



INSIDE



UA student finds Christ after atheism, shares testimony

◆ Page 3



Disaster relief efforts continue around state

◆ Pages 4-5



Alabama Baptist spreading God's Word in Spain

◆ Page 11

High-demand occupation

Ministers may be satisfied at work — but are they healthy?

You cannot go to church," Christian philosopher Elton Trueblood once said. "You are the church wherever you go." That is especially true if you are the pastor.

While many people with high-demand occupations view Sunday worship as a haven from day-to-day pressures, ministers are on call 24/7. Clergy rank high in job satisfaction, because most don't enter the field expecting to get rich but are motivated by wanting to make a difference in people's lives. At the same time, clergy rank among the highest rates of obesity, depression, high blood pressure and adult-onset diabetes when compared to other professions.

For that reason, congregational experts say it is extremely important — but often neglected — that ministers and congregations take seriously ministerial wellness and self-care.

"Healthy clergy make for healthy parishes," Pamela Lee Cranston said in a clergy-wellness handbook for the Episcopal Church. "Unfortunately unhealthy work patterns practiced by clergy in congregations have resulted in burnout, if not actual physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological breakdowns."

Issues of wellness

The Episcopal Church is among American denominations advocating a holistic understanding of work for clergy and taking a closer look at issues of "wellness" related to ministry.

Cranston said clergy face several unique career challenges. One is "dual relationships." The reality of clergy vocation is that, whether they would like to or even if they should, ministers never can completely "de-role" with members of the congregation.

Another is ambiguity about expectations. In secular fields, employment usually is evaluated by "performance." The vocation of ministry, however, is not defined as just another job, but rather in relational terms of "being" and "doing" in ways not always measurable by a bottom line.

Closely related is the dual nature of

10 best practices for ministerial health

- ▶ Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
- ▶ Love your neighbor as you love yourself — be an example of self-care as well as caring for others.
- ▶ Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy — be intentional about time for rest and renewal within your week, church year and life in ministry.
- ▶ Honor your body as a gift from God and temple of the Holy Spirit. Feed it healthy foods and build your physical and emotional endurance with regular physical activity.
- ▶ Honor your mother, father, siblings, spouse and/or children with your love, respect and time.
- ▶ Reflect your faith and use your gifts in your vocation.
- ▶ Develop healthy habits to keep your wholeness wheel in balance and to be fit for a ministry of service.
- ▶ Equip yourself to use your gifts effectively to proclaim and live out the gospel in the world.
- ▶ Practice and seek forgiveness.
- ▶ Pray daily.

These practices for ministerial health and wellness are provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (ABP)



sxc.hu, graphic by Lauren Chow

the relationship between minister and congregation.

"The reality of today's church is that the working pastoral relationship between clergy and congregations is both contractual and covenantal," Cranston writes. "It is both a job and a vocation, although not in equal measure. Covenant assumes the best aspects in a pastoral relationship, while contracts protect both the clergy and congregation from the worst."

Studies suggest 75 percent of the stress in clergy life is related to unclear and improper sense of boundaries related to work. According to the Alban Institute, to work more than 50 hours per week is considered "dangerous," but many ministers are expected to do this consistently.

Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute said one in five clergy score high on the burnout scale. "With stress, too much change or novelty forces people

to overuse their adjustment capacities and after a while they become physically or emotionally ill," he said. Furthermore, he adds, burnout occurs "when people over use their listening and caring capacities."

Research also links clergy burnout to family problems, poor communication with congregations, financial responsibility and clergy sexual abuse. "Clergy are not called simply to (See 'Healthy,' page 13)

Work among Jews expanding globally

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

White and blue flags rustled in the breeze, and kebab sizzled on the grill. Ben Martin, a Christian worker from Alabama, gathered the group around and offered a prayer of thanks for the food.

"Thank you for this food. Thank you for this nation. And thank you that after 2,000 years, you haven't forsaken Israel."

He hasn't forsaken it — in fact, Jesus Christ is at work among the Jews more than ever, Martin said.

The crowd at this Israeli Independence Day party May 10 was more diverse than one might expect for a get-together celebrating the founding of the Jewish homeland in 1948.

There were Iranian Jews. Iraqi Jews. Russian Jews. American Jews.

"The face of the Jews here isn't what you'd expect," said Martin, who works among the Jews. "Because of 'the return,' it's a very diverse group."

The return of Jews after 1948 to what is Israel today brought the Diaspora — Jews scattered worldwide — back from different countries and cultures. But despite differences, the work among them is expanding all the time, he said. Baptist work in Israel started in 1911 in an Arab town, and the Messianic work among the nation's Jews is a growing phenomenon.

Now there are around 150 Jewish congregations worshipping around Israel in different languages. The

number of believers is estimated to be around 20,000 and is growing exponentially. In 1948, there were 12 Jews who believed in Jesus in Israel. By 1987, there were 3,000, and in 1997, there were 5,000.

"This is clearly the work of Jesus, because it's very hard for a Jew to become a believer," Martin said.

It's fine for non-Jews to be Christians, but many Jews feel being a Jew by birth and a Christian by belief is inherently impossible, he explained. They feel the two are mutually exclusive. "It's a lie of 2,000 years that the Messianic movement (Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah) has to fight against."

In the early years of the (See 'Jews,' page 7)

COMMENT

Robinson Crusoe Was Not a Pastor

Robinson Crusoe is the lead character in one of the most popular stories ever told. He was adventuresome, resourceful, compassionate, intelligent and religious. His life took him to the depths of despair as a slave and to the heights of success as a wealthy plantation owner.

But most people remember Crusoe for his 28 years of scraping out a living as a castaway on a deserted island, which he named the Island of Despair. His only friend was a prisoner brought to the island to be sacrificed by cannibals. After the prisoner escaped, Crusoe befriended him and named him Friday for the day of the week he appeared. In time, Friday learned English and Crusoe converted him to Christianity.

Sometimes readers forget that Crusoe read the Bible daily and thanked God for his fate that included all the necessities of life, save human companionship.

“Robinson Crusoe” is a thrilling story and a wonderful book to read nearly 300 years after its first publication (1719). However, Crusoe was not a pastor.

Still many men seem to use his story as a model for pastoral ministry. Like Crusoe, these men possess great personal skills. Experience has taught them valuable lessons through victories and defeats. They are good and godly men. But circumstances have led them to churches that have become their own Islands of Despair.

Like Crusoe’s story, theirs are stories of isolation. They feel alone in ministry, scraping out a living by their personal ingenuity and reliance on God. Stories of others remind them that they live as pastors at the whims of others. Comparison to neighboring churches or even TV ministries reinforces the idea that competition, not cooperation, is the name of the game, further increasing their isolation. Responsibility for ministry under these conditions can become a burden too heavy to bear. The loneliness can be overwhelming. Even with people all around, these pastors live on Islands of Despair.

In some places, a growing number of pastors are finding another storyline for their ministries. It is a storyline that includes companionship of other pastors through peer group participation. And for those who are writing this new storyline, it is making a difference in their ministries as well as in them.

A study for Austin Presbyterian Theological



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Seminary found “the longer a pastoral leader has participated in a peer group, the more likely is his congregation to experience growth.” The study was not just of Presbyterians. It included participants of all denominations.

For Baptists, who often are accused of judging a church on the basis of “nickels, noses and noise,” that finding is worth noting.

Peer group participation

Peer group participation also made a difference in ministry style, the study found. Lay leadership was significantly more active in churches led by pastors who participated in peer groups. Also a significantly greater percentage of youth was involved in planning church events and serving on committees and boards in churches where pastors participated in peer groups.

In addition, peer group participation influenced the direction of ministry. Community service and ministry were more prevalent in churches where the pastor participated in a peer group. Not only did the churches “strongly emphasize community service” but the pastors also represented the churches in community life and their congregations saw themselves as agents of change through community ministry.

One might expect participants to value sharing ideas and resources with each other, which two-thirds did. What may surprise some is that the greatest value was “sharing personal concerns and struggles” (83 percent). Second was “sharing and getting feedback on ministry problems and challenges” (80 percent).

Evidently the peer groups became times of respite from the Islands of Despair during which pastors could be honest without worrying about repercussions in the deacons meeting or commu-

nity. The result was companionship in the life of ministry rather than isolation.

Perhaps that is why slightly more than nine out of 10 pastors rated their participation in peer groups as an important part of their continuing education.


Baptist pastors have not been as involved in peer groups as those of other evangelical denominations. They usually go to conferences led by well-known pastors, where they seek a listening ear. Increasingly they have become involved in mentoring networks led by nationally known pastors. Some join organizations like Leadership Network. For many, these steps are to escape the Island of Despair as they grow in their pastoral skills.

In the past decade, scores of Alabama Baptist pastors have participated in peer groups associated with the Institute for Clergy Excellence in Huntsville. This organization works across denominational lines and was a pioneer in peer groups for ministers. It remains a strong ministry resource.

More recently, Samford University’s Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence has become a magnet for helping pastors. One Southern Baptist pastor wrote of his experience, “I’m emerging ... a better person, and I’m looking forward to experiencing more health in my relationships and in my ministry.”

The center’s resources include a variety of programs ranging from sabbatical leave assistance to peer groups to apprenticeships for ministerial students and new pastors. All are designed to provide “human companionship” in the life of ministry rather than a ministry of isolation on an Island of Despair.

The Robinson Crusoe model may be a popular ministry model for Baptists, but it is not our Lord’s model. During His earthly life, Jesus invited others to join Him in moments of great glory such as His transfiguration and great agony such as in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus modeled companionship in the life of ministry. That is a far better model than the isolation of Crusoe. After all, he was not a pastor. 



“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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Letters to the Editor

APPLYING DANIEL 3


I read your editorial in the May 12 issue “But Even if He Does Not ...” and was excited that someone had captured my view and application of those texts from Daniel 3. I am a full-time hospice chaplain with

Wiregrass Hospice in Enterprise.

I have used the story of the three Hebrew young men on several occasions with my patients. I focus on the “but if not” portion to help my patients.

Many struggle with the feeling that their plight is the result of some un-

known and thus unconfessed sin. I try to remind them that we don’t always know what God is doing and that we should never confuse “what God can do with what God chooses to do.”

Roger B. Stone
Pinckard, Ala. 

700 gambling machines seized in Greene County

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

Greenetrack in Eutaw gambled against Gov. Robert Bentley and Attorney General Luther Strange and lost when the casino was raided for the second time in one year. This time, state law enforcement agents seized 700 gambling devices from Greenetrack and another Greene County casino, Frontier Bingo in Knoxville.

After the raid, Strange reassured anyone doubting the cooperation between the attorney general and governor's offices on the state's gambling efforts.

"Today's actions are the culmination of an investigative process over the last several months," he said

in a June 1 press release. "From my first day in office, we have worked hand-in-hand with Governor Bentley and his staff to ensure that illegal gambling laws are enforced consistently across the state."

Some gambling opponents have doubted this partnership frustrated by the unhindered operation of the Greene County casinos, one of which reopened two months after new state officials entered office in January. At that time, most expected the last nail to be driven into the coffin of slot machine-style gambling around the state — especially after the progress made by former Governor Bob Riley's Task Force on Illegal Gambling. But, as weeks and months passed, many began to wonder if Bentley would make good on his promise to give Strange the law enforcement power needed to enforce the state's gambling statutes.

Illegal machines

In his press release, Strange addressed any doubts about the legality of the machines being used in the facilities.

"We have worked to try to resolve this matter with minimal controversy," he said. "We have offered Greenetrack numerous opportunities to resolve this matter by surrendering some of its machines to the state, to allow a court to determine the legality of the machines. We personally met with Greenetrack representatives and the Greene County sheriff numerous times to work out arrangements for this solution."

Jefferson County District Attorney Brandon Falls has is-

sued similar warnings to casino owners in his jurisdiction. Like Strange, his advice was also unheeded. A few weeks ago, a small casino in Tarrant was raided and two people were reportedly arrested and charged with possession of illegal gambling devices.

Falls said his office has also made Hale and the Birmingham Police Department aware of two other gambling facilities currently operating on Highway 78 in Jefferson County and on Birmingham's Lakeshore Parkway.

"I think they are trying to test the waters to see if the change in administration will benefit them," Falls said.

And Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville, who played a key role in helping Ri-

ley's task force enforce gambling laws, was not able to get his bill passed to change the crime of possessing a gambling device from a misdemeanor to a felony. But, he and eight co-sponsors did get Senate resolution 154 passed asking the Supreme Court to "decide once and for all whether slot machines ... may be offered legally in some counties by casinos who claim their machines play legal 'bingo,'" his press release stated.

"Alabamians want an end to the corruption and the nonsense," Taylor said. "The casino owners say they want the courts to answer this question, yet at every turn, they file frivolous motions and seek illegal injunctions to block, delay and derail court rulings. ... This resolution asks the Supreme Court to answer the question once and for all: In a state where slot machines are illegal, can you circumvent the law by simply calling it bingo? If gambling proponents really want the courts to answer this question, they should welcome this resolution." Falls said gambling supporters will continue testing the waters without further clarification.

"I think law enforcement was waiting for a ruling that spelled out in unequivocal terms that no electronic devices could be used at all," he said. "I feel that the [Supreme Court] did that but they didn't use the wording so there is always going to be an attorney out there ... who is willing to argue that the Supreme Court has allowed them to operate, and therein lies the problems because the courts are not set up to legislate."

"Alabamians want an end to the corruption and nonsense."

Sen. Bryan Taylor
R-Prattville

Radical change

UA student finds Christ after atheism, shares testimony

By **Sammie Jo Barstow**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Militant atheist" is how Ben Friedman described himself less than two years ago. Even though he had rarely attended church and his parents were not Christians, Friedman had examined Christianity and decided that atheism was more logical.

But earlier this year, the 20-year-old Moorestown, N.J., native was baptized and gave his testimony before a packed sanctuary at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

"During the last two years, my worldview has changed radically," he said. "My hope is that my testimony will provide a cause for celebration among Christians and, more importantly, offer a challenge to everyone else."

The opportunity to run track and cross country at the University of Alabama (UA) was the only reason Friedman chose to move from New Jersey to Alabama. That move set in motion several circumstances and introduced him to people who were instrumental in leading him to examine his atheistic beliefs and instead embrace Christianity. He recognizes that none of this was coincidence but was the work of the Holy Spirit drawing him to Christ.

Investigate Christianity

During the weeks before his freshman year, a young woman told Friedman their friendship couldn't go further because he didn't share her Christian beliefs. Not wanting to end the relationship, he agreed to investigate Christianity.

"I figured I'd give it a couple of months and it would blow over," Friedman said.

Making good on his promise, he went to a large bookstore to find a book on the topic. As Friedman walked in the door, the first book he spotted was "The Reason for God" by Tim Keller. He read it in less than 48 hours.

"The book took me by complete surprise and I devoured it. Keller answered so many of my questions really concisely and logically. It was incredible," Friedman said.

About a week later, his roommate's father was visiting from out of town and invited him to go with them to First, Tuscaloosa. Although Friedman admits that he doesn't really remember much about the service, what really impressed him was how welcoming the people were. He was interested



Photo by Heath Wilson

NEW IN CHRIST — Ben Friedman, a University of Alabama student, was baptized at First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, earlier this year and shared his testimony with a packed sanctuary.

enough to return alone the following Sunday. He told himself that if the people weren't friendly, then that would be his last church visit. Again he experienced a welcome he had not expected.

Heath Wilson and several other college students spotted Friedman that second Sunday and invited him to lunch. Wilson encouraged him to join a freshman Bible study at the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church focusing on "The 10 Basic Truths of Christianity." Even though he frequently had to use the table of contents to locate books of the Bible, he began devouring Scripture.

Friedman also was invited to attend a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), during which he met FCA Director Gary Cramer, whom he now considers his mentor. They began meeting twice a week to discuss the Bible, especially concentrating on apologetics, a defense of the gospel. He also began meeting with Wilson for weekly Bible study and attending the church's college worship service on Tuesday evenings.

"I now recognize this as God giving me the nutrients and resources I needed to grow after first planting the seed," Friedman said.

Even then, he did not make a quick decision. Although Cramer had carefully taught him the basics of the faith, Friedman said he was still hesitant.

"Once I learned what salvation was, I probably counted the cost more than anyone else I know,"

Friedman said. "I kept telling [Cramer] that I'm almost there, but I couldn't seem to make that last step. But finally I decided that following Christ was the life I wanted for myself."

Now he is taking a year out of school to participate in the World Race, an 11-month, 11-country missions project. Friedman was required to raise \$15,500 for the trip. By the first of March, he had less than \$3,000 in donations. He had composed numerous handwritten letters and prayed consistently, but he was ready to give up.

"I told God that if He intended for me to go, something had to happen, but I had done all I knew to do, so now I gave it up to Him," Friedman said.

Donations began pouring in and in no time, the trip was fully funded.

'From doubt to faith'

Tim Simpson, minister to college students at First, Tuscaloosa, has observed Friedman's life change during the past year.

"It's encouraging to see what God can do with doubt," Simpson said. "He can take a person from doubt to faith, and I've seen the hand of God moving in Ben's life when nothing else would have brought him to Christ. None of these things that came into his life were accidents."

Friedman intends to return to UA to complete his education after the year away but said he wants to do whatever God leads him to do.

"Two years ago, I had visions of working my way up to president of the Atheists and Agnostics Club at Alabama, but God, the Hound of heaven, chased me down and tackled me in His arms," Friedman said. "Now I want nothing more than to live a red-hot life for Christ and to ignite a fire within those around me that sends up an aroma pleasing to God."

"I now recognize this as God giving me the nutrients and resources I needed to grow after first planting the seed."

Ben Friedman
FBC Tuscaloosa

'Storm Troopers' in Alabama

Tennessee volunteers assist Calhoun Baptist Association in disaster relief efforts

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Meeg Pelley, of Rockwood, Tenn., attended a summer camp near Anniston when she was a child. This past Memorial Day weekend, Pelley returned to Calhoun County to do disaster relief ministry in the Ohatchee and Webster's Chapel areas with her four teenage children.

They were part of a group of 43 volunteers from three Tennessee churches — First Baptist, Rockwood, and South Harriman Baptist and Lee Village Baptist, both in Harriman — who assisted Calhoun Baptist Association in three construction projects to aid survivors of the April 27 tornado.

One group of volunteers repaired a damaged mobile home in Webster's Chapel. Another group repaired a 71-year-old widow's roof in Ohatchee. A third group built a wheelchair ramp, porch and deck for a mobile home in the Wellington community. This mobile home replaced a home de-



Photo by Gary Hardin

HELPING — Levi Pelley of FBC Rockwood, Tenn., works on a roof.

stroyed by the EF-4 tornado. Money for these projects came from Calhoun Association and the Tennessee churches.

Love offering

"Our three churches received a one-day love offering for Calhoun Baptist Association disaster relief," said Josh Lancaster, senior pastor of First, Rockwood. "We raised nearly \$14,000 to add to money already given by Calhoun Association churches."

First, Rockwood, member Jeff Rone said what motivated him to come to Alabama was service in the name of Christ.

"The very second my pastor mentioned this opportunity, my eyes lit up," he said.

On Memorial Day, the association's disaster relief ministry continued with two additional construction projects. Volunteers from Bon Air Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., and Grace Baptist Church, Springfield, Tenn., joined

with volunteers from Calhoun Association churches Greenbrier Road Baptist, Anniston, and First



Photo by Gary Hardin

TROOPER TENTS — Several tents are set up in Webster's Chapel as the Storm Troopers tornado relief center. Church and community groups from Anniston, Jacksonville and Gadsden serve together there.

Baptist, DeArmanville, to start rebuilding two homes from the ground up in the Ohatchee area.

Greenbrier Road Pastor Brad Williams and First, DeArmanville, Pastor Tom Bonds coordinated this effort.

"Brad had connections with people, and I had connections with lumber yards," Bonds said.

"It's all just fallen into place. God can put things together when no one else can."

Behind the scenes, Director of Missions Sid Nichols and Associate Director of Missions John Thomas provided their skills and motivation for the five disaster relief projects.

"We're assisting people who had either no homeowners insurance or limited insurance coverage," Thomas explained.

'Blessed efforts'

According to William Cain, pastor of Asberry Baptist Church, Jacksonville, "God has blessed our association's efforts to minister to people."

While Cain has volunteered his carpentry skills, members of Oak Grove Baptist Church, Glencoe, have converted their fellowship hall into a ministry center.

They were assisted by other Calhoun Association churches, Etowah

Baptist Association churches and churches of all denominations in the community, as well as some businesses.

Food, clothing, personal items and bedding are still being distributed to tornado survivors.

Oak Grove Baptist member Tena Norton pointed to massive rows of canned food and said, "Our food pantry has been replenished four times over."

"We haven't lacked for anything. God has supplied our needs in a big way."

Amazingly the church's relief operation received a shipment of chicken from Arizona.

A Delaware resident drove to Oak Grove Baptist in an SUV filled with baby items.

Churches and community groups from the greater Anniston-Jacksonville-Gadsden area set up a massive array of tents in Webster's Chapel for a relief operation called Storm Troopers.

Volunteers, backed by their Facebook page, Storm Troopers

(for Webster's Chapel Tornado Survivors), have provided 800 to 1,000 meals per day, as well as bedding and personal supplies.

Sylvia Benevides, who lives in Anniston but grew up in Webster's Chapel, helps give leadership to the Storm Troopers ministry.

"We started with one tent we called a canteen center and it's just mushroomed," she said.



Photo by Gary Hardin

SUPPLIES — Members of FBC Montgomery deliver bedding and baby supplies.

Update on DISASTER RELIEF efforts



Numbers as of press time

Total credentialed personnel deployed	More than 3,000
Total volunteer days worked	11,327
Meals prepared	256,147
Mass feeding units deployed	9
Mass feeding units active	0
Mass feeding units deactivated	9
Showers provided	5,233
Shower units deployed	30
Shower units active	12
Shower units deactivated	18
Laundry loads	1,801
Chain saw jobs completed	1,430
Child care teams deployed	2
Clients served	120
Child crisis response clients served (in schools)	350
Critical incident stress management chaplains	150
Clients served	5,915
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.

Interested in assisting with the Alabama rebuild effort? Visit www.sldr.org to find areas of need.



BAPTISTS RESPOND

to areas devastated by April tornadoes

My husband, Stephen, is the pastor of Herren's Grove Baptist, Woodland, in Randolph County. We recently took a trip to Hackleburg to help with the tornado efforts. It is one thing to see the pictures but another to have hands-on experience. After leaving, we decided to create a Facebook page to help get the families more attention. The page is Hackleburg Hands On ~ Families. We have 14 families so far, and eight have already been adopted. I would encourage everyone to get out this summer and help in any way you can.

Stephany Ables Dedman
Herren's Grove Baptist Church, Woodland

Shoal Creek Outdoors, the men's ministry of Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Deatsville, held a disaster relief bass tournament May 21 at Alabama River/Cooter's Pond. Fifty-three boats attended and raised approximately \$5,000. The money went to the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Fund to help tornado survivors.



Despite many of its own having been affected by the storms, Oak Grove Baptist Church, Glencoe, opened its doors to minister to those in the surrounding areas. It quickly became a command post for volunteer efforts, donations, shower trailers and meal provisions partnering with Calhoun Baptist Association and its many churches to organize a relief effort.

New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah, in Sand Mountain Baptist Association held a tornado relief benefit concert May 26 for those affected by the April 27 tornadoes. The event featured Gaither recording artist Gordon Mote and New Ground. More than \$2,700 was given.

On June 9, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials will be at Union Hill Baptist Church, Bessemer (on Taylors Ferry Road outside of the Concord community) at the request of Pastor Mickey Bell. "The residents

have heard over and over the many programs and assistance available to them but for some reason they are being denied and I want to know why. Not only do I want to know why, I want FEMA officials to be the one who tells them why," Bell said. The event starts at 6:30 p.m. Bring your paperwork that you have submitted and all letters you have been sent from FEMA. For more information, call 205-491-1103 or 205-410-9067.

FEMA reported June 2 that Escambia County has been added to the counties designated for disaster assistance to households as part of Alabama's federal disaster declaration. This addition brings the total of number of counties designated to 43. "Adding Escambia County to the list of federal disaster counties will enable the citizens on Escambia County the maximum financial resources needed to rebuild their lives," Gov. Robert Bentley, said. Counties previously designated for individual assistance are Autauga, Bibb, Blount, Calhoun, Chambers, Cherokee, Chilton, Choctaw, Clarke, Colbert, Coosa, Cullman, DeKalb, Elmore, Etowah, Fayette, Franklin, Greene, Hale, Jackson, Jefferson, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marengo, Marion, Marshall, Monroe, Morgan, Perry, Pickens, Shelby, Sumter, St. Clair, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Washington, Walker and Winston.

Mountain View Baptist Church, Sylvania, lost its building in the April 27 tornado outbreak, but the congregation plans to be meeting in its new facility by September — thanks to various Carpenters for Christ groups. Church trustee Michael George called East Alabama Carpenters for Christ (EACC) almost immediately. This group built an addition for Mountain View Baptist in 2004. The group arrived back at Mountain View Baptist on May 28, after the debris and rubble had been cleared. By the end of the first week of work, EACC had laid the foundation, framed most of the facility and dropped roof trusses into place. Pastor Brian Harris said watching this group of volunteers use their hammers and saws to rebuild the pieces of his church so quickly has been amazing. "These men love the Lord, and do their work for the glory of God." Later in June, another group of Christian carpenters — Cherokee Baptist Association Carpenters for Christ based in Centre — will come in to complete the work on the Mountain View facility.

Volunteers help Alabama rebuild a little piece at a time

Clarence Smith, a 71-year-old semi-retired brick mason, hid in his chimney hearth during the storms that ravaged Alabama on April 27.

"It was scary," said Smith, a widower who lives alone on a dead-end street in the Pratt City neighborhood of Birmingham.

He heard the trees snapping and felt the thump of debris striking his house. When he emerged, Smith was one of the fortunate ones.

Even though every tree within 75 yards of his 35-year-old home was on the ground, his house only suffered minor roof damage and his deck was missing a few rails.

One block over, it is a different story. Whole neighborhoods are leveled. People's homes are now a mass of timber, trees and trash. One house is missing most of its roof and exterior walls.

Smith has been through bad weather before. This time he knew where to hide.

"Houses get cleaned off to the slab, but you always see the brick chimneys left standing after the storms. The chimneys are still there. And I built my chimney," Smith said.

Blue tarps serve as temporary shingles for most remaining structures. Schools and churches prepare community meals and smiling volunteers hand out frozen popsicles to dirty relief workers and contractors.

One Alabama Baptist disaster relief coordinator estimated only 10 percent of the debris had been removed since the deadly storms more than a month ago.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley announced May 28 that the Federal Emergency Management Agency had granted his request for an extension of Operation Clean Sweep, the program aimed at removing storm debris. The extension will last until July 12.

"There's still so much that needs to be done here," said Art Snead, a volunteer disaster relief team leader from Long Hollow Baptist Church (LHBC), Hendersonville, Tenn.

Snead has been organizing and leading weekend trips to tornado-stricken areas like Pleasant Grove and Pratt City.

Over Memorial Day weekend, Snead guided his third trip. Ten other churchgoers from LHBC's multiple campuses gathered May 27 at the Hendersonville site with items such as chain saws, baby formula and a blue Ford tractor.

The team arrived at NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, which has hosted about 15 disaster relief teams from as far away as Ft. Smith, Ark.

Alabama Baptist volunteer disaster relief leaders arranged for the LHBC team to work on Smith's property the first day of their latest trip.

"We might not be able to change the world, but each person can change their little piece of it," said Dr. Hillman Mann, an anatomy and physiology professor at Volunteer State College in Gallatin, Tenn., and one of the LHBC volunteers.

In just two days, the team helped nine tornado victims in all. (LifeWay)



Photo courtesy of Kimberly Creel

DOUGHNUTS, LEMONADE STAND HELPS SURVIVORS

(L to r) Ella Harper, a member of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, and Avery and Aaron Creel, members of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, along with other friends, held a donation only lemonade and doughnut stand to help survivors of the April 27 tornado. The doughnuts were donated by Krispy Kreme, and the lemonade was donated by Buffalo Rock. The children raised almost \$600 in two hours. The money was given to the Christian Service Mission in downtown Birmingham.

NAMB dedicates \$15M to church plant loans, offers 5 options

As part of its expanding emphasis on church planting, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) is dedicating up to \$15 million for financing new church plants across North America.

The new church plant loan initiative was approved by NAMB's board of trustees at its regular meeting May 11. The board's church finance ministry will continue to make loans to established, existing churches.

"We are serious about planting new churches and giving church planters all the tools and resources they need to be successful," NAMB President Kevin Ezell said. "The new church plant loan program, recently approved by the trustees, is just another example of that."

New loan products

NAMB and its predecessor, the Home Mission Board (HMB), have been making loans to established churches since 1900. But this marks the first time NAMB has utilized its church loan resources specifically for creating new loan products for church plants, said Karl Dietz, director of church finance ministry for NAMB in Alpharetta, Ga.

Interest income from the loans flows directly back to North American missions. As of April 30, Dietz said NAMB had \$135 million representing 428 outstand-

ing church loans on its books.

Dietz, whose team consults with 600–800 churches seeking financial counsel and loans each year, said the new church plant loan program is designed for church plants that do not qualify under NAMB's current underwriting guidelines but have commitments of outside support or sponsorship from an established Southern Baptist church.

The new program consists of five loan options. Three of the new loan products will be used for the purchase of a first unit facility or land for the church plant. The loan amount can go up to \$3 million, based upon the outside support of the church plant. A fourth loan product will allow an existing Southern Baptist church to use part of its equity in its own facilities to go toward a church plant. Loan proceeds can be used for almost any purpose directed by the loan borrower.

The final new loan product (up to \$50,000) can be used by a church plant for the purchase of equipment and furniture.

Dietz said NAMB's underwriting guidelines will require that the new church plant be at least one year old; does not own its first building; is a self-governed, legal entity; and averages 40 adult attendees each Sunday. The plant must have documented financial support extending into the future at least two years.

The purchased property serving as the new church plant has to be owned, not rented, and can be a new or previously used church building, storefront or any other building.

No additional fees

"In today's economy, we recommend to church plants that the best thing they can do at first is to buy an existing building and do renovations," Dietz said, who noted that the new program's interest rate will be the same as the current rate of 6 percent, which is subject to change. NAMB does not charge any additional fees beyond normal real estate closing costs, he said.

Dietz said it normally takes his team at NAMB 10 days to approve a loan if the church plant's loan package is complete. Because of the number of people involved — appraisers, realtors, engineers, attorneys — it usually takes another 45–60 days for the loan to close.

"We've been doing this for over 100 years now," Dietz said, referring to NAMB and HMB. "We've developed guidelines over the years that have been tested in good and challenging economies. We know how much debt a church can take on based on historical income, salaries and other expenses."

For additional information, visit www.churchfinanceministry.com or call 1-800-759-5901. (BP)

Across Alabama's Associations

BESSEMER

► J.O.Y. Fellowship, the senior adult ministry of **The Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will hold a program June 28, 11 a.m., with Sally Beth Vick, Ms. Senior Alabama 2009. For information call 205-477-8265 or visit www.bcmcadory.org. Bill McCall is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Fellowship Church, Birmingham**, will celebrate its anniversary June 26, 11 a.m. Bible study will be at 10 a.m. A covered-dish lunch will follow the service. Ron Reed is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

► **Woodmont Church, Florence**, will celebrate its 50th anniversary June 11–12. There will be a dinner and guest speaker Saturday at 6 p.m. The service Sunday will be at 10:15 a.m. Lunch will follow at 11:30 a.m. A special service will follow at 1 p.m. For information call 256-766-1255. Jerry Rea is pastor.

EAST CULLMAN

► **East Cullman Association** will hold God & Country Celebration June 26, 6:30 p.m., at North-

brook Church, Cullman. Otis Corbitt, associate in the office of associational missions and church planting for the State Board of Missions, will speak. Corbitt is also an Army chaplain who recently returned from Iraq. A combined choir representing churches in the association will present the musical "I Believe in America." For information call 256-737-9918. Steve Britt is pastor of Northbrook. Randy Makemson is director of missions for East Cullman Association.

LAMAR

► **Dennis Bridges** is the new summer youth leader for **Fellowship Church, Vernon**. He previously served as youth pastor for First Church, Taos, N.M. He is a graduate of Mid America Theological Seminary in Cordova, Tenn. Bridges is married to Grace. Douglas Bridges is pastor.

RANDOLPH

► **Paran Church, Roanoke**, will celebrate its 165th homecoming June 12, 10:30 a.m. Lunch will follow. Jamie Taylor is pastor.

SHELBY

► **First Church, Pelham**, will

hold an Answers in Genesis (AIG) weekend with Tommy Mitchell June 12–13. AIG is an apologetics ministry dedicated to enabling Christians to defend their faith and proclaim the gospel effectively. The focus will be particularly on providing answers to questions surrounding the Book of Genesis. Services will be Sunday at 8, 9:15, 10:45 a.m. and 5 p.m. and Monday at 7 p.m. Child care will be provided. Mike Shaw is pastor.

SIPSEY

► **Lottie Hocutt**, wife of long-time **Sipsey Association** Director of Missions Lenwood Hocutt, who served for 23 years, died May 20. She was 86. Hocutt was preceded in death by her husband of 60 years and two granddaughters, Jill Hocutt Moore and Melody Baumgartner. Survivors include sons Joe Hocutt, of Fayette, and Johnny Hocutt, of Fayette; daughters Evelyn Fulmer, of Fayette, Carolyn Fulmer, of Deatsville, and Deborah Hocutt, of Fayette; sister Louise Sanford, of Fayette; 11 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren. She was a lifelong member of Hopewell Church, Bankston.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

SBC CP giving 1.92 percent below last year

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee are 1.92 percent below the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank Page. The total includes receipts from state conventions and fellowships, churches and individuals for distribution according to the 2010–11 SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget.

As of May 31, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget totaled \$130,314,404.44, or \$2,545,288.04 behind the \$132,859,692.48 received at the end of May 2010.

Designated giving of \$147,289,329.48 for the same year-to-date period is 6.78 percent, or \$10,719,812.29, below gifts of \$158,009,141.77 received at this point last year.

Monthly CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$15,936,344.95 while designated gifts received last month amounted to \$16,315,629.58. Month-to-month swings reflect a number of factors, including the timing of receipts from state conventions. The end-of-month total represents money received by close of business on the last business day of each month.

For the SBC CP Allocation Budget, the year-to-date total of \$130,314,404.44 is 97.82 percent of the \$133,214,726.79 budgeted to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. The SBC operates on an Oct. 1–Sept. 30 fiscal year.

The CP is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state conventions and the SBC.

NAMB, Obama discuss plans for hurricane season

WASHINGTON — As Southern Baptist disaster relief teams are standing down following spring 2011's horrific tornadoes and floods, the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) adult volunteer mobilization team leader, Mickey Caison, was at the White House on June 1. Caison met with President Obama, leadership from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security, American Red Cross and other federal and state officials to discuss preparedness for the 2011 hurricane season.

The beginning of the 2011 hurricane season is a good time for families, churches, associations and communities to stop and make preparations so that in the event of a disaster, they will be ready with resources and a plan, Caison said. Individuals can find resources to help their families, churches and associations prepare for potential disasters at www.namb.net/Disaster-Relief-Preparedness and to assist in disaster preparedness from the American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) and at www.ready.gov.

Caison said the best donation in a disaster is a gift of cash to a recognized disaster relief organization. Those who want to donate to Southern Baptist disaster relief can go to www.namb.net and hit the "donate now" button. Other ways to donate are to call 1-866-407-NAMB (6262) or mail checks to NAMB, P.O. Box 116543, Atlanta, GA 30368-6543. Checks should be designated for "Storms 2011." Donations can also be sent via texting "NAMBDR" to the number "40579." A one-time donation of \$10 will be added to the caller's mobile phone bill or deducted from any prepaid balance.

Bernice King leaves Atlanta's New Birth Church

ATLANTA — Bernice King, daughter of the late Martin Luther King Jr., announced May 31 that she is leaving an Atlanta-area megachurch whose leader has been embroiled in scandal.

"When I came to New Birth, I came for a season and I expected that season not to be quite as long as it was," King said in an interview on Atlanta gospel music station WPZE-FM, two days after her last Sunday at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church.

Her announcement follows a settlement between the church's senior pastor, Eddie Long, and four young men who accused him of sexual misconduct.

King, who did not tie her departure to the scandal, said she had told Long in April that she would be leaving at the end of May. After declining the presidency of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in January, King said she feels called to a new assignment. "I'm not calling it a church right now. What God is showing me doesn't look like what people are accustomed to," she said.

In a statement, Long said he had discussed how King could continue the legacy of her father and mother, Coretta Scott King, whose 2006 funeral was held at New Birth. "I am in full support of her decision to leave New Birth in pursuit of this worthy endeavor," Long said.

100 years of Baptist work in Israel

One man's faith leads to salvation of untold numbers of Arabs, Jews

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

Hiba used to pore over the Quran, trying to sort out life's problems. Then she bumped into some Christians in her hometown a few years ago. She agonized for days about which was the real book, the Quran or the Bible. "And then God showed me," Hiba said.

Thanks to local Baptists discipling her, she said she now knows it's Jesus who changed her life. This lasting legacy of Baptist work was honored May 12–14 at the 100th anniversary of Baptists in Israel, celebrated in Nazareth, where the nation's first Baptist church was planted.

Hiba was baptized in the Sea of Galilee to close the weekend celebration.

Before the first believers were baptized through Baptist work in Nazareth a century ago, Baptists "had nothing in the Middle East," said Drew Carson, a Christian leader in the region.

Church plant

In 1911, Shukri Mosa — a Palestinian who came to follow Christ at First Baptist Church, Dallas — brought his faith to Nazareth and led two people to faith and baptism. He faced persecution from the town around him, but eventually a church was planted in the 1920s.

The International Mission Board (IMB) partnered with the work in Israel soon after it began, helping nurture the church. IMB workers continue to reach out among the Jewish and Arab people groups in the nation.

"Shukri Mosa's connection with First Baptist, Dallas, provided a bridge for us



BP photo

CELEBRATION — A baptism in the Sea of Galilee was part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Baptists in Israel, held May 12–14 in Nazareth, where the first Baptist church was planted in the 1920s.

to come over here and plant our lives and get deeper and deeper into this part of the world," Carson said. "We should never underestimate the first step of the journey. What happened here 100 years ago resulted in untold lives across the Arab and Jewish world being touched by the salvation of Jesus Christ."

The work in Nazareth sparked a flame of American-led Southern Baptist work in the

region. And it produced many Arab believers who took the gospel to other countries when war in Israel dispersed part of the nation's Palestinian population in 1948.

"Many believers scattered when war happened, but they were able to take the message with them where they went," said Dale Thorne, a Southern Baptist representative in Israel.

Baptist work in Israel dwindled nearly

to extinction immediately after the war, but then new ministry doors opened, Thorne said.

"A large number of Arabs fled to Nazareth, which had surrendered to the Jews, and so the town boomed in population," he said.

A Baptist school was founded in the Arab community, and it's still going strong with 1,000 students, Thorne said (see story this page).

Roughly a couple hundred Baptist congregations, both Messianic Jewish and Arab, exist in Israel today.

"I hope that this time of celebrating 100 years is an encouragement to Baptists here not only to look back but also to accept the challenge of moving forward into the future," Thorne said.

Gordon Fort, vice president for overseas operations for the IMB, challenged Baptists to keep reaching out across their region and the world.

"Israel has (had) a genuine faith living among its Baptists for 100 years. Years ago, someone brought that genuine faith to you. It is your responsibility to share this faith with others," Fort said.

Baptists are striving to do this, showing Christ's love through unity across deep cultural divisions, said Bader Mansour, secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.

"I am thankful for the Lord and what He's done in our lives. He's commanded us to be one in body, one in mind, one in spirit," Mansour said. "We are in a time of miracles."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed. (BP)

Jews 'more open' to gospel

(continued from page 1)

movement, when the Messianic Jews did street evangelism, they would often find Jews who already believed in Jesus but thought they were the only ones. "We believe Jews are becoming more open to the gospel all the time," Martin said.

And not just in Israel. David and Cindy Bufkin spent 21 years reaching out to the people of Argentina before they felt a strong pull to join the work God was doing among the Jews there.

Now the couple are spending a year working in Israel to learn Jewish culture and the Hebrew language.

"We wanted to be able to have the cultural foundation to connect with them and build relationships," Cindy Bufkin said.

"It's a wide spectrum of culture among the Jews in Argentina, but they all have that (Jewish traditions) in common.

"We want to be able to connect with them and lead them to the Messiah."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed. (BP)

In Muslim-majority Nazareth, Baptist school nurtures faith

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

Flat-roofed houses still dot the Nazareth skyline as they did in Jesus' time, but these days, they're covered with satellite dishes.

A good bit has changed since Jesus grew up in the Galilean city. But one thing rings true across the years: Christ's hometown still needs His peace, Charles Tyson said.

"People think of Israel and they automatically think of biblical Israel instead of the modern-day political state of Israel," said Tyson, a Southern Baptist worker in Israel. They don't realize that Israel is a diverse nation with many different ethnic populations, he explained.

Strong roots

The residents of Nazareth — including the members of Israel's first Baptist church, planted in the 1920s — are Arabs, not Jews, even though Israel is majority Jewish. The Word is preached today in Arabic at Nazareth Baptist Church, just as the church's first sermon was preached decades before Israel was a nation.

Today, in the town of 80,000, roughly 80 percent of people are Muslim, 20 percent

are Christian by background and a tiny sliver of that number are evangelical believers in Jesus.

It's that way even though Christians have had strong roots in the town since Jesus' day. Two churches — including the Church of the Annunciation, the largest church in

the area — claim to be on the place where Gabriel told Mary she would bear God's Son.

"Even in Nazareth, where we've had a Christian presence for a long time, it's hard for Arab Muslims to see what a Christian is," said Adam Roberts, a Southern Baptist worker in Israel.

"We want to show them that it's not just our identification or our background. Our faith transforms our whole life in Christ."

It's slow work to overcome religious barriers, but workers are still tending the missions field where Baptists began planting spiritual seeds in 1911, Roberts said.

One way he's doing this is through his work at Nazareth Baptist School, where he teaches Bible to teens.

About 20 percent of the K–12 students are from a Muslim background, he said.

"The parents in the community respect

"We want to show [Muslims] that it's not just our identification. ... Our faith transforms our whole life in Christ."
Adam Roberts
Southern Baptist worker

the high academic reputation of the school to the degree that they are willing to accept that their children will be taught about the Bible," Roberts said. "Because of this, I'm able to talk openly about the gospel."

"Openly" is a bit of an understatement — he said he's shared the gospel more in one year at the school than he did in several years of youth ministry back in the States.

'Speak freely'

"I encourage them to speak freely about their questions and their own faith and talk about where our beliefs are different," Roberts said.

"I tell them if we fall to the temptation to say we are the same, we are robbing both of us of important aspects of our faith. It's good to talk about what we share, but it's also good to discuss where we are different."

Roberts asked for believers to pray

▶ for the 1,000 students who attend the Baptist school in Nazareth.

▶ that the school will find qualified teachers who are Christ followers.

▶ that churches in the United States will partner with the school, leading a week of chapel at the school or partnering in other types of work.

For more information, visit www.nbs.org.il/en.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed. (BP)

Princeton Baptist

Area's Only Accredited Chest Pain Center

By Susan P. Moore

Princeton Baptist Medical Center, the only accredited chest pain center in the region, has received its next cycle of chest pain center accreditation – Cycle III Chest Pain Center with PCI (Percutaneous Coronary Intervention) – from the Society of Chest Pain Centers (SCPC).

This accreditation recognizes hospitals that demonstrate a higher level of expertise in treating patients with symptoms of a heart attack. The hospital earned its initial Chest Pain Center Accreditation in 2009.

For this third cycle of accreditation, Princeton Baptist underwent a rigorous evaluation by SCPC for its ability to assess, diagnose and treat patients who may be experiencing a heart attack. To the community served by Princeton, this means that

processes are in place to meet strict criteria aimed at:

- reducing the time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis and treatment,
- treating patients more quickly during the critical window of time when the integrity of the heart muscle can be preserved,
- monitoring patients when it is not certain they are having a heart attack to ensure they are not sent home too quickly or are needlessly admitted to the hospital.

“We have the system and protocols in place to quickly get a cardiology consult from a physician, and then get the patient from their room to the cardiac cath lab for an intervention,” said Ann McEntire, nursing director.

“We have a saying in cardiac care that ‘time is muscle,’” she added. “Every minute a patient has to wait for treatment can compromise heart function. Whether a patient comes in with chest pain through

our emergency department or experience chest pain while a patient on one of our units, that patient receives state-of-the-art care, especially during the critical window of time when the integrity of the muscle can be preserved.”

The cardiovascular program at Princeton Baptist provides a full continuum of care – from emergency department, to catheterization lab, to community outreach and more. By achieving this next level as an Accredited Chest Pain Center, Princeton Baptist has enhanced the quality of care for cardiac patients and demonstrated its commitment to high standards.

For information about heart services at Princeton Baptist or any of the four Baptist Medical Centers, or for help finding a physician to meet your health care needs, call toll free 1-877-222-7847.

Baptist Health Center Practice Earns National Recognition

By Susan P. Moore

Hoover Internal Medicine Associates has been accredited as a Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH). The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) awarded the highest level of recognition – Level 3 – to the Baptist Health Center practice of Dr. Darlene Traffanstedt and Dr. Frank Miller. The practice, located in the new Baptist Health Center Hoover near the intersection of Highway 150 and Interstate 459, is one of only a few practices in the state to receive this important Level 3 distinction.

Designation as a Patient-Centered Medical Home represents an emerging model of advanced primary care in which patients select a primary care practice to be their “medical home.” A PCMH fosters an environment of improved quality and greater involvement of patients in their own care. The setting is one in which the patient has an on-going relationship with a primary care physician who leads a multi-disciplinary team of health care professionals in caring for the patient. This physician-led, patient-centered approach ensures patients get the care they need, when and where they need it, by the physician or specialist needed, in the manner and language necessary for them to understand.

In a PCMH practice, patients also receive health care advice and education from a Health Coach. The Health Coach serves as an educator regarding disease prevention and chronic condition management. One of the most important duties of the Health Coach is to ensure patients are aware of the need to receive appropriate medical screenings and manage chronic conditions. Cynthia Garrett, DNP – a doctor of nursing practice – is piloting the Health Coach role at Hoover Internal Medicine and will mentor new health coaches as more BHC clinics become



NCQA awarded the highest level of recognition to the practice of Dr. Darlene Traffanstedt and Dr. Frank Miller at Baptist Health Center Hoover.

accredited PCMHs. Baptist Health Centers has a goal to have all its primary care practices become accredited PCMH practices by early 2012.

“Hoover Internal Medicine is excited about the opportunity to reach out to our community with this new approach to care. We believe PCMH to be the model of quality primary care for the future,” said Dr. Traffanstedt.

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Princeton and Walker Baptist Rated Among “Best Hospitals”

By Susan P. Moore

Walker Baptist Medical Center in Jasper and Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham have been named among the top-ranked hospitals in the Birmingham Metro Area in U.S. News & World Report magazine’s first-ever “Best Hospitals” metro area rankings.

The two Baptist Health System hospitals were among 622 hospitals in or near major cities with a record of high performance in key medical specialties. U.S. News created “Best Hospitals” more than 20 years ago to identify hospitals that are exceptionally skilled in handling the most difficult health concerns.

Walker and Princeton Baptist were in a tie for third place in Neurology and Neurosurgery, medical specialties that deal with the structure and function of the nervous system including the brain.

“It’s gratifying that the performance excellence of our hospitals continues to earn recognition,” said Shane Spees, president and CEO of Baptist Health System. “The expertise of our physicians, the dedication of our staff and our ongoing investment to provide the latest medical technology make such achievements possible. We take seriously our mission to keep our hospitals at the forefront in providing outstanding care to those we serve.”

To be ranked in its metro area – which for Birmingham includes Jasper and Cullman – a hospital had to score in the top 25 percent among its peers in at least one of 16 medical specialties.

From the nation’s approximately 5,000 hospitals, U.S. News ranked hospitals within all 52 U.S. metro areas with populations of 1 million or more, using existing data from “2010-11 Best Hospitals.”

Thanks to the generosity of its donors, the Baptist Health Foundation continues to provide funds to help the hospitals of Baptist Health System stay among the country’s top hospitals. *For more information on how you can join this effort, contact the Foundation at 1-877-474-4243 or visit online www.BaptistHealthFoundation.com.*

FREE SEMINAR

Understanding Medicare Coverage

Baptist Health System’s Senior Choices program will present a free seminar on Medicare and the new Affordable Care Act. Medicare beneficiaries no longer have to pay out-of-pocket costs for most preventive services. Join us and guest speaker Dr. Maria Bennett of Baptist Health Center Bessemer for this free seminar Monday, June 13 from 12 noon – 1 p.m. at the Hoover Senior Center (400 Municipal Drive, Hoover, AL 35216) to learn more about these benefits for seniors. Free of charge; registration is requested but not required. For more information or to register call (in Birmingham) 715-5572, dial toll-free 1-800-450-5099, or email senior.programs@bhsala.com.

NAMB voices concerns over military 'marriage' issue

The North American Mission Board's (NAMB) head of chaplaincy ministry is one of 21 denominational chaplain-endorsing officials to sign a May 23 letter to the Army, Navy and Air Force chiefs of chaplains voicing concerns over recent policy changes involving homosexuals in the military.

The two-page letter went to Chaplain Douglas L. Carver (Maj. Gen.), chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army; Chaplain Cecil R. Richardson (Maj. Gen.), chief of chaplains for the U.S. Air Force; and Chaplain Mark L. Tidd (Rear Adm.), chief of chaplains for the U.S. Navy.

Permission granted

The letter was drafted in response to an April 13 memo issued by Tidd in which he granted permission to Navy chaplains to conduct same-gender "marriages" in Navy base chapels.

Tidd reversed course on May 10 by rescinding his April 13 decision.

Tidd's reversal came on the heels of an out-

cry from 63 members of Congress charging that the change in policy was a violation of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

As a result, Tidd said he was suspending his authorization "pending additional legal and policy review and enhanced cooperation with the Army and Air Force."

Tidd, in his April memo, had authorized Navy chaplains to officiate at on-base, same-sex ceremonies in states where such unions are allowed. He also had ruled that naval base facilities "may normally be used to celebrate the marriage" if the base is in a state that has legalized "same-sex marriage."

Chaplain (Col.) Keith Travis (U.S. Army Retired), NAMB's head of chaplaincy ministry, said Southern Baptist chaplains will continue "to treat all military service people with respect and provide ministry and pastoral care to all. But we are firm in our support for one man, one woman in marriage and that we do not want any SBC chaplain to compromise his faith. I also can emphatically state that we have no plans to pull our 1,400 chaplains out of the military or stop endorsing Southern Baptist chaplains."

In their letter to the three chiefs of chaplains, the 21 chaplain-endorsing entity heads said, "We know you are collectively facing many difficult decisions, especially in light of the repeal of DADT (Don't Ask, Don't Tell)." The chaplains said the policy changes had "potentially far-reaching consequences."

"It is our strong belief that the letter of revision ... by Chaplain Tidd's office goes beyond this stated intent of DADT repeal by sanction-

ing and normalizing the use of base chapels for same-sex unions. Though this revision is now temporarily suspended pending further review, we are genuinely concerned that this might be a sign of things to come. We are likewise concerned that endorsers and faith communities had no voice in the formulation of such a significant policy change."

The denominational chaplaincy heads maintained that DOMA "remains the law of the land. There is no clear reason why it does not apply to federal military facilities, particularly base chapels."

The letter — stating that the Obama administration has publicly stated it will no longer support and defend DOMA — "has every appearance of selective disregard for the law and raises significant concerns."

Hostile environment

The chaplains said the policy changes toward homosexuality in the military would "create an environment that is increasingly hostile to the many chaplains — and the service members they serve — whose faith groups and personal consciences recognize homosexual behavior as immoral and unsafe, and do not permit same-sex unions."

"No American, especially those serving in

the armed forces, should be forced to abandon their religious beliefs or be marginalized for holding to those beliefs," the chaplains' letter said.

"Service members should know that chaplains' ministry and their own rights of conscience remain protected everywhere the military necessity has placed them. We hope you will join us in urging the Department of Defense and Congress to adopt such specific and intentional conscience protections," the denominational chaplains told the three chiefs of chaplains.

Also signing the letter were representatives of the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), National Association of Evangelicals, Presbyterian & Reformed Joint Commission,

Anglican Church in North America, Evangelical Free Church of America, Calvary Chapel, Grace Churches International, Foursquare Church, Pentecostal Holiness Church, Church of God of Prophecy, Full Gospel Churches, Conservative Baptist Association of America, Plymouth Brethren, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Free Methodist Church of North America, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, International Ministerial Fellowship and the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church. (BP)

"We have no plans to pull our 1,400 chaplains out of the military or stop endorsing Southern Baptist chaplains."

Chaplain (Col.) Keith Travis
North American Mission Board

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

Remember to:

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

Report shows violence against children rising worldwide

In virtually all parts of the world, violent incidents against children are on the increase.

Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children suffer violence, according to UNICEF's 2011 "The State of the World's Children."

According to the report, approximately 1.5 million children between 5 and 14 are involved in child labor; 1.2 million children have been trafficked each year since 2000; 1 million children are detained through justice processes; 18 million children are living with the effects of displacement; and 70 million females in 29 countries, many of them young girls, have experienced female genital mutilation or cutting.

Child soldiers

Further complicating a terrible picture for children in the world, child soldiers are a norm in several countries. A child soldier is "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity."

Children were actively involved

in armed conflict in government forces or nonstate armed groups in 19 countries or territories between 2004 and 2007, according to Human Rights Watch's 2008 "Child Soldiers Global Report." The report estimates that "Child soldiers exist in all regions of the world."

For several decades, the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has sought to lead Baptists to be fully engaged in the quest to end violence against children. The BWA has given direct and indirect assistance to combat this scourge through Baptist World Aid, such as through resettlement programs for displaced persons, refugee assistance, post-conflict healing and reconciliation programs, and assistance for war orphans.

The BWA, in a 2002 resolution, lamented "that a large percentage of the world's children suffer various forms of violence," and encouraged Christians to "support policies ending abusive practices against children" and "make themselves more aware of the harsh and apparently unloving world into which many children are born." (BWA)



By Wanda Bergeron
The Alabama Baptist

Someone You Should Know

PANSEY BURCHFIELD

Concord Highland Baptist Church
Bessemer Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: Philipians 4:6-7, 13

FAVORITE HYMN: "Amazing Grace"
HOBBIES: Praying for my family, reading, singing and ceramics

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 48 years of marriage to Lebro; two daughters, Wanda and Shelia; six grandchildren; and nine great grandchildren



BURCHFIELD

Pansey Burchfield has been a member of Concord Highland Baptist Church for the past 45 years. She loved teaching Sunday School and hated having to give it up when she became homebound.

Q: When were you saved?

A: (I was) saved and baptized at age 9. I made a total commitment to Christ later in life and was baptized again.

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

A: I began teaching Vacation Bible School and then taught the 3- and 4-year-old (Sunday School) class, then I moved to teaching teenagers, and after that, I began teaching the young ladies class. The ladies class has been the longest and most enjoyable class I have taught, and I have made many friends and prayer warriors.

I also enjoyed singing in the choir and being on the church board and nominating committee.

Q: What were the demands of teaching and what did you get from it?

A: I would start preparing my lesson early in the week and pray over it. I usually would change it several times, depending on how the Lord would lead me. By Sunday morning, I would have a finished lesson through many hours of studying and praying. I always tried to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, so some Sundays, we would have a short lesson and spend more time praying for others who might have special needs that week and just needed that special care and touch from our Savior. We would just let God's Holy Spirit take over and witness and heal. My Sunday School class has taught me more (than I taught it) and blessed me in

so many ways. I learned so much ... while preparing my lesson about God and His Word. ... My faith has grown even stronger by teaching and sharing God's Word.

Q: What difference has being a Christian made in your life?

A: Being a Christian has made all the difference in the world. I cannot imagine having to go through this life without Jesus by my side. He is my best friend, my provider, my comforter, my rock, my teacher, my master and king. Christ is my everything and I am here to serve Him and glorify Him.

If you know of a person who should be featured here, 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.



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World of Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Arabic broadcast ministry celebrates 15 years

EASTON, Md. — While many are celebrating pro-democracy movements in the Middle East and North Africa known collectively as Arab Spring, a Christian broadcasting ministry celebrates 15 years of wholesome family programming.

SAT-7, a Christian satellite television station run by and for people in the Middle East and North Africa, aired its first program in Arabic on a single channel May 31, 1996. Today the ministry has three different channels — including one for children and another in Farsi, the most widely spoken Persian language in Iran and Afghanistan.

The success of SAT-7 surprises even its founders — a group of ministries already active in the area that were seeking to support and bolster the witness of minority indigenous Christian communities in the region. Satellite television was just becoming popular, sparked by the desire for uncensored news coverage during the first Gulf War.

Research indicated that despite its cost, satellite TV was the most effective way to reach large numbers of people in the area. Founders established a broadcasting ethos that includes commitments to never attack those of another faith or denomination but rather seek to build bridges of understanding between Christians and their neighbors.

Rita El Mounayer, executive director for SAT-7's channels, was there for the first broadcast. Fifteen years later, she said she sees a continuing hunger in the Middle East and North Africa for SAT-7's holistic and uplifting programming.

SAT-7 is governed by an international board of directors, the majority of whom must be local Christian leaders living in the Middle East or North Africa.

The network has about 140 Middle Eastern Christians working in ministry offices and studios in Cyprus, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt. The Lebanon office is next door to Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut. Fund-raising offices are located in Europe, the U.K., Canada and the United States.

International SAT-7 partners include BMS World Mission in the U.K. and American Baptist Churches USA in North America.

Veteran Chinese Diaspora worker Cheng dies

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Angie Cheng, a veteran Christian worker with the Chinese Diaspora, died May 7 in Taipei, Taiwan, after complications associated with a bone marrow transplant. She was 62.

Her career spanned 25 years, working in six different countries. After she and her husband were appointed Aug. 11, 1985, they worked to equip leaders through theological training in Costa Rica, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan.

Longtime friend Naomi Taylor (name changed for security reasons) said Cheng made a significant impact on so many students throughout the years.

"She mingled with the students as a student, not holding herself above them in anyway. She became their friend and was able to have an influence on their lives," Taylor said. "Angie was quick with her smile and always had a good word to say of everyone."

"When one got to know Angie, one could readily tell she was a lady at peace with herself because she was at peace with God," Taylor added.

Cheng did not grow up in a Christian home. She was born Nov. 15, 1948, in Canton, China. She lived in China for less than one year, in Hong Kong for one year and then in Taiwan. She migrated to the United States in 1975. It was during college, studying to be a chemistry teacher, that she became a follower of Jesus Christ.

She married Roland on Feb. 2, 1974. After he felt a call to work with the Chinese Diaspora, Cheng felt the same pull to training leaders. She helped to start many small groups to study the Bible as well as a women's fellowship for migrant workers. Right up until her death she proclaimed the good news, witnessing to nurses and cancer patients.

Cheng is survived by her husband and three children. One daughter preceded her in death. She died of meningitis when she was 21 months old.

Compelled to share

Alabama Baptist spreading God's Word in Spain

By Ava Thomas
Special to The Alabama Baptist

It was the first time Lauren Howard had ever cried like that.

Studying language in Spain, she was on a train when the weight of her teacher's loss hit her.

"Just out of the blue, I started crying uncontrollably for her salvation," Howard said. "This was the first time I had cried for someone's salvation, and that was the moment God spoke to me and said, 'You have to come back.'"

She did.

Now an International Mission Board journeyman in Sevilla, Spain, Howard spends her days walking the cobblestone streets of the quaint city building relationships with university students.

"It's so dark and there is so much sin and disregard for God," said Howard, whose home church is Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association. "It seems like no one is interested in the gospel at all, and when they hear it, it doesn't penetrate their hearts. They're so consumed in their sinful lives that they cannot see the truth."

It's hard sometimes to keep sharing, she said. But she's compelled by the need and the bondage she said comes from a tradition of Catholicism but no real knowledge of Jesus.

"They're all searching for some-



IMB photo

CALLED — Alabamian Lauren Howard serves as an International Mission Board journeyman in Sevilla, Spain.

thing more and no one is happy. It's very obvious (that they need something), but they don't think Jesus is it," Howard said.

But she is seeing God at work despite the hardness of the soil she's tilling, especially through a new Bible discussion group she and her roommate started in their home in January. At the meeting, nonbelievers read Scripture and then discuss its message in a casual environment. It's something that has drawn a lot of interest from students.

"This time has given us great op-

portunities to talk deeper with many students and share the entire gospel with them," Howard said. "The Lord has definitely been using this to open their eyes, and many of them come back each week without hesitation. And they come with questions and eager to learn more."

She works through Connexion, a university ministry that offers English conversation classes, Bible discussion groups like the one at her house, parties, excursions and discipleship groups.

"I'm constantly hanging out with students in order to build relationships, share the gospel and bring them into our group," Howard said. "We need so much prayer because this is a hard place."

She asked that believers pray for God to break the hearts of the people.

for Him "to reveal their futile and sinful lives and to show them the emptiness in their idols of alcohol, partying, friends, family and all the Catholic tradition that isn't based on truth."

for them to see that God is real and relevant and wants a relationship with them.

that their preconceptions and stereotypes of God and Christianity would be destroyed.

"Please also pray for me and my team, that we would continue to be obedient in sharing the Word and continue to seek the Lord first in all that we do," Howard said.



SBC Representatives Around the World

I left from Atlanta on Memorial Day to fly to International Falls, Minn., to begin a north-south long distance bike ride. I began the bike ride from Angle Inlet, Minn., our nation's northernmost point outside of Alaska. I am pedaling my way south and east until I arrive at our nation's southernmost point, Key West, Fla. I anticipate that it will take me between 45 and 48 days. It is 2,650 miles of riding on a variety of terrain and roads in Canada and nine states.

I have five purposes in this long bike ride:

1. The physical challenge of it.
2. Seeing places in our country I have never seen before.
3. Connecting with churches and believers across our nation to share with them what God is doing through the ministry of Albanian Bible Institute.

I am especially desirous to share with Southern Baptist churches in our country that have few missionaries ever visit them. I want to be

the face of the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, which they support year after year.

4. Trying to raise money for the continued ministry of our school.

5. Growing in my own relationship with God. (I should have listed this as No. 1.)

I ask you to pray for

1. My safety and health on this trip. Pray for wisdom when I face situations that are unexpected.

2. My ability to connect well with the churches where I speak. Pray that people will understand and appreciate what their support really means and how it changes lives in Albania.

3. My fruitfulness on the trip. Pray that many will be stirred to think about their involvement in missions, both personally and corporately, as they reflect on what they hear me say about missions in Albania.

4. Pray that our school will be

blessed financially as a result of this trip.

5. Pray that I may grow in my fellowship with God as I travel the miles across America.

6. Pray that my radical trip might stir believers to attempt radical actions for the sake of the Lord Jesus, whose radical love compels us to step out of our comfort zone so that others may know Him.

I am not going to start a blog about this experience and don't have any plans to write a book about this trip. If you want to get an update of where I am and what I am seeing, both physically and spiritually, please see my entries on Facebook. I am not posting every day because I do not always have a computer with me. However, I am there as often as I can be. If you are not on Facebook, please send me a "friend request" and I will add you to the list of those who will get updates.

Lee Bradley
Durres, Albania

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newspaper.

Christians arrested for meeting in China

More than 20 members of a Beijing illegal church were arrested May 29 as they tried to gather for an outdoor service in what was the eighth straight week of public confrontation between the congregation and the Chinese government.

Police arrested at least 22 members of Shouwang Church, which has been trying to meet outdoors after the government forced members from their indoor facility.

Many more likely would have been arrested had police not placed most of the members under house arrest since May 27, preventing them from even leaving their house. The church has nearly 1,000 members. Twenty-one of the members were released by midnight, and the final one was released the next day. All the church's leaders have been under house arrest for weeks, and some members have lost their jobs as the government pressures employers and landlords.

"After eight outdoor worship services, we may feel tired and

may sometimes unconsciously become lax in our spirits and actions," the church said in a statement published on the website of ChinaAid, an organization that monitors religious freedom.

"Therefore, in this continuing fight, we need all the more pray for our alertness, support each other, encourage each other and press forward with the extra strength and power given by the Lord."

The dispute — the church calls it a "spiritual fight" — has put China's crackdown on religious freedom in the world spotlight.

More than 160 were arrested the first week Shouwang tried to meet outdoors, about 50 were arrested the second week, approximately 40 on the third week, about 30 on the fourth week, 13 the fifth week, 20 the sixth week and 25 the seventh week.

In China, only churches registered with the government who are members of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement are considered legal. But registration brings heavy restrictions, including prohibitions on evangelism, Sunday School and

baptizing children and teens, said Bob Fu, president and founder of ChinaAid, which has been covering Shouwang's stance.

Some members were battling internally with whether to defy the government. "Thank God that by respectfully seeking guidance

from the faithful Creator, many brothers and sisters triumphed over their weakness," the statement said. "It is just like what He has told us that if the faith does not meet challenges, we may never know ourselves. Without tests, one's faith can hardly grow." (BP)

"If the faith does not meet challenges, we may never know ourselves."
Shouwang Church statement

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Relive the golden age of railroading with a one-hour train ride through the forests of Shelby County. Train departures at 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Southside Baptist Church in Albertville, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Resumes can be sent to: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 1144, Albertville, AL 35950, or e-mailed to: jlpeters@charter.net.

SENIOR PASTOR: Tate Springs Baptist Church, located in Arlington, Texas, is a multi-generational, conservative Southern Baptist church looking for a senior pastor who can operate in a team approach with pastoral staff. Our total Sunday morning attendance is 600-650. Please forward resume to: Terry Jeffries, Pastor of Administration, at terry@tatesprings.com or directly to the pulpit committee at pastorsearch@tatesprings.com.

MUSIC & YOUTH OR MUSIC & CHILDREN: We are interested in someone to help full-time with music and youth or music and children. Send resumes to: Forest Avenue Baptist Church, P.O. Box 611, Jackson, AL 36545, or fabc7637@att.net.

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT MINISTER: Central Park Baptist Church is accepting resumes for this full-time position. Mail resumes to: Central Park Baptist Church Search Committee, 2020 Westmeade Street SW, Decatur, AL 35601.

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

PART-TIME MINISTER TO CHILDREN: First Baptist Hazel Green is currently accepting resumes for a part-time minister to children. This position involves planning, coordinating and leading a team of volunteers to minister to children (birth-

5th grade) and their families. Relevant ministry experience is required. Send resumes to: David Spiers, 225 Hunt Drive, Hazel Green, AL 35750.

OTHER POSITIONS

LICENSED CERTIFIED SOCIAL WORKER — MONTGOMERY: Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries is seeking a licensed certified social worker to serve the Montgomery area. Responsibilities include conducting foster home studies, training and approving foster parents and working with foster children. Experience a plus. Contact Louise Green, 205-945-0037, lgreen@abchome.org.

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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.

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HEART OF MISSIONS ...

In mid-April, Tennessee River Baptist Association sent a team of 11 to Christ Fellowship Community Church on the Tohono O'odham reservation in Arizona.

Director of Missions Dwight Everett explained that Christ Fellowship Community is the only evangelical witness in the area. The association decided to try to help save the 12-member congregation and went to replace the 28-year-old church roof (something the small church could have never completed or afforded on its own).

The two-woman and nine-man team from Calvary Baptist Church, Agape Baptist Church, Center Point Baptist Church, Ridgedale Baptist Church and New Prospect Baptist Church, all of Scottsboro, and Harmony Baptist Church, Fackler, also took quilts and Vacation Bible School (VBS) supplies to the reservation.

Tennessee River Association plans to take a VBS team to the reservation in the future.

Sixth Street Baptist Church, Alexander City, in Tallapoosa Baptist Association has adopted the Kakabe people group in West Africa and plans to work with them for several years, building relationships and sharing the gospel.

Pastor Matt Haines said three deacons and one staff member from the church traveled to the group's home country of Guinea in early February just to locate them. The group of less than 4,000 people is not easily accessible.

The team brought back videos and photos for the church to get to know the Kakabe people and to better know how to pray for them. Sixth Street Baptist plans to send several small teams to Guinea each year, with the next trip planned for November.

Healthy minister, healthy congregation

(continued from page 1)

be 'institutional CEOs and business managers' but are in the 'health and wholeness business,'" Cranston says. "The healthier and more whole clergy are the more likely parishioners and congregations will become healthier too."

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) profiled its typical ministers as a 51-year-old male with symptoms of depression, high blood pressure and overweight with heightened risk of heart disease and other illnesses. He works 60 to 70 hours a week in a sedentary job lacking physical exercise and reports considerable work-related stress. He is married with three children. One expresses interest in following their father into full-time ministry. The pastor, however, expresses little enthusiasm for encouraging a child to do so.

'Wholeness Wheel'

The ELCA promotes a "Wholeness Wheel" model for balancing the interconnected aspects of individual wellness:

► **Physical well-being.** "While we are not all born perfectly healthy and no one makes it through life without injury or illness, with tending and nurturing we can live well even with disabilities, injuries or illness. Those with good health can lose it as a result

of unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors. Keeping the wholeness wheel in perspective means optimizing our physical health through good nutrition, physical activity and avoiding risks to our health."

► **Emotional well-being.** "Being emotionally well means feeling the full range of emotions and expressing those emotions appropriately. Not feeling emotion is a sign of stress or depression, just as having emotions that you cannot control may be the sign of emotional distress. Physical health problems can affect our emotions, and emotional problems affect our physical health."

► **Social well-being.** "We were created to be social persons by God with instructions to help and love each other. We are nourished by the love and intimacy of our family and friends. Isolation is a significant risk for depression and premature death. Whether we are introverted or extroverted, regular social contact is essential for health. Being healthy means having healthy relationships with family, friends, co-workers and others. Studies have shown that volunteering in service to others actually lengthens life."

► **Intellectual well-being.** "Alzheimer's disease or dementia is feared by all who have seen or heard about the personal frustration or social disruption it causes.

While we cannot be certain that we will never experience dementia or something similar, using our minds keeps them alert and active. ... We can stretch our minds by experiencing new things — music, art, hobbies or travel. Pushing ourselves at work by seeking out new responsibilities and pursuing lifelong learning keeps us healthy and growing."

► **Vocational well-being.** "Having a sense of purpose is important in living a healthy life. We all want to feel that we are using the gifts God has given us to make this world a better place. We need to be aware of what those gifts are and make good use of education and training to hone our skills. We need to always be seeking for opportunities to make a difference. If not through our occupation, then perhaps through volunteering in the community, nurturing our family, or actively participating in church."

► **Spiritual well-being.** "Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength impacts everything we do and everything we are. ... Nurturing your relationship with God through daily prayer or devotion is the first step. Knowing that God is always present and has given us the gift of grace through the death of Jesus Christ allows us to stumble along the way and keeps us from getting lost." (ABP)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 12

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

GET BACK ON TRACK

Jeremiah 3:12-17; 4:1-4

The nation of Judah survived even after greater kingdoms fell. More than a century before Jeremiah's time, Assyrian troops destroyed the idolatrous tribes of Israel, ransacking the capital city of Samaria in 722 B.C. Assyria's pantheon was unable to protect Nineveh from the Babylonian army. Due in large part to the spiritual renewals under kings Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah, however, Judah had avoided a similar end.

"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it/Prone to leave the God I love." In these few words, lyricist Robert Robinson characterized the bent to walk away from God. This nature is one of the ways in which His people resemble sheep (Isa. 53:6). God sent shepherds to guide His people, but most of them failed to keep Judah from straying from Him. In these passages, Jeremiah announced God's plan to judge and then restore His wandering people.

Admit Guilt (3:12-13)

The northern kingdom of Israel never had a godly king. Judah, in the south, had eight. Israel had faced God's judgment by the hands of the Assyrians, yet God called Jeremiah to pronounce them more righteous than the people of Judah. Jeremiah was to proclaim toward the north that God would restore Israel if they would admit and repent of their wickedness.

Israel had committed spiritual adultery by following after the gods of the Philistines, Phoenicians and Canaanites. They had prostituted themselves for the sake of convenience and wealth, yet God said they were more righteous than Judah. How was Judah worse than Israel?

Jeremiah was calling Jerusalem and the wandering citizens of Judah to turn back to God while kings were ignoring prophetic words and gathering advisers who spoke only encouraging words. Priests were allowing forbidden altars and statues inside the temple. God invited them to admit and repent in order to experience His blessings.

Accept Blessings (3:14-17)

Under God's mighty hand, Moses shep-

herded Israel. Centuries later, a shepherd boy became king, and David confessed that Yahweh was his shepherd. Before his calling to announce a message of judgment to Israel, Amos also owned or herded sheep. Each of these men had an honorable responsibility, in some way reflecting Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10).

In the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, the term "shepherd" is used to refer to leaders who had been entrusted with the care and protection of Judah and Israel. Prophets, priests and kings were given stewardship responsibilities over God's people. They failed. More often than not, they were more concerned about their own welfare and position than about the nation. Jeremiah conveys God's promise that He will provide honorable shepherds who love Him and will care for His people.

God's plan includes representatives from every people, tribe and tongue (Gen. 12:3). This plan is for the nations to hear the gospel message (Matt. 24:14) and worship Him together (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Jerusalem will be the gathering place. This section is a reminder that God blesses His people in order for others to know Him (see Ps. 67:1-7).

Avoid Judgment (4:1-4)

The idea presented in the lesson is that repentance allows for believers to avoid judgment. In truth, even after turning away from sin, believers may still face consequences for thoughtless words, foolish choices and blatant rebellion.

Restoration and repentance are Jeremiah's actual focus. Avoiding judgment is only secondary. Jeremiah's message called for the people to remove their idols from the temple, bear the name of Yahweh and reflect Him in truth, justice and righteousness. They must admit that their hearts are as hard as unused ground in a time of drought, that their hearts are uncircumcised, without faith like the Gentiles.

If they turned from their wickedness, then would they avoid God's righteous indignation. Only then would the nations be blessed by God and glory in Him.

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

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

Matthew 6:19-34

This week's passage comes from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus addressed His disciples, not the crowds. Matthew probably made this point to ensure that his readers apply the teachings to themselves.

Jesus' discussion of wealth flowed from the stream of Israelite and Jewish attitudes, particularly the prophetic tradition. The authors of the Books of Deuteronomy through 1 Kings laid great emphasis on worship of Yahweh alone and worship only at the Temple in Jerusalem. Such an understanding stood out sharply against the faith systems of the ancient Near East. It was the prophets who said Israel could worship God alone but still violate His will as it was expressed in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). Prophet after prophet condemned God's people for profiting on the backs of the destitute. In later Jewish tradition, the poor would be considered righteous because they were poor. Why? They relied upon God, not their own wealth, for their daily existence.

Collect the Right Treasure (19-21)

Jesus' words also fit within the tradition of the Greek and Roman moral philosophers, with some important differences. Remember Plato spread the view that the material world is changing and impermanent (rust and decay are common metaphors for this idea). For that reason, the material world is a poor shadow of what is unchanging and eternal and, hence, most real. For Jesus, however, "heaven" was not some disembodied existence but a creation that matched the heavens and earth that God had declared "very good" in the beginning (note the language "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth" in Matthew 6:10). Plato could never say such a thing. Nevertheless Jesus agreed that "treasures on earth" are mere shadows of those unchanging and enduring "treasures in heaven."

Select the Right Master (22-24)

Paul used the same metaphors when he said now we see, as in a mirror, dimly. He was referring to the first century's burnished bronze

mirrors that poorly reflected their subjects, unlike today's clear glass mirrors. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand His teachings about wealth.

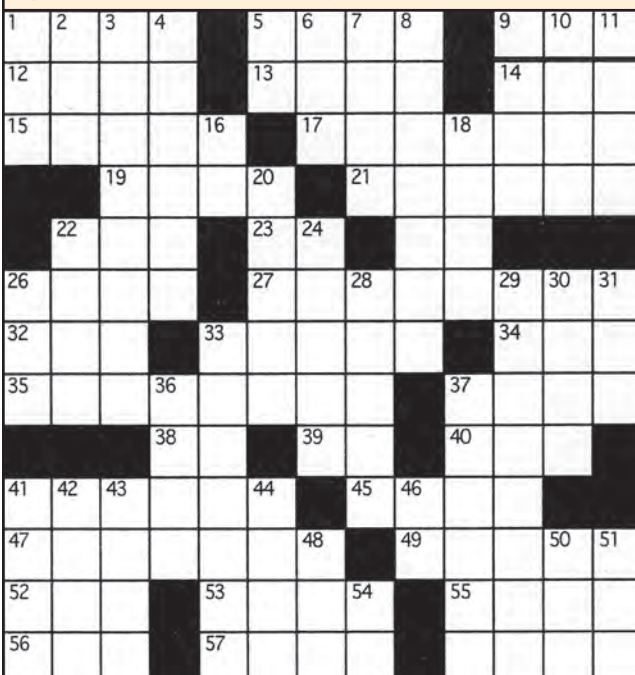
The word "mammon" appears in Matthew and later Jewish sources, where it refers to riches. The idea that one cannot serve two masters is found throughout the Bible (see Joshua 24:15 and James 4:4). Jesus singled out riches but isn't it true that one cannot serve God and anything else? Mammon, therefore, is such a powerful metaphor because it can refer to anything that dilutes devotion to God. What is it that you value? You can regard it as mammon when you begin to rely on it rather than God. Often we do this in such subtle ways that we are not even aware of it. For example, why is it that you follow Christ? Is it for happiness? Is it for peace of mind? Is it for some other reward? The question becomes then what is it that you want. Do you want happiness or God? If it is God, then serve for the sake of serving God. If happiness or peace comes, then God be praised. If they do not, then God be praised as well and God be served.

Reject Anxiety (25-34)

The phrase "anxiety is a mild form of atheism" is going around. As far as platitudes go, it's not bad. It does have some resonance with Jesus' admonition not to worry about what to eat, drink or wear. Remember that Jesus was speaking to people who, like most readers of this lesson, truly did not have to worry about these things. Yet later, Jesus would condemn those who call Him "Lord" yet do not provide these very things for those who do not know where they will get their next meal or drink and have suitable clothing (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:31-46). I think this is what Jesus was talking about when He said to "seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness." For most of us, food, drink and clothing can be characterized as wants: We have these things and we simply must decide which we want right now. God has provided. To provide these things for those who truly need them, therefore, is to take up God's care of the world as our own.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- "Thy word is a ___ unto my feet." (Ps. 119:105)
- Actor Alan.
- "___ iniquity unto their iniquity." (Ps. 69:27)
- Egg shaped.
- Oust.
- Feminine name.
- Rectangular sections.
- "The heavens ___ the glory of God." (Ps. 19:1)
- Object of adoration.
- Believed.
- Asian country. (abbr.)
- In the same place. (Lat.)
- "Perfumed my bed with myrrh, ___, and cinnamon." (Prov. 7:17)
- Pioneer in steel.
- Kin. (abbr.)
- "From the tower of ___ shall they fall." (Ezek. 30:6)
- Inhabitant of. (suffix)
- "In his law doth he ___ day and night." (Ps. 1:2)
- "They love to ___ standing." (Matt. 6:5)
- Either ___.
- Continent. (abbr.)

- Munch.
- Of a Damascus river. (2 Kings 5)
- The man behind McDonald's.
- Feels contrite.
- Sound of a dropped melon.
- ___-de-France.
- "If he shall ___ the whole world." (Matt. 16:26)
- Apollo's mother in myth.
- Careless.
- He was. (Lat.)
- To die.
- Son of Kemuel. (Gen. 22)
- "For a good man some would even ___ to die." (Rom. 5:7)
- Act.
- King of Egypt. (2 Kings 17)
- Lift. (Fr.)
- Tripoli is its capital.
- Toward the wind.
- Branch.
- Move stealthily.
- "For no man can do these ___." (John 3:2)
- State. (Fr.)
- King. (Sp.)
- Alien.
- Bulwer-Lytton heroine.
- "Sin is a reproach to any ___." (Prov. 14:34)
- Seed covering after fertilization.
- Lugosi.
- Peak.
- "The bright and morning ___." (Rev. 22:16)
- Currency of India. (abbr.)
- A Nethinim family, the children of ___. (Neh. 7)
- Chewed.

Down

- "The Lord of hosts shall ___ the bough with terror." (Isa. 10:33)
- Star of The Barefoot Contessa.
- "Yet thou in thy ___ mercies forsook them not." (Neh. 9:19)
- "What ___ shall I give thee?" (Gen. 38:18)
- Direction for printer. (abbr.)
- First ___.
- Slave Scott.



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Protestors in Egypt stop church from reopening

CAIRO, Egypt — Hundreds of Muslims, angered by the prospect of a government-closed church reopening in their neighborhood, protested outside the church May 19, causing the provisional military authority to back away from its promise to allow Orthodox clergy to reopen it. Protestors started gathering the afternoon of May 19 outside the Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Abraam in Ain Shams, a poor section of northeastern Cairo.

The church was scheduled to reopen that day, but protestors surrounded the building, preventing anyone from getting into it and trapping priests who were inside. Several people were injured in fights between the Copts and the Muslims. Protestors threw rocks at each other, according to a witness. One Coptic bystander was seriously injured, another witness said, when he took out a cell phone camera to record the protest and a group of Muslims surrounded and beat him.

Several Copts were arrested, according to church officials. Peter Rizq, a lay minister at the church, said he, the priests and others trapped in the building found a way to sneak to safety after Muslims threatened to kill the head priest of the congregation. “[The priest] told us, ‘We need to go home now,’” Rizq said. “He told us we couldn’t stay any longer in the church because it would cause more problems.” The men left the church building one by one, but some of them were later arrested and charged with illegal possession of weapons, a charge Rizq said was untrue.

Christian sentenced beyond prosecutor’s request

ORAN, Algeria — Convicting a Christian convert for insulting the prophet of Islam, a judge in Algeria stunned the Christian community by sentencing him beyond what a prosecutor recommended. In Oran, 292 miles west of Algiers, a criminal court in the city’s Djamel district sentenced Siaghi Krimo on May 25 to a prison term of five years for giving a CD about Christianity to a neighbor who subsequently claimed he had insulted Muhammad. Krimo was also fined \$2,760, according to Algerian news reports.

The prosecutor had reportedly requested the judge sentence him to a two-year prison sentence and a fine of \$690. “He gave a CD to a neighbor, and for that he has to spend five years in prison,” said the president of the Protestant Church of Algeria, Mustapha Krim, trying to contain his disbelief. Defense lawyer Mohamed Ben Belkacem said that the judge’s verdict was unexpected and heavy, indicating the legal system’s prejudice against Christians.

The lawyer said he plans to appeal the case. Krimo is not required to serve his prison sentence until the court hears his appeal and upholds the conviction. The court delivered its verdict the same week that the governor of the province of Bejaia ordered the closing of seven Protestant churches. Over the May 27–29 weekend, authorities did not interfere with the scheduled worship meetings in the district of Bejaia despite the order for all the churches in the area to close and threats that police could use force.

Provincial official in Algeria orders churches to close

BEJAIA, Algeria — Seven Algerian churches faced closure after the governor of their province sent them written notice that they were operating “illegally.” The notice came May 22 from police Chief Ben Salma, citing a May 8 decree from the Bejaia province governor, and also states that all churches “in all parts of the country” will be closed for lack of compliance with registration regulations, but Christian leaders dismissed this assertion as the provincial official does not have nationwide authority.

The May 22 notice from the governor of Bejaia province in Kabylie region to the president of the Protestant Church of Algeria (PCA) asserted that all churches in the province were illegal because they were unregistered. Registration is required under controversial Ordinance 06–03, but Christians report the government refuses to respond to or grant their applications for registration. The controversial law was introduced in 2006 to regulate non-Muslim worship. In 2008 the government applied measures in accordance with Ordinance 06–03 to limit the activities of non-Muslim groups, ordering the closure of 26 churches in the Kabylie region because they were not registered. No churches had been closed down since then. PCA members argue, however, that the law is impossible to implement as officials refuse to register their churches despite efforts to comply. They said authorities apply the law when they want to harass churches.

‘Hot-button issue’

Blasphemy laws not likely to change with Egypt, Sudan

Shifting political winds in the North African countries of Egypt and Sudan will leave their mark on history, but local attitudes ensure one thing remains unchanged: The laws against defaming Islam will stand like granite in a sandstorm.

The law in Egypt, in theory meant to discourage people from offending others’ religious sensitivities, is instead used to stifle free speech and punish and intimidate those who do not subscribe to the orthodox version of Sunni Islam practiced by most in Egypt, human rights advocates and religious dissident groups said.

“In general in Egypt, things are in flux, but because these particular issues are so hot-button, I would not expect, even with a new regime, any changes in these laws,” said Paul Marshall, a senior fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute in Washington.

Still Marshall said after the national demonstrations of Jan. 25–Feb. 11 that led to the ousting of the president, there may be changes coming in the way the statute is applied.

Article 98(f), known to Egyptian attorneys as the “contempt of religion” charge, states, “Whoever exploits religion in order to promote extremist ideologies by word-of-mouth, in writing or in any other manner, with a view to stirring up sedition, disparaging or contempt of any divine religion or its adherents or prejudicing national unity shall be punished with imprisonment between six months and five years or paying a fine of at least 500 Egyptian pounds [\$85].”

Strictly speaking, Article 98(f) is not an anti-blasphemy law but is used in much the same way as other anti-blasphemy laws throughout the Middle East and the greater Islamic world.

Typically the law is used to punish people not for actually insulting any religion but for choosing a spiritual path not accepted by the government. It is what is known as a “status crime,” where one isn’t punished for doing something but for being something.

“If you become a Christian, you

are likely to be accused of insulting Islam on grounds that you left, and therefore you are [supposedly] saying it’s bad,” Marshall said.

By comparison, no convert from Christianity to Islam has ever been charged with Article 98(f) for defiling Christianity.

Converts to Christianity aren’t alone in falling prey to the law. People in Egypt who follow the Baha’i faith, adherents of the Islamic Shia tradition and numerous other non-Sunnis have all been brought up on defamation charges.

According to Azza Taher Matar of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, cases of a Muslim accused

of defamation for holding a dissenting view are the most common ones.

“Most cases result from Muslims debating Islam or Islamic history and the Arabic empire,” Matar said.

Human rights advocates say it is nearly impossible to find out how many people are charged under the defamation statute in Egypt.

Another aspect of the law is that it is enforced unequally and in a way that is seemingly meant to protect the sensitivities of the majority from the minority but not the other way around.

Religions insulted

Even the protections that in theory are extended to Judaism and Christianity are tenuous at best. Anti-Semitism is rife in Egypt. People insult Judaism and its adherents in the media and in the public arena “every day and every way in Egypt” without anyone being called to task under Article 98(f), according to Marshall.

On a few rare occasions, the state has intervened when media professionals have insulted Christianity on television, but by and large, people “defame” Christianity and its core ideas in the public sphere with no recrimination.

According to a survey conducted in 2009 by WorldPublicOpinion.

org, 71 percent of Egyptians agreed with the statement “The government should have the right to fine or imprison people who [publicly] criticize a religion because such criticism could defame the religion.”

Part of the reason the law is unlikely to change is that Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution states, “Islam is the religion of the state.

Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence.”

In Sudan’s Sunni Muslim-majority north, violation of Section 125 of the Sudanese Criminal Act, which prohibits “insulting religion, inciting hatred and showing contempt

for religious beliefs,” is punishable by imprisonment of one year, a fine and 40 lashes.

“This article is being used by the police to crush any person who leaves Islam for Christianity,” one Sudanese convert to Christianity said.

Since the non-Islamic south is set to split from the Islamic north July 9, Christians remaining in the north are particularly vulnerable, and the U.S. State Department’s latest International Religious Freedom Report describes Khartoum as having a “significant Christian population,” due in part to migration during the long civil war.

While convictions may be rare, Christian converts from Islam said they continue to be victims of Sudan’s blasphemy law.

The State Department report notes that while Sudan’s Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the country, it establishes Shariah (Islamic law) as a source of legislation in the north while Southern Sudan’s constitution provide for freedom of religion “contributed to the generally free practice of religion.”

“Those who leave Islam know they may be victims of this article,” a source in Khartoum told Compass Direct News. (CDN)

“I would not expect ... any changes in these laws.”

Paul Marshall
Center for Religious Freedom



Photo courtesy of Butler Baptist Association

Butler Assoc. holds M-night

Butler Baptist Association held M-Night (Mobilization Night) for the pastors, staff and members of Butler Association churches May 15 at First Baptist Church, Georgiana. Mike Jackson, director of the office of leadership and church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shared on the importance of discipleship. About 200 people attended.

'Give God my all'

Montgomery Biscuits' Shelby loves God, baseball

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

After a game in Mississippi, an inebriated woman asked John Shelby III to autograph a baseball and added, "Can you put your number on it?"

Then a center fielder for the Birmingham Barons, Shelby said, "I'm sorry, ma'am; I'm married."

"Not your phone number; your baseball number," she replied.

Shelby said, "I felt real stupid after that."

Shooting straight is a Shelby trait.

As the oldest of six children, he learned to be "pretty straightforward" and develop a sense of humor.

"I like to make people laugh. I keep it nice and easy around the clubhouse and around my house. I try to keep a nice atmosphere where everybody can have fun and be themselves," said Shelby, who was recently traded to the Montgomery Biscuits, the Southern League Double-A affiliate of the Tampa Bay Rays.

Season of struggle

The 2009 and 2010 seasons, both with the Barons, the Double-A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox, were not as much fun as some seasons he's had. Shelby struggled.

Desperately wanting to fulfill the dream of following in his father's footsteps and playing in the major leagues, he repeated the same classification for the first time since being drafted in 2006.

"I never thought I would repeat a level. I never thought I would have any struggles with baseball," said Shelby, who hit .243 in 2009 and .249 in 2010. He did hit 11 home runs in 2010 and, in 2008, was the White Sox Minor League Player of the Year.

"I feel like I've matured a lot," said Shelby as he learned to stay positive and "grind" every day.

Through it all, Shelby relied on God.

"I want to give God my all. That is my mission. I play

to glorify God. I don't want to judge anybody, but I think a lot of people play this game and they are all about baseball. I know God has given me talent. It's not that we can pick and choose what we want to be in life. It is the gift God gives us. That passion to play baseball is really huge, and I've got to give Him all the glory for that. Being able to do something that I love every day is an honor."

From day one, Shelby was destined to play baseball. His parents put a baseball in his crib.

Shelby's father, John Jr., played 11 seasons in the big leagues with the Baltimore Orioles, Los Ange-



Photo courtesy of Montgomery Biscuits

BATTER UP — John Shelby III recently joined the Montgomery Biscuits, the Southern League Double-A affiliate of the Tampa Bay Rays, and 'plays to glorify God.'

les Dodgers and Detroit Tigers. He was on World Series championship teams with the Orioles in 1983 and the Dodgers in 1988. He is now a coach for the Milwaukee Brewers.

When younger brother Jeremy was drafted to the Bluefield (W.Va.) Blue Jays, it became a Shelby triple play.

However, John Jr. gave his sons more than a baseball dream.

"My dad is a positive role model. He is definitely a godly man," John III said.

Both ordained ministers, his parents "don't just preach it; they live it," said John III, a member of Greater New Hope Christian Center in Lexington, Ky., his hometown.

His "biggest thing" is to be a godly example. "I have put that into my own heart, no matter where I am."

He's also put that on his arm with a tattoo of Matthew 5:16.

He also has Proverbs 3:5 tattooed on his arm.

A "huge" Bible verse is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

"I put that on my bat, just to know without Him, basically we are nothing," John III said.

In 2009, he slammed 10 homers and had 49 RBIs. Last year, his .412 slugging percentage was among team leaders, but he wanted his batting average to be better. He stole 30 bases in 2009, seventh in the Southern League and first among White Sox minor leaguers.

Drafted by the White Sox in the fifth round, he was named by Baseball America as their best athlete of the 2006 draft class.

With the Kannapolis (N.C.) Intimidators in 2007, he led White Sox minor leaguers in triples. He tied the Carolina League record

with three home runs in one game with Winston-Salem in 2008.

The 25-year-old was Kentucky's Gatorade Player of the Year in 2003 as a senior at Tates Creek High School, and at the University of Kentucky (UK), he was a pre-season All-American his junior year and second team All-Southeastern Conference (SEC) as a sophomore and junior.

It was at UK that he became closer to God. While he became a Christian when he was a child, he said it wasn't until he was a college freshman that his life changed.

John III lives by the motto "There is no victory without a battle."

He only had to look in his family to see battles.

Inspired by a brother

At age 13, Jeremy was diagnosed with Hodgkin Disease. Chemotherapy and radiation treatments followed.

The way Jeremy, now 23, fought the lymphoma, which he said made his faith stronger and appreciation for life greater, inspired John III.

Today Jeremy, who was first team All-Southwestern Athletic Conference at Grambling State University in Louisiana, is cancer-free.

"He is my little big brother. He always helps me out. We talk every night and push each other through the hard times.

"There are many times when you want to give up but you can't. You have to have faith in baseball, faith in life. There is always going to be a battle."

Studying the Bible is the "main thing," and "a lot of people out there praying for me every day" helps maintain his spiritual fervor.

Among those praying for him is his wife, Tricia. The couple married before the 2010 season.

"I want to increase my faith every day," he said. "I want to keep on being a witness. I hope I lead a lot of people to Christ and increase a lot of people's faith."

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

PCUSA to allow openly gay, partnered clergy

MINNEAPOLIS — Gay and lesbian advocates celebrated a landmark victory May 10 when the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) entered the expanding ranks of Christian denominations that allow openly gay, partnered clergy.

The winds of change, they said, are at their backs.

"Presbyterians join a growing Protestant movement of Lutherans, Episcopalians and United Church of Christ members who have eliminated official barriers to leadership by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons," a coalition of pro-gay Presbyterians said in a statement.

Officially, the PCUSA's decades-old barrier will fall in July, after Presbyterians in Minnesota voted to effectively revoke a rule that had barred sexually active gays and lesbians from becoming ministers, elders and deacons.

The new policy, which was passed by the church's general assembly last summer, required approval from a majority of 173 regional presbyteries.

But even as gay and lesbians celebrated, some acknowledged that steep challenges lie ahead in other faith groups, particularly the country's largest four: the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Those four faith groups, whose leaders show few signs of accepting gay clergy or relationships, together count nearly 100 million members.

By contrast, the four largest Protestant groups that allow gay clergy together count less than 11 million members. PCUSA, for example, has about 2.1 million members.

Ordinance could have threatened religious liberty

NASHVILLE — Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam signed a bill May 23 overturning a controversial Nashville ordinance that forced businesses with ties to the city to adopt "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" nondiscrimination policies.

The new Tennessee law applies to all cities but its immediate impact is felt on Nashville, which had passed an ordinance in April that opponents said was anti-business and anti-religious liberty. The ordinance applied to any business that had a contract with the city. A court challenge to the new law is possible.

Southern Baptist leaders Richard Land and Frank Page, along with Tennessee Baptist Convention Executive Director Randy Davis, had urged Haslam to sign the bill, which passed the state House 70-26 and the state Senate 21-8. The bill prevents localities from adopting nondiscrimination policies not in line with state law.

The legislation was needed, supporters said, to ensure the uniform application of the state's nondiscrimination laws, thereby protecting employers from having to deal with a variety of municipal policies.

For Christian leaders, the primary concern was religious liberty. In a letter to Haslam, the three Baptist leaders argued that without Haslam's signature, the constitutional rights of Christian business owners "may be infringed by expansive local nondiscrimination laws."

Record high for U.S. foster care kids with 'forever families'

FRANKFORT, Ky. — In 2009, 57,000 U.S. kids in foster care found forever families, up from 37,000 in 1998, according to a Child Trends study reported in *The Washington Times*. The number represents a record high.

Kelly Rosati, vice president of community outreach at Focus on the Family, said the Christian church is to thank for some of the progress. "We've been excited to see an increase in the willingness of Christians to simply ask themselves, 'Does God want to use the blessing of our family on behalf of a child without one?'" she said.

"And as Christians across the country continue to pray that prayer, I think we're going to see these numbers increase." Researchers also found that the number of children waiting for adoption fell to a record low of 115,000 in 2009, down from 135,000 three years earlier. The average wait to be adopted fell to a record low 35 months, down from 48 months in 1998.

"I want to increase my faith every day. I want to keep on being a witness."

John Shelby III
Montgomery Biscuits

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