs to get to work. We expect them to get along and make some decisions and go to work and get the debris removed."

According to *The Birmingham News*, Mayor William Bell and the City Council could not agree about whether private companies or the Army Corps of Engineers should

clean up Pratt City. Bell and the council blamed each other for the delay.

Eventually the council reportedly hired three private companies to do the public debris removal and passed a resolution asking Bell "to negotiate" with the Corps to do the job on private properties. At press time, Bell's plans were unknown.

While Bentley criticized Birmingham leaders' inactivity, he praised other leaders in storm-ravaged areas who are working well together to help survivors begin the recovery process.

"In some communities, where there was once rubble, there are merely blank slabs of concrete," Bentley said. "Some areas of the state are seeing gradual progress

in the area of debris removal; some are slowly moving in that direction. To date, there has been upwards of 270,000 tons of debris removed."

He also said his office will work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Corps to begin cleaning up Alabama lakes and waterways.

"We expect this to get started very quickly," Bentley said. "The governor's office will lead the cleanup of the lakes and make them safe again."

He also said more than 70,000 people mostly from Madison, Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties have applied for FEMA assistance and asked FEMA representatives to be more sensitive when denying assistance. (TAB)

Baptist communicators in Alabama recognized nationally, earn awards

(continued from page 1)

by a Test Results.” His editorial “Glenn Beck Is Wrong” also won an honorable mention from ACP.

In addition, he garnered a fourth-place award from EPA for “Quran Burning Debate Shows Double Standard,” and he and Rash received a fourth-place award for “Q-and-A with gubernatorial candidates Robert Bentley and Ron Sparks.”

A feature section on “Baptizing Children” won an award of excellence from ACP, and one of the stories inside, “Preparing a child’s heart to respond to Christ,” brought a first-place award from EPA in the evangelism article category for writer Waylan Owens.

Correspondent writer John Evans won two second-place awards for feature stories, one from BCA and one from EPA.

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) was also honored with six awards from BCA.

Jesse Conte won first place in the specialty items category for the design of the Alabama Bible



TAB photo

Drill tote bag. He also got second-place awards for the “Thank You” Cooperative Program print ad, the Spring Ring logo design and the new SBOM letterhead and business cards.

In addition, Conte won an honorable mention for the One Mission Students display banner.

Chris Mills and Doug Rogers won a first-place award in the Internet-based Media category for the SBOM e-newsletter, a monthly e-mail that promotes events and resources to more than 8,500 recipients.

Rogers also won first place in the photography division for a photo of Reggie Quimby and an interpreter sharing the gospel at a medical clinic in Ukraine, and a second-place award in the video

public service announcement or commercial category for “The Next Step,” a joint project with First Baptist Church, Tallassee, to help them prepare for a move to dual Sunday Schools.

Samford University’s office of communications also received a number of regional and national awards under the leadership of Philip Poole, executive director of university communication at Samford.

From BCA, video producer/editor Nathan Troost won first place for a Samford commercial that aired during athletics broadcasts. He and Poole also won another first-place award for the monthly video newsmagazine “The Samford Chronicle.”

Web designer Carissa Bradley brought home a BCA second-place award for the office of admission website.

Samford also received two awards of excellence from RCC — one for the university’s quarterly news publication, “Seasons,” and one for a campus visit brochure that was part of the undergraduate admission brochure for 2010-11. (TAB)

Across Alabama’s Associations

BESSEMER

► **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will host Embassy Quartet and SonRise Christian Vocal Band in concert June 3, 7:30 p.m. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. For information call 205-425-4991. Scott Bush is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Neal Bruce** is the new pastor of **Cahaba View Church, Trussville**. He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Marshia, have two children. The church will hold a covered-dish welcome lunch June 5 following the 11 a.m. service. ► **Deerfoot Church, Trussville**, will hold a Vacation Bible School kickoff June 5, 5 p.m. Activities will follow the

service. For information contact Children’s Director Paige Nelson at 205-655-0798 or visit www.deerfootbaptist.org. Roger Willmore is pastor. ► **East Gardendale Church** will hold a Vacation Bible School kickoff parade June 18, 11 a.m. A picnic will follow. For information call 205-608-0889. Allen Davis is pastor.

CAHABA

► Churches of **Cahaba Association** held Sing About Jesus May 22 at Judson College in Marion. Seven of the 15 churches in the association provided two musical selections of their choice. Bill Wallace is director of missions.

CHILTON

► **Ken Daniel** is the new pastor of **Friendship Church, Clanton**. He previously served as pastor of Lake Highland Church, Birmingham. He also has served other churches in Alabama and South Carolina. Daniel is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and his wife, Susan, have two children.

LAMAR

► **Springhill Church, Millport**, will celebrate its 175th anniversary June 5, 10 a.m. Sunday School will be at 9 a.m. Lunch will

follow the service. Matthew Fancher is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **Cook Springs Church** will celebrate homecoming June 5, 10 a.m. There will be special music. Lunch will follow at noon. There will be no afternoon service. Michael Dowling is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Circlewood Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold Biker Sunday June 5, 10:30 a.m., with Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the State Board of Missions. A barbecue lunch for bikers will follow. Herb Thomas is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Jordan Anderson** is the new associate pastor for **Cubahatchie Church, Shorter**. He is currently attending Troy University in Montgomery. Anderson was ordained and licensed to the ministry May 15 at the church. He is engaged to Whitney Segrest. Perry Neal is pastor.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Central Church, Cullman**, will hold a memorial service June 5, 10 a.m. Lunch will follow. Chasity (Barton) Jordan will sing at 1 p.m. John McKoy is pastor.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Ethridge to be nominated for Pastors Conference pres

NEW ORLEANS — Grant Ethridge, senior pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Hampton, Va., will be nominated as president of the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference at its June 12-13 meeting in Phoenix, Louisiana pastor Fred Luter Jr. has announced. “Dr. Ethridge has been a pastor for over 27 years, serving churches in Georgia, Arkansas and Virginia,” Luter, senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, said in a statement to Baptist Press on May 20. Ethridge is a former president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and has served on various state and national boards and entities.

“Under his leadership, Liberty has grown to five worship services each Sunday,” Luter said of the 6,000-plus-member church Ethridge has led the past five years.

Liberty has received designations as one of the top 100 fastest-growing churches in the U.S., Luter stated, and has been the leading church in the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia convention in Cooperative Program giving, in giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and in baptisms. “With the emphasis today on unreached people groups and church planting, Dr. Ethridge and Liberty have led by example,” Luter stated. “Liberty has adopted UPGs [unreached people groups] in North Africa, Northwest Africa and the Middle East. They have been a part of planting churches in Virginia, Boston and Toronto.”

Ethridge and his wife, Tammy, have four children — a married daughter and son, both graduates of Liberty University, and twin sons who will be attending Liberty University in the fall to prepare for full-time ministry. Another son, Christian, died in 1992. The Ethridges are expecting their first grandson in September.

British Baptists urge end to tax-dodging strategies

LONDON — An annual assembly of British Baptists called on the government to crack down on strategies used by multinational corporations to avoid paying taxes in the Third World.

While not illegal, a Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) resolution said tax-avoidance strategies cost developing countries about \$160 billion in lost tax income that could help them build financial sustainability.

The resolution, recommended by BUGB Treasurer Malcolm Broad, called upon Baptist leaders to make government leaders aware of “the negative impacts of tax evasion and avoidance by some companies” and on the British government to “show international leadership in negotiating international tax transparency for all multinational companies and an end to tax-haven secrecy.”

“It is vital that the underlying structural causes of injustice in our world are addressed if poverty is ever to be overcome,” Broad said in a Baptist Assembly news release. “And tax dodging is increasingly recognized as one of those structural causes too important to ignore.” A Baptist Assembly handout claimed that for every \$10 given in aid to the developing world, \$15 slips out through tax dodging. By reporting just a fraction of the profits they make in poorer countries and hiding the rest in off-shore tax havens, unscrupulous businesses reduce their tax bills while depriving poor countries of revenues that are used by the West to pay for things like basic health care, roads and schools.

The vote aligns British Baptists with a “Trace the Tax” campaign sponsored by Christian Aid, an anti-poverty charity with head offices in London.

BWA provides help for Myanmar earthquake victims

WASHINGTON — Several Baptist World Alliance (BWA) groups are providing help after a Baptist church collapsed in a village in Myanmar following a severe earthquake March 24.

The Baptist church in Kyakuni, a mostly Lahu village in eastern Shan state, near the border with Thailand, collapsed after the 6.8 magnitude quake, leaving 25 dead and 57 injured. The relief and development arm of the BWA sent a grant of \$10,000 and the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation, a regional fellowship of BWA, sent \$5,000.

The Myanmar Baptist Convention mobilized approximately \$11,000 from local churches for emergency relief.

There was extensive damage to roads and bridges and communication was disrupted. Thirty-one churches and monasteries, 11 schools and one hospital sustained severe damage.

An undetermined number of people died as a result of the quake, but some estimates put the death toll at more than 150.

The earthquake was felt as far away as Bangkok in Thailand and Hanoi in Vietnam.

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Pro-life laws aid abortion decline, study shows

Various state-level pro-life measures result in “statistically significant declines” in the country’s abortion rate, according to a study in the State Politics & Policy Quarterly.

The report by Michael New, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Alabama, revealed a correlation between the drop in the number of abortions in the United States and the rise in state regulation of abortion, including laws requiring informed consent, waiting periods and parental involvement.

Abortions in the United States declined by 22.2 percent between 1990 and 2005, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

New said several factors might play a role in the decrease in abortions, but his research focused on the relation of two U.S. Supreme Court opinions to the decline — *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989) and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992).

The Casey decision allowed states to regulate abortions as long as the regulations do not pose

an “undue burden” on women. In 1992, New pointed out, no states had informed consent laws or waiting periods.

By 2005, however, 33 states had informed consent laws and 22 states required women to wait a specified period of time before obtaining abortions. In 2005, 34 states also enforced parental involvement laws.

New says his study proves that such anti-abortion legislation at the state level has played a factor in the decline of abortions between 1990 and 2005.

In his study, New compared states in which judges nullified anti-abortion legislation with states where anti-abortion legislation went into effect. The comparison showed states with enforced laws had larger in-state abortion declines than states where laws were nullified.

The changes brought by Casey and the subsequent decrease in abortions show the pro-life movement is growing stronger, New said, despite its failure to gain the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court opinion legalizing abortion.

“Surveys indicate that more Americans are willing to describe themselves as ‘pro-life.’”

Michael New
University of Alabama

Alabama abortion laws open to interpretation; Senate, House bills seek more restrictions

In Alabama, it is legal to have an abortion when it is necessary “to preserve life (or the health of mother or where (the) fetus is not viable.”

An illegal abortion is defined as “willfully administering a drug, substance or instrument which induces abortion or miscarriage.”

But some Alabama legislators are seeking to do even more to protect the lives of the unborn:

▶ Senate Bill (SB) 201 would require insurance companies to not cover elective abortions unless the insured pays extra. It passed from committee and was read a second time.

▶ SB 183 would keep health care plans from providing coverage for abortion. It received a second reading.

▶ SB 202 would allow the

state to opt out of “allowing abortion coverage by exchange participating health plans.” It passed to the House.

▶ SB 46 would give health care providers, institutions and payers the authority to refuse to perform services that violate their conscience without fear of termination. It has been carried over for further consideration.

▶ SB 308 would require physicians planning to perform non-emergency abortions to administer ultrasounds and display the images to pregnant women prior to the procedure. It was read for the first time in the House.

▶ SB 298 would make it unlawful to administer any abortion-inducing drug to a woman without her receiving an exam by a physician. It was read for the first time in the House.

▶ SB 34 would make it a crime to expose a child at any developmental

stage to a controlled or chemical substance. At press time, it had not passed the Senate.

▶ SB 301 would define the term “persons” to include all humans from the moment of fertilization. It passed to the House. House Bill (HB) 405 is the companion bill, and HB 409 would propose “to define persons to include all humans from the moment of fertilization.” Both were read for the first time.

▶ HB 18 would prohibit elective abortion at and after 20 weeks of pregnancy, based on medical findings that an unborn child is capable of feeling pain. It recently passed the House 69–19 and is pending a third reading in the Senate. Several states have already signed the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act into law. (TAB)

“Even though abortion opponents have been unsuccessful in their efforts to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (1973) they have enjoyed incremental policy success in recent years,” New wrote.

“Surveys indicate that more

Americans are willing to describe themselves as ‘pro-life’ (*The Washington Post* 2009) and a higher percentage of people are willing to support restrictions on abortion (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 2009).”

New’s study, “Analyzing the Effect of Anti-Abortion U.S. State Legislation in the Post-Casey Era,” appears in the current issue of the State Politics & Policy Quarterly, published in March.

(BP)

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Poll results reveal more Americans see Christianity, capitalism at odds

Are Christianity and capitalism a marriage made in heaven, as some conservatives believe, or more of a strained relationship in need of some serious couples' counseling?

A new poll released April 21 found that more Americans (44 percent) see the free-market system at odds with Christian values than those who don't (36 percent), whether they are white evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Catholics or minority Christians. But in other demographic breakdowns, several categories lean the other way: Republicans and Tea Party members, college graduates and members of high-income households view the systems as more compatible than not.

The poll, conducted by Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service, found that although conservative Christians and evangelicals tend to want their clergy to speak out on issues like abortion and homosexuality, they also tend to hold left-of-center views on some economic issues.

"Throughout the Bible, we see numerous passages about being our brother's keeper, welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and healing the

sick," said Andrew Walsh, author of "Religion, Economics and Public Policy" and a religion professor at Culver-Stockton College.

The poll found stronger religious distinctions over the question of businesses acting ethically without government regulation, and whether faith leaders should speak out about economic concerns such as the budget deficit and the minimum wage.

White evangelicals (44 percent) are more likely than other Christians or the general population to believe that unregulated businesses would still behave ethically, and they place a higher priority on religious leaders speaking out about social issues over economic concerns.

Minority Christians, in contrast, believe clergy should be vocal about both areas — particularly on the economic issue of home foreclosures, which 76 percent considered important, compared to 46 percent of the general population.

Noticeable link

"Minority Christians have a deep theological tradition of connecting faith and economic justice and we see that link in the survey," said Robert P. Jones, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute. "Because minorities in the United States

generally continue to have lower incomes than whites, economic issues are also more salient in these congregations."

In other findings:

► Half of women believe that capitalism and Christian values are at odds, compared to 37 percent of men.

► A majority (53 percent) of Democrats believe capitalism and Christian values are at odds, compared to 37 percent of Republicans and 41 percent of independents. A majority (56 percent) of Tea Party members say capitalism is consistent with Christian values.

► Nearly half (46 percent) of Americans with household incomes of \$100,000 a year or more believe that capitalism is consistent with Christian values, compared to just 23 percent of those with household incomes of \$30,000 a year or less.

► Most Americans (61 percent) disagree that businesses would act ethically on their own without regulation from the government. White evangelicals (44 percent) are more likely than Catholics (36 percent), white mainline (33 percent) or minority Christians (34 percent) to say unregulated businesses would act ethically.

"The most idolatrous claim of the Christian right is that the invisible hand of the free market ... is none other than the hand of God," Walsh said, "and any attempt to regulate the free market, according to this theology, belies a lack of faith in God." (RNS)

"Minority Christians have a ... tradition of connecting faith and economic justice."

Robert P. Jones
Public Religion Research Institute

Judson, others noted for service commitment

Several Alabama colleges and universities, including one Baptist school, recently received presidential recognition for their commitment to "volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement" from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

Auburn University and the University of Alabama were placed on the honor roll with distinction. Birmingham-Southern College, Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Judson College in Marion and the University of Alabama at Birmingham were placed on the honor roll.

In all, 641 institutions of higher education were honored.

According to a May 12 CNCS press release, "CNCS oversees the honor roll in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development, Campus Compact and the American Council on Education. Honorees are chosen based on a series of selection factors including the scope and innovation of service projects, the extent to which service-learning is embedded in the

curriculum, the school's commitment to long-term campus-community partnerships and measurable community outcomes as a result of the service."

Patrick A. Corvington, chief executive officer of CNCS, said, "As members of the class of 2011 cross the stage to pick up their diplomas, more and more will be going into

the world with a commitment to public service and the knowledge that they can make a difference in their communities and their own lives through service to others, thanks to the leadership of these institutions."

For a list of honorees and descriptions of their service, visit NationalService.gov/HonorRoll. (TAB)

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Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

When I started in this business over six years ago there was only one kind of reverse mortgage — an adjustable rate. Fortunately, FHA realized that "one size does not fit all" and in the past couple of years they have introduced three great new products.

The fixed rate was one of the first. People really wanted a fixed rate option, and it sure has been popular. After that, FHA introduced a program that allows seniors who are 62 or older to purchase a home with a reverse. Some of us may want to consider this if we are trying to move closer to the kids or farther away (ha). Perhaps we need a home that is all one level, or maybe we want to downsize. The newest program is called the "Saver," and it gives seniors access to all the benefits of a reverse mortgage but at a fraction of the cost. Normally, FHA's initial mortgage insurance charge is two percent of the value of

the home, but with the "saver program," this cost is almost non-existent. For example, on a \$200,000 home, the initial cost for FHA's insurance is \$4,000, but with the saver it is \$20.

This may be a good plan for those who are thinking about opening up a line of credit at the bank. Like a home equity line of credit, you can draw on it and pay it back whenever you like, but with a reverse mortgage there are NO required monthly payments as long as one homeowner is living in the home. Many seniors are using this as a "piggy bank" to draw on whenever they have special needs or just need a little money. They are more at ease doing so because they know they won't have to make a payment back to the bank next month.

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Verse by verse, word by word

Researchers complete 1st phase of online database of New Testament textual changes

Working in a cluster of offices above a LifeWay Christian store, Bible scholars are buried in a 20-year project to codify the thousands of changes, verse by verse, word by word — even letter by letter — that crept into the early New Testament during hundreds of years of laborious hand-copying.

Their goal: to log them into the world's first searchable online database for serious Bible students and professional scholars who want to see how the document changed over time.

Their research is of particular interest to evangelical Christians who, because they regard the Bible as the sole authority on matters of faith, want to distinguish the earliest possible texts and carefully evaluate subsequent changes.

The first phase of the researchers' work is done. They have documented thousands of creeping changes, down to an extraneous Greek letter, across hundreds of early manuscripts from the second through 15th centuries, said Bill Warren, the New Testament scholar who leads the project at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Early changes

After 10 years of work and the interruption of Hurricane Katrina, the seminary's Center for New Testament Textual Studies has logged those changes, amounting to 17,000 pages of highly technical notes, all in Greek, into a searchable database.

Many of the early changes are well known, and have been for hundreds of years. Study Bibles mark scores of changes in italicized footnotes at the bottom of what often seems like every page.

But nowhere have so many changes been collated in a single place and made searchable for scholars and serious students, Warren said.

Nor is there an Internet tool like the one being constructed now in



RNS photo

THE TEXT — Scholars at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary are in the midst of a 20-year project to catalog and post online most of the thousands of text changes of the New Testament.

the second phase of the project: the history of substantive textual changes.

This fall, the New Testament center will publish an online catalog of substantive textual changes in Philippians and 1 Peter. Warren estimates there's 10 more years of work to do on the rest of the New Testament.

Those with more than a passing familiarity with the New Testament know its 27 books and letters, or epistles, were not first published exactly as they appear today.

The earliest works date to about the middle of the first century.

They were written by hand and successors were copied by hand. Mistakes occasionally crept in.

Moreover, with Christianity in its infancy and the earliest Christians still trying to clarify the full meaning of Jesus, His mission and His stories, the texts themselves some-

times changed from generation to generation, Warren said.

As archeologists and historians uncovered more manuscripts, each one hand-copied from some predecessor, they could see occasional additions or subtractions from a phrase, a verse or a story.

Common words

Most changes are inconsequential, the result of mere copying errors, or the replacement of a less

common word for a more common word. But others are more important.

For example, the famous tale in John's Gospel in which Jesus challenges a mob about to stone a woman accused of adultery: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," is a variant that copyists began inserting at least 300 years after that Gospel first appeared.

In the conclusion to the Gospel

Egypt on 'worst violators of religious liberty' list

A religious freedom watchdog panel has added Egypt to its list of the worst violators of religious liberty, citing attacks on Coptic Christians that occurred surrounding the downfall of former President Hosni Mubarak.

"The Egyptian government engaged in and tolerated religious freedom violations both before and after President Hosni Mubarak stepped down Feb. 11," said Leonard Leo, chairman of the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which released its report April 28.

"In his waning months, religious freedom conditions were rapidly deteriorating and since his

departure, we've seen nothing to indicate that these conditions have improved."

Members of the independent commission also continued their criticism of the Obama administration for not making religious freedom a higher priority.

'Meaningful actions'

"President Obama's administration has yet to break from the practice of previous administrations of keeping the issue of religious freedom on the margins of U.S. foreign policy," the report states.

Leo acknowledged the recent confirmation of Pastor Suzan Johnson Cook as the new ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom and said he hopes it will lead to "meaningful actions" in the near future.

Commissioners, who are appointed by the president and members of Congress, listed a total of 14 countries that they recommend the State Department designate as "countries of particular con-

cern." The department currently lists eight such countries, a number that remains unchanged since President George W. Bush left office.

Countries on the State Department's list include Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

In addition to Egypt, USCIRF says the list should also include Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.

State Department spokesman Evan Owen differed with the commission's analysis, saying his department issues reports on both religious freedom and anti-Semitism and now has special envoys for both areas.

He said the department will consider USCIRF's recommendations as it weighs updating its list of the worst violators of religious freedom.

"It's a long process and with the appointment of an ambassador for religious freedom, we expect it to be a more streamlined process in the future," he said. (RNS)

Warren said the story wanders across several early John manuscripts, appearing in a variety of places.

It even shows up in two early copies of Luke.

"But probably it was never part of John's Gospel, in the original form," he said.

In effect, early copiers were taking what modern readers would recognize as study notes and slipping them into the texts, a process that began to tail off around the ninth century, Warren said. (RNS)



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Trust God, others around you in crises

It's funny what crisis can do to you. You learn so many things about yourself that you never really knew. I am thinking specifically about the current national economic crisis and how it has affected my workplace and family.

It is true that in times of crisis, you hold firmly to what you know.

You cling to what has been successful for you in the past. You hold tightly to ways of operating.

Unfortunately, for me — and many of us — holding tightly to ways of operating soon begins to cross the line into controlling. Then we have to deal with that word — trust.

Let me explain.

I look around at my family and

*A Thought
for Women*

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



colleagues, and I know I can be trusted. I can be trusted to do a good job. I can be trusted because I am committed. I can be trusted because I share a vision of what our family or work can be. I can be trusted because I care.

If I discovered that someone did

not trust me in these things, then I would be hurt. I would be hurt because I know me.

However, I have to ask myself, as much as I want to be trusted in these things, do I trust others? Do I trust the people around me?

Enter the crisis.

Finances are not the same. Work is not the same. Savings are not the same. Stability is not the same. Relationships are not the same. Needs are not the same.

I hold tightly to what I know. I cling to what has been successful in the past. I trust in myself because I know me.

Unfortunately, in an effort to do what I believe is right, I alienate those around me. In this time of cri-

sis, I speak more than I listen. I tell others what to do more than I work alongside them to solve problems. I become controlling and almost distrustful of others.

If you were to identify the greatest crisis in the Scripture, then what would it be? I would choose when Jesus ascended into heaven. Jesus was leaving.

The Law, the old way of drawing close to God, had been turned on its ear. Only a small group believed. What would happen? What did happen? Would it be accurate to say God trusted others to accomplish His will?

Certainly the Holy Spirit continued to guide, but the message was entrusted to a small group of people. They were imperfect people, to be sure. Still they became an active part of the process of sharing the news that Jesus saves.

What would happen if I follow that example?

A Takeaway Value . . .

God has called me to my life, but He also has called the people around me.

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

Want to know God?

By Pastor Terry Birdsong
Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Eufaula

Imagine just leaving the eye doctor after your yearly examination. He has pronounced that your eyesight is just as good as a 10-year-old child's.

As you exit the building, you walk out into total darkness. You can't even see your own hand in front of you.

The idea of this is very scary.

You know that your eyes are working, but you fail to see anything.

This is what a person who is lost is experiencing. The sad fact is he or she doesn't realize it.

God is the Light that is eternal. He shows us so many things as we come out of the darkness.

As we get to know God, the blessings that He has for us are innumerable. But the blessings are for those who have accepted His Son, Jesus Christ, as Savior.

It is so easy to begin a personal relationship with the Father — all you have to do is pray.

Admit to God that you are a sinner, repent of your sins and forsake them. God will then lift the veil of darkness from your eyes that Satan has placed over them, and the light of Christ will begin to shine. You will then realize the darkness you have been in.

As you grow in knowing God, the brighter His light will be in you.

Every day will be a joy and there will be a song in your heart and Scripture on your lips.

Letters

(continued from page 2)

you know many students are going to these schools with Pell Grants, veteran's benefits, student loans and many other forms of educational assistance, all provided by the federal government and being spent at these private and parochial schools. "Me thinks you protest too much." I was once a public school teacher and later an elected public official, and my wife spent 45 years as a public school employee, much of it in the central office and at the

university level, so I have plenty of information from within the system to make a judgment.

James A. Bonner
Florence, Ala.

CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Thank you, Dr. Terry, for your editorial in the April 21 issue on the Arizona case regarding tax credits for private Christian school tuition. You are not a "contrarian" as you assert but an astute historian with an insightful perspective on the vola-

tile issue of church/state separation.

Another point that must be made is this: If the government can directly or indirectly show support for Christian schools today — what is to stop them from doing the same for religious schools of any type (Muslim, Wiccan, etc.) tomorrow? I think that if this were to happen, the same people praising this ruling now would be crying fowl — but too late!

Doug Green
Dothan, Ala.

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'Support for the good decisions'

US teenage birth rate decreases to record low of 37 percent, CDC report shows

Statistics indicate that the teenage birth rate in the United States decreased 37 percent from 1991 to 2009 to a record low.

The most significant decrease — 50 percent — among black girls.

The report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in April said overall approximately 4 percent of girls ages 15 to 19 gave birth in 2009, marking the lowest level in the nearly 70 years such data has been recorded.

"Paralleling the decline in births to teens aged 15-19 years during 1991-2009, the percentage of high school students who had ever had sexual intercourse and the percentage of sexually active students who did not use any method of contraception at last sexual intercourse both decreased," the CDC said.

Among key points from the study:

▶ Teen childbearing costs the United States about \$9 billion annually.

▶ Among high school students,

46 percent have had sexual intercourse.

No contraception

Among sexually active students, 12 percent did not use any method of contraception at last sexual intercourse.

▶ Approximately half of U.S. teens have talked with their parents about how to say no to sex or about methods of birth control.

"While these statistics certainly do not mean that teen sexual activ-

ity is not an issue of concern, they do compel us to examine what is working and what is causing teens to reject the 'everybody's doing it' myth promulgated in the media," said Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association.

"While some argue that teens simply need access to more birth control and devices, perhaps a closer look would show us that they need more support for the good decisions they are mak-

ing to abstain," Huber added.

"Current public policy has failed to recognize and support the positive behavioral trends among teens by failing to provide resources for comprehensive risk-avoidance sex education."

Positive direction

Huber urged leaders to increase the positive direction of teen sexual health by empowering teens with the skills to resist early sexual activity. (BP)

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Retired Hale Association director of missions Felkins dies at 90

Noah Ray Felkins, retired director of missions (DOM) for Hale Baptist Association, died April 26.

He was 90. Felkins attended Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and served as a Southern Baptist minister for 69 years.

He was pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches: Moundville Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Cordova; Southside Baptist Church, Talladega; Mulberry Baptist Church, Maplesville; First Baptist Church, Parrish; and Kansas Baptist Church.

He also served as DOM for

Bethel Baptist Association for more than 10 years and as DOM for Hale Association for more than 10 years.



FELKINS

Felkins served with the Army in North Africa during World War II.

At the time of his death, he was a member of Rosedale Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, where he had served as interim pastor twice. Felkins preached his last sermon at Rosedale Baptist in April.

He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Jeanette; three sons; nine grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. (TAB)

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Decatur's Central pastoral team follows fathers' footsteps

By Martine Bates Sharp
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Vroom! The sound of the motorcycle entering the fellowship hall was a surprise to the people attending the Valentine's banquet. The fact that their pastor was driving it was not as surprising. The people of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, have learned to expect the unexpected from their pastoral team.

Senior Pastor Rob Jackson and Associate Pastor Bryan Blass are comfortable being on the "cutting edge;" they grew up with parents who did the unexpected — parents who also served on the same church staff when Jackson and Blass were children.

Jackson was 10 when his father, Robert "Bob" Jackson, was called as pastor of First Baptist Church, Monroeville.

Twelve-year-old Blass' father, A.B. Blass, was the church's minister of music. His mother, Saranne, played the piano, and Jackson's mother, Gail, taught Sunday School.

The parents worked closely together, and the sons became fast friends.

'Cutting edge'

Blass pointed out that their parents were ahead of their time. "They used synchronized lights and tape tracks for our youth choir back then."

Jackson agreed. "Everything they did was cutting edge. Now we try to constantly do cutting edge things to reach people for the Lord."

Both men believe that their cur-

rent relationship was in the works even when they were children.

"There are no accidents," Jackson said. "God knew even when we were riding minibikes together and Bryan's dad was teaching me to water ski. It's exciting."

He and Blass were close both inside and outside the church, spending time visiting in each other's homes.

Each was heavily influenced by the other's family. Blass' father led the youth ensemble, and both he and Jackson sang in it.

"Bryan's dad was one of the most Christlike gentlemen I've known," Jackson recalled. "We had one of the best choirs around. He taught me to appreciate music and trained me in parts. I can still pick up parts because of what he taught me."

Blass was impacted in many ways by Jackson's father but particularly by his work ethic. First, Monroeville, had three vans named Faith, Hope and Love. Jackson's father drove Faith on choir trips, while Blass' father drove Love. Often while the choir performed, Blass noted that Jackson's father would slip out to the van to work on his sermon.

Blass remembers spending the night at the Jackson house and listening to Bob Jackson prepare his sermon for the following day.

"On Saturday nights, he was up most of the night, preaching to the grandfather clock," Blass said.

Blass did not receive a call to preach until he was an adult though he felt a call to Christian service at an early age.

"I thought at first that I was

called to be a Christian doctor," Blass said.

"I can trace my call back to sixth grade during VBS (Vacation Bible School) at a service led by Rob's dad."

Blass was a deacon at Central Baptist when he first publicly acknowledged a call to preach in 1996 while visiting First, Monroeville, on Easter.

That same year, Blass, who was working as a sales representative, began attending New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary extension in Birmingham, where he earned a master of divinity. He served New Home Baptist Church, Titus, and First Baptist Church, Gadsden, as pastor before returning to Central earlier this year.

Jackson was a pharmacist before answering the call to ministry. He earned a master of divinity and doctorate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and served as associate pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky., and evangelism associate for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions before being called as Central's pastor in 2003.



Photo by Steve Moon

LONG-TIME FRIENDS — Senior Pastor Rob Jackson (left) and Associate Pastor Bryan Blass of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, believe God knew when they were childhood friends they would be serving together now.

The two men acknowledge the benefits of having known each other since they were children.

Serving together

"The trust was already there," Jackson said. "And the knowledge. We each understand how the other operates. I run out there and Bryan works on the details. God sent Bryan here to shore up areas of need, so we can reach more people."

Blass summed up the present

situation in a prayer: "As you have reunited us to serve together at this time, we acknowledge that this does not catch you by surprise. You have been weaving a tapestry of ministry and service throughout our lives, as we have both been blessed by Christian parents and grandparents. We stand on their shoulders and others whom you have allowed in our path over the years as we now have the honor and privilege of serving Jesus Christ here at Central."



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- First Priority, BE Co-op
- Decatur Baptist Church
- Plans to attend Calhoun Community College and Athens State University for an accounting degree



Antonio Taylor Hanson

- Decatur High School
- Decatur Baptist Church
- Plans to attend Calhoun County Community College and major in psychology, then pursue a masters in counseling



Taylor Matthew Lucy

- Homeschooled under Anniston Christian Academy
- NCFCA Speech and Debate Team; Won gold and silver medals in the ACTE Technology Fair, regional and state levels; Home School representative for Youth Leadership Calhoun County; Camp C.I.T.; 2010 Alabama Honors Choir; 2011 All State Choir; Won several scholarships
- Anniston Bible Church; member of youth group and softball team, VBS worker, attended youth camps and mission trips
- Chick-fil-A employee
- Plans to attend Auburn University on a Scholarship to pursue a degree in Mechanical and/or Aerospace Engineering



Jeremy Wayne Melton

- Fayetteville High School
- Key Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Beta Club, Best Offensive Player and Pitcher, All County Baseball Team, Honorable Mention in All State Baseball Team, All County Basketball Team, UAB Fall League Baseball, East/West Baseball All Star Teams, Won several scholarships
- Marble City Baptist Church, Sylacauga
- Plans to attend Talladega College on Baseball Scholarship



Timothy James "T.J." Reach

- Pleasant Grove High School
- National Honor Society, Ranked 16th out of 168 in his senior class
- Westmont Baptist Church, Birmingham; member of choir, mission trip teams, active in local mission projects
- Will enter the United States Marine Corps



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 5

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson Professor of Christian Studies, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

ACCEPT YOUR COMMISSION Jeremiah 1:4-14, 17-19

Imagine living among a people whose forefathers had a reverent fear of God, established civil government under His authority and regularly prayed for Him to be glorified by their nation. Imagine that same nation being dissatisfied with God's laws and becoming more and more concerned with the laws, behaviors and faiths of surrounding nations and people groups. God sent spokesmen who called the nation to repent. Instead of turning back to God, however, it mocks the heralds for their naysaying. Some of these men are even executed for their focus on righteousness over patriotism.

Jeremiah was one of God's chosen spokesmen to the people of Judah. God's great nation had split, and Israel's people had already been scattered among other nations. Judah remained, in large part because of the leadership of godly kings. The kingdom was in turmoil, however, because of a growing fascination with spiritual power apart from God's demanding laws. It worshiped constellations, fertility gods and idols made by its own hands. It sacrificed its children to foreign deities in order to appease them or gain their favor.

Receive God's Plan (4-6)

God spoke to Jeremiah and the young priest was terrified. God had work for him to do? God set him apart before he was born? God was calling him to be a missionary? Jeremiah did not want the job. He felt that he was unqualified. After all, priests served from age 30 to 50 (Num. 4:46-47). Jeremiah felt that he was far too young and inexperienced.

When God calls you to a task, your age is not an issue. Jeremiah was a young man, and Moses was a senior citizen (Ex. 3). Neither of them wanted to obey, yet God used both of them for His purposes. Neither man felt qualified yet God equipped him for the task. As you respond in obedience to God's call, He will equip you. What if you are unsure that God is calling you to the task? "Experiencing God" author Henry Blackaby said, "When God speaks, you

know it is God and you know what He says."

Receive God's Power (7-10)

God responded to Jeremiah's protest with two negative commands and a twofold commission. Do not make that excuse about your age, and do not be afraid of anyone. Like Isaiah's calling (Isa. 6), Jeremiah's mouth was touched and prepared for service.

In a similar way, God is preparing and empowering you for the work to which He is calling you. To quote the founder of China Inland Mission, Hudson Taylor, "God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply."

Receive God's Revelation (11-14)

Jeremiah received two directive visions from God. The almond branch seems to test the prophet's ability to see clearly what God was revealing. The second vision, a boiling pot, indicates the bubbling, smoldering, caustic and immediate judgment that the nation is facing for its rebellion against God.

Such a vision is applicable for our time. Christians and the church must recognize that while there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, there are serious consequences for unrepentant sin. Ignoring God's call in order to pursue our own agenda is an invitation to immediate chastisement by the Lord.

Receive God's Resources (17-19)

The intervening verses record God's revelation of judgment upon Judah. God would employ peoples from the north to discipline His wayward kingdom. It desired to be like its neighbors, rather than reflecting God's holiness.

God announced to Jeremiah that there was no need to fear. Though his message would be unpopular and rejected even by Judah's leaders, he was to remain faithful to the calling. God would deliver him from anyone who dared to harm him.

Jesus taught His disciples to be concerned about God, rather than fear men (Matt. 10:28). As you recognize God's calling in your life, use the resources He has given you. Rely upon His strength. Listen for His direction. Go about the task He has given you. Discover your task and do it.

Bible Studies for Life By James Strange Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

WHAT DO YOU OWN?

1 Chronicles 29:10-20

Southern Baptists receive guidance from Article 13 of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), which contains a statement giving credit to God for all of life's blessings. James agrees: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights" (1:17). Reworking imagery from Genesis 1:3-4, James reminds us that the creation is good, and God intended it for a blessing. In this way, James enters the great stream of Israelite, Jewish and Christian traditions that remind us that our generous God alone is the source of good.

As a result, when we act generously, we take up God's ways.

The first step in living a life of generosity is to realize that all of creation belongs to God, and that we are not its owners but only its stewards.

Furthermore, we must remember that the whole setup is temporary, for only a small part of God's creation is under our stewardship and only for a little while. "For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you," says David (29:14).

God Owns Everything (10-11)

Verses 1-9 tell us that although he himself did not build God's House, David provided lavishly out of his own wealth for the objects made of precious metals and stones. When the assembled people heard his pledge, they too were inspired to give out of their own wealth.

We are so used to hearing these ideas that we might not give the verses a second glance: David owns great wealth, and he gives of it freely; the people also own wealth, and they too give.

It is not until we read verses 10-11 that we realize that human's "own" nothing; rather, it is God who owns all that is. Therefore, when David and the people give, they give not of their own wealth, but of God's.

David's prayer flies in the face of attitudes that claim, "I earned this money, and it's mine to do with as I please."

God's answer is: "I own everything, and you should do with it what pleases me."

God Gives Us What We Have (12-16)

That point is reiterated here. Because God gives us what we have (that is, what we have stewardship over, for a brief time), to give to God is to give back to God what is already God's. By that same token, to give to others is to give out of God's abundance. I am suspicious that this is one reason that giving is so important to the biblical authors. It is certainly true that it is good to build beautiful testament's to God's glory, and it also goes without saying we must clothe the naked and feed the hungry, as Jesus commanded. However, it is also important to act generously because to do so is to become that much more like God. Giving helps the one who receives, and it provides visible testimony of God's greatness, but it also transforms the giver.

God Examines Our Hearts (17-20)

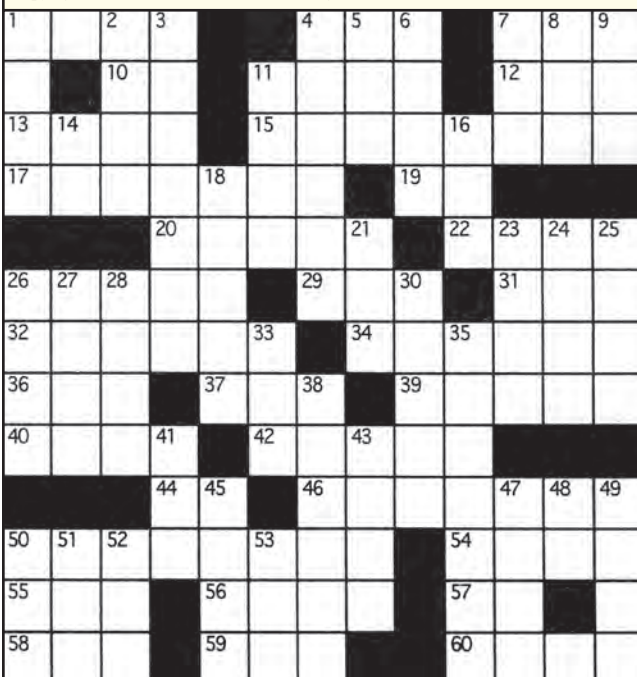
When David prays, "I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness," he lays the foundation for the great Jewish and Christian thinkers to come, including Jesus Himself. The biblical prophets, the Rabbis, Jesus and Paul will agree that when God requires anything (in the Ten Commandments or in the Law as a whole), what God really wants is the human heart.

That is why, according to the Jewish Sages, one can fulfill the obligation to stand while praying by "directing the heart" to God. That is also why it is not enough, according to Jesus, to avoid adultery if you lust in your heart or to avoid murder if you hate. Similarly, we might add that it is not enough to give much if one gives grudgingly or fearfully or reluctantly. As David did, God wants us to give — whatever we give and to whomever we give it — freely. God wants our hearts. This is, after all, how God gives to all of creation.

The answer, therefore, to the question that forms the title of this lesson is, "Nothing." Paradoxically, the answer to the question, "What does God want?" is, "The most important thing."

Christian Crossword

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Across

- "And if a son, then an ___ of God." (Gal. 4:7)
- Energy.
- Printer's measures.
- Eastern U.S. state.
- "For there is hope of a ___, if it be cut down." (Job 14:7)
- Churchill gesture.
- High school ___.
- Nard.
- Twelve lions stood around his throne. (1 Kings 10)
- Vowels in chorus of children's song.
- Carter cabinet member.
- North Atlantic food fish.
- Deborah accompanied him.
- They travel through the Loop.
- Year. (Sp.)
- "And the king of the south shall be moved with ___." (Dan. 11:11)
- "The ___ pot is for silver." (Prov. 17:3)
- Small bit.
- "Eat not of it ___ ... but

roast it with fire." (Ex. 12:9)

- To tend.
- Father of Peleg and Joktan. (Gen. 10:25)
- Sister of Absalom.
- Preposition.
- "___ shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." (Ps. 91:10)
- After dusk. (poet.)
- Congolese river that forms Ubangi.
- Light touch.
- Sanction.
- Egyptian sun deity.
- Tropical bird.
- Son of. (Heb.)
- Fencing implement.

Down

- Rose seedcases.
- "An ___ is nothing in the world ... there is none other God." (1 Cor. 8:4)
- Dismissal.
- "The ___ of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2)
- Even. (poet.)
- St. ___ (FL city.)
- Palindromic name.
- "Quit you like ___." (1 Cor. 16:13)
- Arrange.
- Sat. TV fare. (colloq.)
- Recto. (abbr.)
- Wrong. (prefix)
- Preposition.
- "___ shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." (Ps. 91:10)
- Mischievous one.
- Absalom's defining feature.
- Yearbooks. (abbr.)
- Venetian magistrate.
- Alphabet sequence.
- Jezebel's "better" half.
- The ___, Douglas novel.
- "The Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of ___." (Num. 3:14)
- Rodent.
- "Bring them up in the ___ and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4)
- "Your children shall ___ in the wilderness." (Num. 14:33)
- Tore.
- "And if it be ___ that I go also." (1 Cor. 16:4)



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Muslim villagers beat Christian for defending girls

GANGNI, Bangladesh — Muslim villagers beat a 22-year-old Christian man in April for defending Christian girls against routine harassment and bullying, sources said.

Sipon Mondol was beaten April 20 while returning to his native village of Nittanandapur from Gangni, Meherpur district, some 120 miles west of the capital city of Dhaka, his father said.

On April 15, at a cultural event to celebrate the Bengali New Year, Poresh Mondol said his son had defended Christian girls against the slurs of a group of young Muslim men in an exchange that led to a gang fight.

The Mondol family informed the parents of the young Muslim men, and village elders assured the Christians that they would resolve the long-standing problem, telling them that such harassment would not happen again, he said.

"After the complaint, though, those Muslim boys became more predatory," he said. "He was severely beaten. He was treated in the hospital for one day and released April 21."

Gangni Police Inspector Motiur Rahman said authorities were taking the proper steps in response to the Christians' complaint but had so far arrested only one of the seven Muslim suspects.

Church in Egypt reconstructed in time for Easter

HELWAN, Egypt — Fewer than 40 days after a mob of Muslim villagers in Egypt left a church's building in ruins, the congregation celebrated Easter on April 24 in a reconstructed building at the same site.

The reconstruction of the church building by the Egyptian military gave Christians in Egypt cause to celebrate, but it came during a new outbreak of sectarian violence across the country.

Balamoun Youakeem, head parish priest for the Church of the Two Martyrs St. George and St. Mina in the village of Sool, located in Helwan 22 miles south of Cairo, said the reconstruction was finished in "amazing time."

Youakeem said the rebuilding was carried out over the objections of villagers. It was attacked the evening of March 4, after an imam told Muslim villagers to "kill all the Christians" in response to a rumor of an affair between a Muslim man and a Christian woman, both married to other people.

The rioters set fire to the church and demolished a large part of what was left by hand and with sledgehammers.

They then set up a sign declaring the site to be the "Rahmah Mosque" and held a prayer service inside the church ruins.

Muslim extremists burn Nigerian church, homes

DENGI, Nigeria — Christians from a local Evangelical Church Winning All congregation in Dengi, Plateau state have been displaced after Muslim extremists set their church building and some homes on fire in April.

Pastor Ishaku Danyok of the church said the April 29 incident occurred after Muslims approached Christian music shop owner Gabriel Kiwase and told him that his music was disturbing them as they said their prayers.

The young Christian man quietly switched off the music, and 20 minutes after the Muslims left, they returned and burned down the music shop, then set fire to the pastor's house and the property of five other Christians, Danyok said.

The pastor's family, his wife and four children were left homeless, he said.

Christians from his church, a Roman Catholic parish and Deeper Life Bible Church in Dengi town lost property in the attack, he added.

Danyok said that as a result of the destruction, most members of his church have fled the town, reducing attendance at services to 50. "We currently worship in the destroyed church building with no roof to shield us from the sun and the rains," he said.

Misconduct in the church

Church, insurance company differ on sexual abuse case

When officials at Vienna Presbyterian Church (VPC) decided to acknowledge the church's failures in handling reports of sexual abuse by a youth ministries director, they thought it might upset some in the congregation.

What surprised them was the admonishment from the church's insurance company. On March 23, a lawyer hired by GuideOne Insurance sent a warning to church officials:

"Do not make any statements, orally, in writing or in any manner, to acknowledge, admit to or apologize for anything that may be evidence of or interpreted as (a suggestion that) the actions of Vienna Presbyterian Church ... caused or contributed to any damages arising from the intentional acts/abuse/misconduct" by the youth director.

The church's governing board took a different course.

"Members of Staff and of Session are profoundly sorry that VPC's response after the abuse was discovered was not always helpful to those entrusted to our care," the board said in a letter to the congregation.

In a sermon on March 27, Pastor Peter James went further: "We won't hide behind lawyers. ... Jesus said the truth will set us free."

Then, turning to a group of young women in the audience, he continued: "Let me speak for a moment to our survivors," he said. "We, as church leaders, were part of the harm in failing to extend the compassion and mercy that you needed. Some of you felt uncared for, neglected and even blamed in this church. I am truly sorry. ... I regret the harm this neglect has caused you."

As churches nationwide struggle with disclosures of sexual abuse in their midst, many find inherent conflicts between the guidance they find in Scripture and the demands of the insurance companies and lawyers responsible for protecting them from legal claims.

Common religious tenets of atonement often run counter to the legal tenets of avoiding self-incrimination.

Common conflict

"This sort of conflict is happening all the time," said Jack McCalmon, a lawyer whose company, the McCalmon Group, is hired by insurers to help churches set up abuse prevention programs.

"The church is in the business of forgiveness, of being forthright and open and truthful, but that often creates liability in a world that's adversarial, in the judicial world," he said.

Church officials often face a wrenching dilemma: If they do what they feel is right in the eyes of God, they can put their church



RNS photo

DISAGREEMENT — Vienna Presbyterian Church in Virginia and GuideOne Insurance disagreed about whether to assume blame for sexual misconduct by a former minister.

at risk of financial claims that could end its existence.

Dozens of lawsuits have been filed against churches by people alleging sexual abuse by clergy or church employees. Jury awards and settlements have ranged from tens of thousands of dollars to many millions.

Five years ago, Vienna Presbyterian officials learned that Eric DeVries, student ministries director, had "crossed the boundary of emotional and physical propriety in his relationship with female students."

DeVries, hired in 2001, resigned in September 2005 amid the allegations. Church officials reported him to authorities, and he later pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and received a 12-month suspended jail sentence.

In 2009, the church began to re-examine what went wrong. The discussions also led to the decision to acknowledge failures in responding to the abuse, apologize to victims and recommit the church to their care.

In letters and e-mails, GuideOne and a lawyer it hired to defend the church against possible claims raised adamant concerns about the church's approach. Church officials responded with adamant refusals to let legal interests steer their decisions.

The correspondence shows the church balked at the idea of defending potential lawsuits by invoking the two-year statute of limitations or raising questions about the sexual histories of women who might file claims.

The conflict intensified when GuideOne learned that church officials were cooperating with *The Washington Post* on a story about the church's failures — a course

the insurance company's lawyer had warned against.

In a Feb. 10 letter, GuideOne reminded the church of its contractual obligation to "cooperate with us to the fullest extent reasonably necessary" in protecting against potential claims.

Coverage jeopardized

The church's actions "have impeded our right to investigate the claims and the future defense of this matter," the letter warned. "Any failure ... to comply with the conditions of the policy will jeopardize any future coverage available to Vienna Presbyterian Church."

The church stuck to its plan.

"The directions from the insurance company and its lawyer were clear and possibly correct from a legal perspective," said Peter Sparber, who is on a panel of elders handling issues related to the abuse.

"They did their job, but as elders, we had to do ours. We still have lots of work cleaning up the mess created by DeVries, but not following their legal advice was a good start."

Officials at GuideOne declined interview requests.

"The situation with Vienna Presbyterian Church continues to evolve, and we have a policy to not comment on open claims," Sarah Buckley, a company spokeswoman, wrote in an e-mail.

She noted that GuideOne offers clients extensive resources to help them respond to abuse cases. The company encourages churches to react with concern and compassion, report allegations to authorities, investigate and document all events, seek legal counsel, and encourage counseling for victims, Buckley added. (RNS)

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Example of God's love

Recording artist August finds freedom in forgiveness

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

During his childhood, Dove Award-winning recording artist Chris August was forced to deal with many issues surrounding his parents' divorce, including heartbreak, pain and bitterness, that carried over into his teenage and college years.

While writing songs for his debut album, "No Far Away," he had the opportunity to spend some time reflecting on his past and realized what was truly missing: forgiveness.

"I think when we search our hearts and find bitterness toward another person, we need to be aware that the next step should be forgiveness," August said. "Because of a relationship with Christ, we are able to forgive others. I've come to realize how important forgiveness is and that even as Christians, we sometimes skip over asking someone's forgiveness or the need to forgive others.

"We need to remember that it's only through Christ that we are able to be forgiven. We have the perfect example of His great love, grace and mercy, so we should be willing to forgive others and help them see Christ in us, the hope of glory."

Desiring to remind others about the freedom found in forgiveness, August was inspired to write the song "7x70."

"Since the song came out, I've heard a lot of stories from people about forgiveness," August said. "One example that's been on my mind a lot lately was a man who told me that this song saved his marriage.



Photos courtesy of Word Label Group

WELL-RECEIVED MESSAGE — Dove Award-winning recording artist Chris August shares about the freedom found in forgiveness as he tells the story behind the hit song '7x70.'

It's amazing and humbling to hear stories like that because God just laid the words for this song on my heart one day.

"To hear that this song is being used to heal marriages that were falling apart and giving people a little more hope to work through their problems almost leaves me speechless. All I can say is, 'Hallelu-

jah, God is good.'"

August's music and message are being well received. He garnered the Male Vocalist of the Year and New Artist of the Year honors at

the 2011 Gospel Music Association Dove Awards in Atlanta. His album, "No Far Away," also won Best Pop/Contemporary Album.

As he travels across the country and performs concerts, August shares the valuable lessons he's learned in hopes of inspiring others.

"At the end of the day, if you really want to get to know God, you have to dig into His Word," August said.

"I encourage people to read the Bible, realize God's truths and apply them to your life. When I'm writing songs, I'm incorporating those truths and hoping that people will be inspired to live for something greater than themselves." ❧



American Idol winner 'thanks the Lord'

When Scotty McCreery won Season 10 of the singing contest "American Idol" May 25, he responded by saying, "I thank the Lord. He got me here."

McCreery, 17, is a member of First Baptist Church, Garner, N.C., a Southern Baptist congregation where he has been active in the church's youth group.

A *Charlotte Observer* article portrayed McCreery as a "boy next door," patiently ringing up customers as a high school cashier at the Lowes Foods in Garner. He had become a contestant on the popular show, but he hadn't told many people in his hometown. People started noticing him around February.

"Once they realized who he was, they all went to his register," the

store manager said, adding that four checkout lines were empty and McCreery's line stretched 30 customers deep, to the back of the store.

McCreery was a high school baseball player, but his participation in American Idol caused him to miss this year's baseball season, where he probably would have been pitching, *The Observer* said.

He was required to live in Los Angeles during most of the taping of the show but his mother was with him most of the time. Both were home-sick, the newspaper said.

In the eighth grade, McCreery wrote a biography of himself for a class assignment. "My philosophy of life is simple. Please God, work, provide for your fam-

ily and help others," he wrote.

Throughout the filming of American Idol, McCreery wore a black "I Am Second" bracelet, showing his support for a movement that chronicles the personal stories of struggle and transformation of celebrities and everyday people. The stories are intended "to give hope to the lonely and the hurting, help from destructive lifestyles and inspiration to the unfulfilled," according to iamsecond.com.

"Those who are featured on the site (called 'Seconds') graciously lend their names and stories to be shared so that others might be inspired to find the same freedom and sense of purpose they have found in Jesus," the website explains. "While some of the 'Seconds' may be well-known for their jobs ... others are just local believers who transparently tell of overcoming struggles through Jesus." (BP)



McCREERY

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

US Navy reverses course on gay 'marriages'

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy rescinded May 10 its permission for chaplains to perform same-sex "marriage" ceremonies on base when the ban on open homosexuality in the military is lifted. The switch came after members of Congress charged the change in policy violates the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

Chief of Chaplains Rear Adm. Mark Tidd reversed course after his April 13 memo became publicized May 9 and drew a sharp rebuke from more than 60 representatives.

Tidd said late May 10 he was suspending his authorization "pending additional legal and policy review" and enhanced cooperation with other branches of the military. News media coverage and the outcry from Congress caused armed forces lawyers to review Tidd's memo, a Pentagon spokesman acknowledged. "That raised the issue, so the (Navy) legal counsel looked at it and determined it needed further review," Col. Dave Lapan said. In his April memo, Tidd authorized Navy chaplains to officiate at on-base, same-sex ceremonies in states where such unions are allowed. He also said naval base facilities "may normally be used to celebrate the marriage" if the base is in a state that has legalized same-sex "marriage."

Sixty-three members of the House of Representatives complained to Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus after Tidd's memo was revealed. Led by Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo., the representatives said they "find it difficult to understand how the military is somehow exempt from abiding by" DOMA. DOMA, which was signed into law by President Clinton in 1996, defines marriage in federal law as being between a man and a woman and empowers states to refuse to recognize another state's gay "marriages." "Offering up federal facilities and federal employees for same-sex 'marriages' violates DOMA, which is still the law of the land and binds our military, including chaplains," the House members told Mabus in a May 6 letter.

Akin said in a statement released May 9 with the letter, "While a state may legalize same-sex 'marriage,' federal property and federal employees, like Navy chaplains, should not be used to perform marriages that are not recognized by federal law." On May 12, the House Armed Services Committee passed legislation to ban military chaplains from performing same-sex "marriages" and bar the use of armed services facilities for such ceremonies. The amendment, which was part of the yearly Defense Authorization Bill, was passed 60-1.

Reliance on God may affect cancer treatment spending

BIRMINGHAM — Cancer patients who consider the length of their lives to be "in God's hands" are more willing than others to spend money on treatments that might extend their lives, a new study shows.

Michelle Martin, an assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, based her research on findings of a National Cancer Institute study of 4,214 patients with colorectal and lung cancer.

The study, reported in a recent issue of the journal *Cancer*, also found blacks were more willing to spend all their resources to extend their lives than members of other racial and ethnic groups.

Martin hopes to conduct a more in-depth study but speculates some patients may feel God is encouraging them to continue treatment.

"If you see the physicians as tools of God, you might think ... if God has put these individuals in my life to help me then I should avail myself of that opportunity," she said.

Indiana 1st to ban Planned Parenthood funding

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels signed into law May 10 expansive pro-life legislation that includes a ban on state-directed funding of abortion providers such as Planned Parenthood. In doing so, the Republican governor made Indiana reportedly the first state to enact such a prohibition on money for organizations that perform or promote abortion.

The law exempts hospitals and outpatient surgery centers. The measure will eliminate about \$2 million of the \$3 million in federal funds Planned Parenthood of Indiana receives each year, according to *The Indianapolis Star*.

Planned Parenthood of Indiana filed a lawsuit hours after Daniels signed the legislation, but federal judge Tanya Walton Pratt denied the organization's request that she block enforcement of the new law, *The Star* reported.

The measure will remain in effect while Pratt — nominated by President Obama — considers its constitutionality. ❧