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'On mission together' at 2011 SBC meeting

Wright encourages unity in Great Commission work

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Bryant Wright broke with tradition following his re-election to a second term June 14 as he asked SBC entity leaders Frank Page, Kevin Ezell and Tom Elliff to join him in the customary president's news conference.

Wright, senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., was elected to a second term as president of the SBC, defeating Wiley Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Buena Park, Calif., by a vote of 2,274-102 June 14 at the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix.

Wright thanked "the people of the convention who felt led for me to serve in this role another year" and noted that Page as Executive Committee (EC) president, Elliff as International Mission Board president and Ezell as North American Mission Board president all took office within the past year, marking a historic change of leadership in the SBC.

Wright called for unified support of the three colleagues: "As your president, I am asking Southern Baptists to join me in covering these men in prayer and support as we enter a new era of leadership."

The annual meeting in Phoenix marked an opportunity for renewed focus on unity rooted in "love for the Lord and in carrying out His Great Commission together," Wright said. "Unity is a byproduct of being in the will of God and on mission together."

Noting two crucial challenges before the convention — planting churches in unreached North American areas and engaging unreached people groups internationally — Wright called on Baptist Press and state papers to keep those two issues in front of Southern Baptists.

Wright also asked churches to keep their state conventions informed of new church plants and people groups they engage with the gospel, "so



BP photo

SBC LEADERSHIP — (L to r) Executive Committee president Frank Page, North American Mission Board president Kevin Ezell, Southern Baptist Convention president Bryant Wright and International Mission Board president Tom Elliff take part in the customary president's news conference June 14.

we can publish reports about what God has accomplished through our churches as we work together."

'The Spirit is moving'

Wright said: "The Spirit of the Lord is moving in a unique way in these days, and we hope Southern Baptists will lead the way in building up the Kingdom of God to fulfill our Great Commission."

Asked how the four men's peace-

making personalities would influence Southern Baptists generally, Page replied: "We're pastors. We've learned in church what it takes to get along and what it takes to not get along. And we're committed to dialoging in the way Christ wants us to. We had enough of church members not doing that, and we've seen what happens when disagreements or even differences of opinion or differences of emphasis are dealt with in a Christ-

like way versus a non-Christlike way. So I hope we are setting examples."

Other SBC officers elected included Fred Luter Jr., senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, La., who was elected first vice president over Rick Ong, a deacon at First Chinese Baptist Church, Phoenix.

Of the 2,012 ballots cast June 14 in Phoenix, Luter received 1,558, or (See 'Luter,' page 3)

'Christ-like selflessness is our only hope'

If Southern Baptists are going to fulfill their God-given mission in a lost world, they must deal with fragmentation and self-centeredness and recommit themselves to gratitude, trust, unified ministry and honesty, messengers were told during the opening session of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting June 14.

"We have been headed in the wrong direction, in several ways," said Frank Page, SBC Executive Committee (EC) president, during the EC's report to the convention. "Our convention is fracturing into various groups, some theological, some methodological. Sometimes there is an honest difference of opinion, but

often there is self-centeredness that frequently mirrors our own culture.

"Christ-like selflessness is our only hope."

While many have lamented a decline in giving through the SBC's Cooperative Program missions channel, Page cited statistics that showed total mission expenditures in Southern Baptist churches also have declined over the past 20 years. In 1989, Southern Baptist congregations allocated 16.5 percent of their total receipts to missions, but by 2009 that had declined to 12.32 percent.

"Our cooperating churches have

not just shifted their Cooperative Program dollars away from the Cooperative Program to other missions," Page said. "What this means is that we have been keeping more of our dollars at home. While the Cooperative Program certainly has taken its hit, it is our total mission giving that is the real victim."

As CEO of the EC, Page said he is working to rebuild trust by reducing bureaucracy. EC staff has been reduced by 19 percent and the budget has been cut 13.58 percent, Page said. The budget presented (See 'SBC,' page 4)



PAGE

COMMENT

The Hallmark of the Phoenix Convention

As expected, the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Phoenix was the least attended national convention in more than 65 years. Only 4,821 messengers registered from the more than 43,000 cooperating SBC churches. One has to go back to 1944 to find such a low total.

Alabama registered 244 messengers, which equals 28 percent of the number who attended the 2010 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

But it is not the size (or lack of it) that will be remembered about this year's annual meeting. Rather the hallmark of this meeting will be its spirit of cooperation and the actions that supported that spirit.

Missing from this year's meeting was the "trash talk" of past conventions through which various personalities tried to advance agendas by blaming others for perceived SBC problems. Neither speakers nor messengers threw verbal rocks at each other in Phoenix.

Past actions resulted in a situation described by SBC Executive Committee President Frank Page when he said, "I have discovered that there is little trust in our convention now — little trust in our entities, little trust in our Executive Committee, little trust in our state conventions, little trust anywhere."

Page led in signing an Affirmation of Unity and Cooperation (see story, page 4). The affirmation is an attempt to lift up the values of mutual respect and cooperation among Southern Baptists. Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Executive Director Rick Lance was among state convention executive directors publically endorsing the affirmation.

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of a new sense of cooperation among Southern Baptists occurred at the news conference following Bryant Wright's re-election as SBC president. Wright invited the new presidents of the three major SBC entities to join him — Page; Tom Elliff, International Mission Board; and Kevin Ezell, North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Wright pointed out that all three were attending their first annual meeting as leader of their respective entity. All four men pledged to work together in unity, mutual respect and cooperation with one another and Southern Baptists.

That may seem like a little thing but it is not. Those who follow the workings of Southern Baptists closely know that unhealthy tensions have characterized relationships among SBC entities in past years as well as the SBC and state conventions recently. Insiders also know that some SBC boards of trustees have been impaired by internal tensions that went beyond healthy disagreements.

Leaving Phoenix, one could be cautiously optimistic that the values of unity, mutual respect and cooperation are once again ascending in Southern Baptist life.

Ezell illustrated that point in his report (see story,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

page 7) when he pointed to the partnership NAMB has with state conventions. Explaining the number of NAMB missionaries, he said more than two-thirds of the 5,100 missionaries are jointly funded with state conventions. In many cases, NAMB pays only insurance, meaning state conventions pay most of the expenses for these missionaries. NAMB provides total support for only 38 national missionaries, Ezell said. That reality is not what most people believe.

State convention partnership

Obviously NAMB cannot do its ministry assignments without the partnership with state conventions.

Ezell emphasized the importance of a continuing partnership with state conventions by calling for joint efforts in church planting and evangelistic ministry in every state convention. He also continued efforts to correct false information reported two years ago by saying again that 80 percent of NAMB's budget goes to underserved areas of the United States and Canada, a percentage he hopes to increase through organizational changes.

The call for unity, mutual respect and cooperation went beyond entity relationships and SBC/state convention relationships, however. The call also included participation of ethnics in convention life. The SBC has been called the most ethnically diverse Protestant denomination in the nation for more than 20 years. But participation of ethnics on boards and committees has been limited. In Phoenix, messengers approved a plan that provides annual accountability to see if entities are seeking participation and input from ethnics.

Over the years, Southern Baptists have adopted many resolutions calling for participation by ethnics, but this is the first time any system of accountability has been put in place.

Some ethnic Baptist groups have their own conventions — Hispanic, Korean, Chinese, Russian, etc. Some of these groups cooperate with the SBC, but they have primarily a collegial relationship. It will be interesting to see how open ethnic Baptist leaders are to participation in and support of the SBC.

Messengers put action behind their invitation for ethnic participation in SBC life by electing

Fred Luter first vice president. Luter, senior pastor of the 7,000-member Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, is the first black to serve as first vice president. He previously served as second vice president and preached the convention sermon in 2001.

It should be remembered that Southern Baptists first elected a black as a convention officer in 1974 when Charles King of Kentucky was elected second vice president. In the 1990s, Gary Frost of Ohio was elected second vice president after serving as a SBC Executive Committee officer. And Eric Redmond of Maryland served as second vice president 2007–08.

Luter is the first to serve as first vice president and already is being promoted as a candidate for president when Southern Baptists meet in his hometown in 2012. If he is elected, however, Luter will not be the first ethnic SBC president. That honor goes to immediate past President Johnny Hunt, who is Native American.

Revelation 5:9 describes believers from every "tribe, tongue, people and nation" worshiping God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is part of the reason Southern Baptists are serious about taking the gospel to the 3,800 people groups who have yet to be engaged (see story, page 5).

As we take the gospel to others, it seems evident that Southern Baptists are reaffirming that we want to do this ministry together and we want our fellowship on earth to reflect the glory of God in heaven — service and praise from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

That is the hallmark of the Phoenix convention.

THE
ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-870-8957. **Web site:** www.thealabamabaptist.org. **E-mail:** news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and other locations.

Subscription Rates:
Church Budget — \$12.50 (plus tax)
Individual — \$19.95 (plus tax; Web and credit card, no tax)

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NEWS SERVICES: Baptist Press (BP), Associated Baptist Press (ABP), Religion News Service (RNS), Compass Direct News (CDN), Evangelical Press (EP), Forum 18 (F18).
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.
ADDRESS CHANGE: Send old and new addresses, and name of church to Circulation Department, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Allow two weeks.

Crossover 2011

Evangelistic event brings Living Water to Arizona

Even as scorching temperatures bumped 102 degrees in Arizona's Urban Corridor, Southern Baptists mobilized in Crossover 2011 to bring the Living Water to people throughout the region's parched deserts.

Some 5.2 million people live and work in the corridor, which stretches from the Phoenix metro area down to Casa Grande and Tucson. 1,131 of those people are new believers in Christ following Crossover.

Crossover, an evangelism event coordinated by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and local associations and churches that precedes the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) annual meeting, marked its 23rd year.

"Arizona Baptists have truly shown their neighbors the love of Christ in action through Crossover," said Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB. "This has been a model for how we can show people we care and then tell them why we care. I'm praying all of our churches in the Phoenix and Tucson areas will benefit from Crossover and keep this momentum going long into the future," he added.

To share the gospel during Crossover, Arizona Baptists used dozens of block parties, a skateboard-a-thon, bottled water distribution, painting and landscaping projects at area schools, community arts and cultural festivals, women-only events and, of course, door-to-door evangelism.

The most creative event had to be the six-hour Skateboard-A-Thon, sponsored by Mountain Ridge Baptist Church, Glendale, Ariz., attended by hundreds of children and parents on Saturday.

A 19-year-old college student and member of Mountain Ridge Baptist, Presleigh Boulos — herself an avid skateboarder — knows skateboard enthusiasts are one of the most unreached groups in any community. So she envisioned a dynamic event that could reach skateboarders with the gospel.

"We had 33 kids go up there and accept Christ," Boulos said.

In Tucson, four SBC churches in the central

part of the city hosted a Crossover community arts festival at Reid Park, with activities for children, live music, food and booths with artisans' hand-crafted items. By noon, volunteers from Calvary Baptist Church, Rising Star Baptist Church, First Southern Baptist Church and North Swan Baptist Church — along with Intentional Community Evangelism (ICE) teams — had shared the gospel scores of times, leading 12 kids to faith in Christ in Tucson.

That number was on top of the 12 children and five adults who accepted Christ the night before at a Tucson car show — attended by 4,000 — hosted by the same four churches.

In east Tucson, Sabino Road Baptist Church sponsored a landscaping project at a local school and conducted door-to-door witnessing in the area's neighborhoods, joined by volunteers from Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Back in the Phoenix metro area, one of the earliest Crossover events for women only, was held at the Christian Challenge Building on the campus of Arizona State University at Tempe. ASU has 3,500 international students from 140 countries.

Women from several Asian countries and Kenya spent the session getting free manicures and learning how to make necklaces and scented bath salts. Following a luncheon, they all left with scented candles — and an aroma of the gospel.

And in other news, Hispanics celebrated the 524 professions of faith from the Crossover 2011 evangelistic outreach (at Central High School, Phoenix) — which drew about 600 Hispanics — mostly from the local area but also from other states.

Joshua del Risco, NAMB Hispanic evangelism coordinator, urged participants to continue the evangelistic fiesta in New Orleans at the 2012 SBC annual meeting. He prayed God would "mobilize the people in New Orleans just like it happened in Phoenix: in prayer, in unity and in evangelistic fervor and success." (Compiled from BP stories)



BP photo

COMMITMENT — Members of the audience who have responded to a gospel presentation by Wild Horse Ministries come to the horse-pen as a public demonstration of their new commitment to Christ during Crossover 2011 in Phoenix.



BP photo

NEW SBC OFFICERS — Newly elected officers of the Southern Baptist Convention are (l to r) Bryant Wright, president and pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta Ga.; Fred Luter Jr., first vice president and pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, La.; Eric Thomas, second vice president and pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.; and John Yeats, recording secretary and communications director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Not pictured is James H. Wells, registration secretary and director of missions for the Tri-County Baptist Association in Nixa, Mo.

Luter first black to serve as first vice president of SBC

(continued from page 1)

77 percent, of the votes, while Ong received 441, or 22 percent, of the votes; 13 votes were disallowed.

In 2001, Luter became the first black to preach the SBC convention sermon. He also has served as a SBC second vice president.

First black 2nd vice — 1972

Luter, according to some sources, is the first black to be elected as first vice president in the SBC. In 1974, Charles N. King, pastor of Corinthian Baptist Church, Frankfort, Ky., was elected as second vice president at the annual meeting in Philadelphia. He was nominated for first vice president in 1972 but lost in a run-off.

This was the first time a black had been nominated for a top post. In 1994, Gary Frost, then pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, was elected second vice president.

In 1995, Luter was elected to that same post. Several other ethnic leaders have

since been elected as first or second vice president.

Virginia pastor Eric Thomas was elected unopposed as second vice president of the convention. Thomas is senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

By acclamation, messengers elected John Yeats, director of communications for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, as SBC recording secretary — a position he has held since 1997 — and Jim Wells, director of missions for the Tri-County Baptist Association in Nixa, Mo., as registration secretary for the ninth year.

In other action, messengers elected David Uth, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., to preach the convention sermon at the 2012 annual meeting in New Orleans. Kenny Qualls, pastor of First Baptist Church, Arnold, Mo., was elected as the alternate. Mark Cottingham, of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., was chosen as the 2012 music director, and Michael Adler of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, as alternate. (Compiled from BP stories)

Seeking ethnic leadership

Executive Committee recommendation for accountability approved

Sensitive to the need for greater diversity in leadership and increased participation of ethnics, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) voted overwhelmingly June 14 on a SBC Executive Committee (EC) recommendation asking for greater accountability regarding their involvement in SBC life.

The recommendation was a response to a motion made during the 2009 annual meeting, directing the EC to study greater involvement in the convention by ethnic churches and leaders. The proposal offered 10 specific points “designed to foster conscious awareness of the need to be proactive and intentional in the inclusion of individuals from all ethnic and racial identities within Southern Baptist life.”

Committee appointments

The points included encouragements to make committee appointments and select program personalities that represent the diversity within the convention, “particularly ethnic diversity.” A failed attempt to amend the recommendation, brought by Channing Kilgore of South Whitwell Baptist Church, Whitwell, Tenn., would have replaced ethnicity with “gospel minded” as the criterion for selecting committee appointees.

During a news conference after the vote, Paul Kim, pastor emeritus of Antioch Baptist Church, Cambridge, Mass., said: “I want ethnic pastors and leaders to also have the opportunity to express their love for Southern Baptists in Christ. We have to work together.”

It was Kim who asked messen-

gers at the 2009 SBC annual meeting to study how ethnic churches and leaders could better partner with others to serve the SBC.

For the first time in history, the convention will ask its entities to provide “a descriptive report of participation of ethnic churches and church leaders in the life and ministry of the respective SBC entity,” the SBC president to “give special attention to appointing individuals who represent the diversity within the convention” to committees under his purview; and a subcommittee of the EC to provide a report each year in February with an update on how each of the recommendations has been addressed.

Four other recommendations approved by messengers related to the “Great Commission Resurgence” report adopted at the 2010 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.:

► Providing additional funding for international missions by reducing the EC’s share of Cooperative Program funding and proportionately increasing International Mission Board (IMB) funding. The proposal adopted by messengers calls for reducing the EC budget share from 3.4 percent to 3.2 percent in 2011–12, with a goal of reducing it to 2.4 percent over time.

► Adding a new Annual Church Profile reporting category called “Great Commission Giving” to highlight each church’s financial commitment to Southern Baptist mission enterprises. The recommendation also reaffirmed the Co-



BP photo

‘PROACTIVE AND INTENTIONAL’ — Paul Kim of Antioch Baptist Church, Cambridge, Mass., signs the Affirmation of Unity and Cooperation during the Executive Committee meeting June 13.

operative Program as “the most effective means” of missions outreach and asked churches to increase their contributions by 2.5 percent of undesignated receipts by the end of the 2013 calendar year.

Assisting churches

► Amending the IMB ministry assignment to allow the organization to “provide specialized, defined and agreed upon assistance to the North American Mission Board (NAMB) in assisting churches to reach unreached and underserved people groups within the United States and Canada.” The current ministry assignment focuses IMB

work outside the United States and Canada.

► Rewriting NAMB’s mission statement and ministry assignment. The new mission statement refocuses NAMB on partnership with churches, associations and state conventions in “mobilizing Southern Baptist as a missional force” in North America. The new ministry assignment consolidates nine points to six and rearranges its priorities. Where appointing missionaries was the first assignment, planting churches now heads the list. A previous ministry assignment on “Christian social ministries” has been merged into an assignment to assist churches “in the ministries of evangelism and making disciples.” The assignments of “communicating the gospel ... through communication technologies” and “strengthening ... and providing services to associations” have been eliminated.

Two additional recommendations related to the 2011–12 budget:

► Adopting a \$186 million 2011–12 Cooperative Program Allocation Budget that increases the IMB’s percentage of budget receipts from 50 percent to 50.2 percent and decreases the EC’s percentage proportionately to 3.2 percent.

► Adopting a \$7.47 million 2011–12 SBC Operating Budget that allocates \$2.2 million to administration expenses and \$5.26 million to operations expenses. The budget represents a reduction of more than \$1.2 million over 2010–11. (Compiled from BP stories)

‘Falling in love with Jesus’ is starting point, Wright says

— President’s Address —

The starting point for Southern Baptists is not the Great Commission, but “falling in love with Jesus once again,” Bryant Wright told messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting June 14 in the annual president’s address.

Wright, president of the SBC and pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., likened Southern Baptists to the New Testament church of Ephesus that Jesus rebuked for having abandoned its first love.

Taking his text from Revelation 2:1–7, Wright noted that Christ began his message to the Ephesian church with words of commendation — and Wright acknowledged that Southern Baptists are doing thousands of good things at home and around the world.

But he continued, “We can even

let good things cause us to leave our first love — our families, our work, even our ministry. I believe the major temptation for anyone who serves in Christian ministry is to begin to confuse their ministry with their relationship to Jesus Christ.” Wright pointed out that Christ told the church at Ephesus to do three things to reclaim their first love: remember, repent and then repeat what they did in their “honeymoon” days.

“When we begin to love the Lord, we will begin to love the lost,” Wright proclaimed.

“The Southern Baptist Convention was founded on two key issues — one was good and one was bad,” Wright said. “We were founded in defense of slavery. We finally apologized, but it was 150 years late. The good thing was the spread of the gospel. The Great Commission is the reason we were formed as a convention of churches.” Wright point-

ed out that the International Mission Board (IMB) has identified 3,800 “unreached and unengaged” people groups that, as far as researchers know, have no church, no mission ministry, no witness for Christ. He challenged Southern Baptists to reclaim their first love by taking the gospel to those people groups. “There is no reason why Southern Baptists cannot adopt every one of those 3,800 people groups,” Wright said. “Churches of all sizes can be a part of this effort. Churches can partner together.”

Wright recalled a conversation with Tom Elliff, president of the IMB, in which they discovered their hearts were in complete agreement about mobilizing churches to reach the remaining unreached and unengaged people groups. “We have to make a decision. Our decision is to be a part of God’s Kingdom business or be on the sidelines,” Wright said. “With all of our resources and with all 45,000 churches, there is no reason why we cannot have a sufficient number of churches to step

forward and embrace every one of the unengaged and unreached people groups.”

Wright reminded the audience that Christ warned the church at Ephesus their “lampstand would be removed” if they did not appropriately respond to the challenge placed before them. “If Southern Baptists do not respond to the challenge God has given us to reach the world, we risk having our lampstand removed,” Wright declared.

Obedying God

“We need to repent and get our priorities right,” Wright said. “Are we going to be on the front lines of ministry or are we going to be on the sidelines? God is going to find someone who is willing, and if we are not faithful to obey His Word, our lampstand will be removed. There is nothing sacred about the Southern Baptist Convention [if] the Southern Baptist Convention refuses to follow the will of God.” (BP)

SBC leaders sign unity document

(continued from page 1)

to messengers during the annual meeting allocates 95 percent of Cooperative Program dollars to international missions, North American church planting and evangelism and seminary education, Page said. As a show of unity and support for cooperative missions, Page called to the platform a large group of people — the 12 heads of Southern Baptist national entities, executives of Baptist state conventions and a number of ethnic fellowship presidents who had signed a document titled “Affirmation of Unity and Cooperation.”

Five core pledges

That document includes five core pledges:

► “We pledge to maintain a relationship of mutual trust, behaving ourselves trustworthily before one another and trusting one another as brothers and sisters indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. (Ephesians 4:20–32; Philippians 4:8; 2 Peter 1:3–8)

► “We pledge to attribute the highest motives to those engaged in local church ministries and those engaged in denominational service in any level of convention life — motives that originate within hearts truly desiring to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we also serve. (1 Samuel 2:3; Matthew 7:1–5; 1 Corinthians 4:1–5)

► “We pledge to affirm the value of cooperative ministry as the most effective and efficient means of reaching a lost world with the message of the gospel. (Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians 16:1–23; Psalm 68:11; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

► “We pledge to embrace our brothers and sisters of every ethnicity, race and language as equal partners in our collective ministries to engage all people groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 16:25–27; Revelation 7:9)

► “We pledge to continue to honor and affirm proportional giving through the Cooperative Program as the most effective means of mobilizing our churches and extending our outreach as Southern Baptists, enabling us to work together to evangelize the lost people of our world locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. (Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 1:8, 20:20–21; Romans 10:14–17; 2 Corinthians 8:1–13; 9:1–15)” (BP)

IMB president Elliff focuses on unengaged people groups

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Hundreds of Southern Baptists left the June 14–15 annual meeting in Phoenix with some research and prep work to do. Their ministry is about to expand to include an active focus on embracing one of the nearly 3,800 unengaged people groups around the globe.

“The challenge from the opening remarks of this convention till now has been where are these New Testament churches that will say it is unacceptable for there to be any people group out there that does not have someone intentionally determined to engage them?” International Mission Board (IMB) President Tom Elliff said during the

IMB presentation, which was the annual meeting’s final report and the official introduction of Elliff as the new head of the mission board.

“Unengaged” is a missiological term, meaning the people group has no established church and no one is actively reaching out to it, and the IMB is taking immediate action to negate that number.

“We’ll find out whether we are true New Testament missionaries,” Elliff said following the commissioning of 40 Southern Baptist representatives who shared a little about themselves and where they will be serving. At least five of the

representatives are from Alabama. Pointing to the Book of Acts, Elliff said, “Peter and John were threatened and told not to share the gospel any longer ... but they didn’t and 5,000 people gave their life to Christ.”

They could not stop sharing what they had seen and heard, he said. They could not help it.

“We are going to find out tonight what it takes to stop us,” Elliff said prior to delivering an invitation to which hundreds responded. “Everyone has a comfort zone, and ‘I will go this far and that’s it.’ ... We should all be willing to [lay down our lives] in our hearts. ... It’s not my life anyway.”

“We need to be bearers of the Light, whatever the cost,” he said.

“It is nothing short of amazing what God is doing if we would just wake up and realize it. Missions is always associated with spiritual awakening. Either one can come in on the train of the other one.

“But it’s not about yanking names off a board. ... It’s a lifetime marriage between the two of us, to see the gospel penetrate that unengaged people group,” Elliff said, noting it will be a partnership between the church and the IMB. Training will be provided and IMB officials will walk church leaders through the steps of what to do.

“Everyone can do this,” he

“We should all be willing to [lay down our lives] in our hearts. ... It’s not my life anyway.”

Tom Elliff
International Mission Board



BP photo

ALTAR CALL — Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board (IMB), urges messengers to make commitments to partner with the IMB to reach 3,800 unengaged people groups.

noted. “Size doesn’t matter.”

Prior to the IMB presentation, Elliff reported to convention messengers that nearly 5,000 representatives and around 4,000 children were on the missions field in 2010.

CP giving

Support for the representatives and their children came from the \$96 million given through the Cooperative Program, the more than \$148 million given to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and

other gifts. Another \$8 million was given to assist in hunger projects, relief efforts and development projects.

Also in 2010, 114 unengaged people groups were actively engaged by representatives and more than 20,000 pastors in various locations around the world were being trained for their roles by other representatives.

More than 360,000 people were baptized after coming to know Christ, and nearly 30,000 new

churches were planted among different people groups.

“You had a part in every one of those,” Elliff said. “Southern Baptist missions isn’t just the IMB. Southern Baptist missions isn’t just NAMB (North American Mission Board). All of us are Southern Baptist missions.”

“It means that missions can’t be just we collectively as Southern Baptists,” he said. “But it means I must be and you must be Southern Baptist missions as well.”

Motion to have at least 1 night session to be voted on next year

Messengers referred one motion for a vote at the 2012 annual meeting in New Orleans.

The motion by Keith Rogers of Santan Baptist Church on the Gila River Indian Reservation in Chandler, Ariz., called for the Committee on the Order of Business to reinstitute at least one evening session, preferably on Tuesday evening, for the annual meeting.

According to Rogers, “many of our lay leaders, including some from the church that I pastor, and bivocational pastors who could only attend an evening session,

were not offered that opportunity this year.”

Rogers, in the same motion, said a missionary appointment service should be a part of that evening session. The Committee on the Order of Business moved that the motion be referred for consideration in connection with the 2012 SBC annual meeting. Messengers approved.

Eleven other motions were automatically referred to various entities because they dealt with the internal operations or ministries of SBC entities and bylaws. Four motions were ruled out of order. (BP)



BP photo

ALABAMA BAPTIST ELECTED PRESIDENT OF EVANGELISTS

Newly elected officers of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists (COSBE) are (front row, l to r) Dean Forrest of Pike Road Baptist Church, president; Phil Glisson of Leawood Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., vice president; (back row, l to r) Sid Peterson of Westchester Baptist Church, Bakersfield, Calif., parliamentarian; Eric Ramsey of First Baptist Church, Van Buren, Ark., director of communications; Russell Johnson of Beach Church, Myrtle Beach, S.C., worship leader; and Eric Fuller of Cottonwood Creek Baptist Church, Allen, Texas, recording secretary.



For more photos and information from the **SBC annual meeting**, visit online.thealabamabaptist.org.

SBC debates immigration

Messengers back citizenship, oppose amnesty; speak about gender-neutral Bible, reality of hell

Messengers addressed the thorny issue of immigration by adopting a resolution that sought to promote the gospel of Jesus while calling for justice and compassion during the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), June 14–15 in Phoenix.

The resolution on immigration was one of eight approved either unanimously or overwhelmingly during the morning and afternoon sessions June 15.

In an unusual move, messengers called to the floor and passed a resolution on the “gender-neutral 2011 New International Version” (NIV) that was not reported to the convention by the Resolutions Committee.

Among the other resolutions adopted were ones affirming biblical teaching on the reality of hell, religious liberty throughout the world, corporate repentance, civility in public discourse and marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman.

The immigration resolution — adopted by what appeared to be about 70 to 80 percent of the messengers — urged Southern Baptist churches to proclaim Christ and minister in His spirit to everyone, regardless of their “immigration status.” It said “any form of nativism, mistreatment or exploitation is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The measure called for the government to make a priority of border security and holding businesses accountable in their hiring. It also requested public officials “to implement, with the borders secured, a

just and compassionate path to legal status, with appropriate restitutionary measures, for those undocumented immigrants already living in our country.”

The resolution’s paragraph on instituting a process for illegal immigrants to gain legal status after the securing of the borders and with restitution elicited an amendment that produced the most floor debate during the resolutions report. Final action on the resolution was delayed from the morning to afternoon session when the vote on the amendment was too close to call and required a ballot vote.

‘Right of people’

Richard Huff, a messenger from Corona de Tucson Baptist Church, Tucson, Ariz., introduced the amendment, which would have deleted the paragraph in question. In support of his amendment, Huff said from the floor, “[T]he principle is that citizenship is a right of people that are here under legal processes, and you do not want to make this something you are rewarding people who are in violation of the law and they have no interest in being here legally.”

Paul Jimenez, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, urged messengers to defeat the amendment. He said the committee members think the resolution is “a realistic and biblical approach to immigration” and removing the language affected by the amendment “would really weaken it in such a way that we would oppose it.”

Messengers barely defeated Huff’s amendment, 766–723 (51.31

percent to 48.43 percent). Four ballots were disallowed.

In the afternoon session, messengers handily rejected an amendment that would have basically gutted the same paragraph. They backed an amendment offered by the committee, however, that clarified the resolution was “not to be construed as support for amnesty for any undocumented immigrant.”

In explaining the immigration resolution, Jimenez told messengers the committee’s goal was that the measure “speak first and foremost to the pockets of lostness” in the United States. He said the resolution was built on a 2006 resolution but “moves us light years ahead when it comes to its gospel-centeredness, as well as understanding how the culture itself is changing. And the culture itself is moving in such a way where immigrants in this country are in desperate need of the gospel and their numbers are growing and growing at an exponential rate.”

Regarding the public policy aspect, he said the committee decided “to state those principles as broadly as possible.”

“We can present the gospel while at the same time upholding the law of the land,” said Jimenez, pastor of Taylors First Baptist Church, Taylors, S.C. He said the resolution “is very strong; it is very balanced, leads with the gospel but also takes into account our mandate to obey the laws of the land.”

Richard Land, president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, lauded the resolution at a news conference after the committee’s final report, calling it “very statesman-like.”

“This resolution upholds the rule of law,” Land told reporters. “This resolution upholds the sovereignty of the United States, and this resolution seeks to deal compassionately and fairly and justly with those who are here in an undocumented status, and calls upon us to act as if this is a gospel issue, which it is.”

The NIV resolution overwhelmingly approved by messengers “expressed profound disappointment” with publication of the new translation and “respectfully request[ed] that LifeWay” not sell the version in its stores.

The resolution came to the floor when Indiana pastor Tim Overton persuaded messengers to address the 2011 version of the popular translation that his resolution said had “gone beyond acceptable translation standards” regarding gender. His resolution said 75 percent of the flawed gender translation in the Today’s New International Version (TNIV) appears in the new NIV. Southern Baptist messengers expressed their disapproval of the TNIV in a 2002 resolution.

2011 resolutions

▶ **On Religious Liberty in a Global Society** — Reaffirmed convention’s belief that all people have religious freedom and called for prayer for persecuted Christians around the world.

▶ **On Protecting the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)** — Urged President Obama to order the Department of Justice to defend DOMA and renewed the convention’s call for a constitutional amendment defining marriage between a man and a woman.

▶ **On Immigration and the Gospel** — Urged Southern Baptists to minister to everyone, regardless of immigration status, and called for pathway to citizenship while not supporting amnesty.

▶ **On the Reality of Hell** — Affirmed belief in the eternal and conscious punishment of the regenerate in hell.

▶ **On Corporate Prayer and Repentance** — Called for corporate prayer and corporate repentance for all revealed sins.

▶ **On Civil Public Discourse** — Encouraged Southern Baptists to speak with conviction, kindness and gentleness.

▶ **On Appreciation** — To God and those He used in Phoenix.

▶ **On the Gender-Neutral 2011 New International Version of the Bible** — Opposed this version, asked LifeWay not to sell it.

Overton, pastor of Halteman Village Baptist Church, Muncie, Ind., told messengers the SBC needed to address the issue in its role as a leading voice in the evangelical Christian community.

Speaking for the committee regarding its decision not to present Overton’s measure, Russell Moore said the members did not believe the issue “rose to the level of needing to be addressed by this year’s convention.” Moore said the TNIV was “something of a stealth move,” which was not true in this case. He also said the NIV is not in the same position now as it was in the past, since such translations as the Holman Christian Standard Bible and English Standard Version are now available. He also said the NIV is “just one of many Bibles out there [with] similar language.”

The committee did not oppose passage of the resolution. At the news conference, Moore said, “The committee, of course, shares the concerns that were expressed in the resolution. The issue was not whether or not we would affirm the NIV and its changes but whether or not we thought the current changes were worthy of being addressed” at this year’s meeting.

Resolution on hell

The resolution on hell came as part of an ongoing response to the publication earlier this year of Michigan pastor Rob Bell’s book “Love Wins.” Bell’s controversial book “called into question the church’s historic teaching on the doctrine of eternal punishment of the unregenerate,” as the resolution described it.

In adopting the resolution, messengers affirmed “our belief in the biblical teaching on eternal, conscious punishment of the unregenerate in hell.” The resolution also urged Southern Baptists “to proclaim faithfully the depth and gravity of sin against a holy God, the reality of hell, and the salvation of sinners by God’s grace alone,

through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.”

The other resolutions approved:

▶ Reaffirmed the convention’s belief that all people have religious freedom, meaning they possess the liberty “to convert to another religion or to no religion, to seek to persuade others of the claims of one’s religion, and to worship without harassment or impediment from the state.” It also called for prayer for persecuted Christians throughout the world.

▶ Urged President Obama to reverse course by ordering the Department of Justice to defend fully the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in federal court and renewed the convention’s call for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman. DOMA is a 1996 law that defines marriage federally as exclusively between a man and a woman and protects states from having to recognize same-sex “marriages” performed in states where such unions are legal.

▶ Called for corporate repentance and prayer, urging Southern Baptists to seek “a life of genuine repentance, Kingdom-focused prayer times for sweeping revival and spiritual awakening, and consistent prayer for specific lost people, missions and ministry.”

▶ Encouraged civility in the public discussion of controversial issues and denounced “the speech or activities of any individual or group that brings shame upon the name of Christ and His gospel.” It urged Southern Baptists “to speak biblically and authoritatively with conviction, kindness and gentleness.”

▶ Thanked God and those He used in producing the annual meeting of Southern Baptists.

Ten resolutions were submitted for this year’s meeting. The committee declined to act on some but addressed others in the final resolutions recommended to the messengers. (BP)



BP photo

FBC NORTH MOBILE’S BRELAND LEADS SBC MUSIC
Jason Breland (left), worship pastor for First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland, and convention music director at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 14–15 in Phoenix, leads in congregational worship.

'Not smoke and mirrors'

NAMB report provides 'real' statistics, outlines Ezell's strategy for efficiency

By Todd Deaton
Western Recorder

In his first report to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), Kevin Ezell urged Southern Baptists to define reality by confronting some brutal facts about their church-planting and missionary numbers.

Acknowledging Southern Baptists' fondness for big numbers, Ezell charged, "We like to remind ourselves how big our denomination is ... how many missionaries we have and how many churches we plant."

Yet biblical stewardship demands accuracy, the former Louisville, Ky., pastor insisted, declaring a need for transparency, effectiveness and efficiency — "not smoke and mirrors."

'You have heard it said'

Borrowing an expression used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Ezell asserted. "You have heard it said Southern Baptists plant as many as 1,400 to 1,500 churches, but I say unto you: In 2010, we planted 769," Ezell noted. The new NAMB will count only church plants for which it can obtain a name, address and information on its church planter, he said.

NAMB, he said, is working on a mutually agreed upon definition of church plants and a system to track them across the 42 state conventions. "If Walmart can track how much toilet paper is sold in an hour, we should be able to track how many church plants are done in a year," he quipped.

The mission board will be committed to planting healthy churches,

focusing on quality, not quantity, Ezell said. "We plant only Southern Baptist churches. All of our church plants agree to give to the Cooperative Program. All of our church planters agree to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 as the theological guide for their ministry.

"And you have heard it said NAMB has over 5,100 missionaries serving in North America, but I say unto you: We must be clear," Ezell continued, giving the following account: 3,480 of NAMB missionaries are jointly funded with state conventions; 1,839 are spouses; 1,616 are Missions Service Corps volunteers; and 38 are national missionaries paid in full by NAMB. In addition, NAMB has 3,400 chaplains, including 1,350 military chaplains, and 955 students currently are serving as summer missionaries, he noted.

"But we must put more missionaries on the field; we must take better care of our missionaries," Ezell challenged. Twenty NAMB missionaries were commissioned following Ezell's report.

"Please know I am striving to bring a sense of strategic focus and efficiency to North American missions," he told SBC messengers. With that goal in mind, NAMB has reduced the size of its Alpharetta, Ga., staff by 38 percent, saving approximately \$6 million a year, and has trimmed its budget by \$8 million, including cutting travel budgets by half, Ezell noted.

"But NAMB is not taking one step back," he maintained. "We intend to do more with less infrastructure." In introducing NAMB's new Send North America strategy for church planting that aims to



BP photo

FAITHFUL SERVICE — Chaplain Maj. Gen. Douglas Carver (right) is recognized for his service as the 22nd chief of chaplains of the United States Army on June 14. Pictured with him are NAMB president Kevin Ezell (left) and NAMB chaplain Keith Travis. Major Carver is retiring June 22.

help Southern Baptists penetrate lostness through regional mobilization, Ezell said, "Already 80 percent of NAMB resources that are invested through the state go to unreached areas, but this strategy will send even more in this direction."

Disaster relief ministry

Ezell concluded his report by spotlighting Southern Baptists' disaster relief ministry, which now has more than 85,000 trained volunteers and more than 2,000 units.

"This year, we've seen flood-

ing, fires and tornadoes," he noted, adding that Southern Baptists have responded to 40 separate incidents, including recently assisting those impacted by the nation's deadliest tornado in Joplin, Mo.

Appearing at the convention was Maj. Gen. Douglas Carver for the final time as chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army.

In 2007, Carver became the first Southern Baptist to be named the Army's chief of chaplains in 50 years. After a distinguished military career, Carver and wife Sun-

ny will retire later this summer to Charlotte, N.C.

"It's been my honor to wear the nation's cloth for 38 years, supporting 2,900 chaplains of all faiths to 300,000 soldiers serving in 80 different countries, including during wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the Horn of Africa, defending us so we can serve God freely," the two-star general said. "When you send a Southern Baptist chaplain to the field, you can be assured we are bringing God to soldiers and soldiers to God." (BP contributed)

SBC president meets with gay group, refuses to apologize

A coalition of homosexual leaders and their allies met for more than 30 minutes June 15 with Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Bryant Wright, with the leaders demanding an apology from the SBC and Wright refusing to budge, saying Scripture is clear on the issue.

The meeting — cordial the entire time — took place between the morning and afternoon sessions of the SBC in Wright's annual meeting office at the Phoenix Convention Center. The nine-person coalition included representatives of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, Faith in America and Truth Wins Out. It protested outside the convention hall and requested to deliver petitions to Wright, who decided to turn the event into a dialogue. Several members of the media also attended.

"We're a coalition of groups asking the SBC to acknowledge and apologize for the damage that the convention has done to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people," Jack McKinney, a heterosexual married man, said. McKinney is a spokesman for Faith in America and a former Southern Baptist minister. McKinney and the other leaders repeatedly made parallels between racism

and a stance against homosexuality. Sixteen years ago to the day, McKinney said, Southern Baptists passed a resolution apologizing for past racism.

'Demonized'

"We feel like the convention is making the same mistake in the way it has demonized LGBT people," said McKinney, who handed Wright a packet of 10,000 signatures. "We come today to ask for an apology for that and for a pledge that those kinds of teachings would come to an end."

Wright, sitting at a roundtable with McKinney and four of the other leaders, rejected the parallels. "Obviously we don't feel that there can be an apology for teaching sexual purity," said Wright, senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga. "As followers of Christ, our only authority for practicing our faith is Scripture, is the Word of God. ... As followers of Christ, it would be very difficult for us to betray our faith by ignoring what God says about sexual purity."

The Bible condemns both homosexual sex and heterosexual sex that is outside the bonds of marriage, Wright said.

"When I teach from the pulpit about adul-

tery, I don't hate adulterers," he said. "Just as we have people attending our local church that are engaging in homosexual activity, we have people attending our church who are engaging in adultery. I don't hate those people when I speak about adultery. I am just, hopefully, loving them enough to speak the truth about what God desires for the best for that person."

Similarly, when Wright preaches about the Bible's prohibition on premarital sex, that doesn't "mean we hate teenagers," he said.

Mitchell Gold, Faith in America's founder, said, "I remember during the 1960s similar words justifying a position against integration and justifying a whole attitude toward black people. Part of what we are saying to you is you really made a big mistake before and you apologized for it, you recognized it."

"There's an enormous amount of harm" done to teens by the SBC's stance, he said.

Although some of the leaders said ex-gay ministries were harmful, Wright disagreed, saying "there really have been" people who have left homosexuality through the various ministries. "The standard of Scripture for heterosexual single adults" and for homosexual single adults is "no different," he said.

Both groups are, he said, to abstain from sex.

Wayne Benson, a leading homosexual activist and a former Human Rights Campaign spokesman, interjected, "You're asking for people to surrender their humanity."

Wright drew the conversation back to his Christian faith. "Jesus Christ came to die for all of our sins, whether it's heterosexual sin or whether it's homosexual sin. ... For a society to come along at this stage in history and all of a sudden say that one of the ... areas that Christ has no power" over is "homosexual behavior is really elevating the importance of that behavior above the power of Christ."

'Just seeking to follow Jesus'

"Looking at sexual purity from Scripture, we're not going to be able to come to common ground. I hope you all would respect that we're just seeking to follow Jesus.

"Christ loves you Wayne; He loves you, Mitchell; He loves Robin [Lunn of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists]; He loves me in spite of my incredible amount of sin," Wright said. "But He does not desire for us to continue to engage in sinful behavior that He very clearly says is not good." (BP)

God's calling

Pastors encouraged to take gospel to nations at 2011 Pastors Conference

A major part of a pastor's leadership is preaching, Muscle Shoals evangelist Bob Pitman told the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference, which met June 12-13 at the Phoenix Convention Center.

Speaking from 2 Corinthians 4:1-5, Pitman pointed to the pastor's mandate to preach.

"We do not have to apologize for being preachers, because that is our foremost and primary responsibility," he said. "When God calls you to be a pastor, He calls you to be a preacher."

Pitman — whose son Vance, lead pastor of Hope Baptist Church, Las Vegas, served as Pastors Conference president — called on pastors to preach the gospel as servant leaders with pure motives.

"God is not interested in any personal agendas that we may push," he said. "God is not impressed as we climb the ladder in the denomination. The only thing that really impresses God is when we live for Jesus' sake."

Of course, openly preaching the gospel in the Muslim world often results in persecution as David Platt learned on a recent trip to Egypt.

The pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, heard from pastors about the many hardships and persecutions that Christians there have endured. Platt said he encouraged those pastors, saying they weren't experiencing that persecution alone.

"I had the opportunity to gather around ... each of those other pastors and to pray for them and tell

them they are not alone, that we are with them, that when one part of the body hurts the whole body hurts," Platt recounted.

Afshin Ziafat, lead pastor of Providence Church, Frisco, Texas, understands what clinging to the gospel costs.

The Iranian American came to Christ as a teenager after he read a Bible given to him by an English tutor. His father disowned him for his faith.

Still Ziafat challenged pastors to recognize the sending nature of the gospel: "The gospel didn't come into our hearts to terminate with us. If you have really grabbed hold of the gospel, it will send you out to others who do not know."

Peter Ndhlovu, bishop of the Bible Gospel Church in Zambia, challenged attendees to join him in reaching the nations with the gospel.

Ndhlovu, whose church has planted 286 churches in 13 African countries, preached from Matthew 24:12-14, urging pastors to fulfill the purpose God has called the Church to accomplish: making disciples of all the nations.

'We have a mission'

"We have a mission and we have to accomplish it," he said. "We have to do it; now is the time, not tomorrow. We have no time to play games. We have no time to play church. We have to fulfill that which God has sent us to do."

But Johnny Hunt, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., said only when pastors have their lives properly ordered

will the Southern Baptist Convention be successful in reaching people for Christ.

"We as the Southern Baptist Convention have had a blessed past," Hunt said. "But I personally sense that God desires to be with us in a more mighty way in the present and in the future if we are to touch this nation, which we're not touching as we ought, and the nations of the world." He pointed to the apostle Paul's example of living "the Kingdom life" in 1 Corinthians 16.

First and foremost, Hunt said Paul emulated the Kingdom life by being generous with his possessions.

"We need as much, if not more, emulation as we have exhortation," Hunt said. "We've learned how to say it; we've just got to learn how to do it. And we've got to do it by example and giving the people a way to follow."

Preaching on Jesus' miracle of water made to wine from John 2, Gregg Matte, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston, urged pastors to be servants drawing on God's power to turn proverbial water in their ministries to wine.

Noting the crisis at the Cana wedding celebration when the wine ran out, Matte emphasized that servants, already tired from their duties, were tasked with the burden of filling six stone jars — each holding 20 to 30 gallons.

Following Mary's command to "do whatever He tells you," the servants filled the water to the brim.

"When God asks you to do something, when Jesus asks you to do something, do you do 51 percent or do you fill it to the brim?" Matte asked. He warned pastors against a 75 percent effort in their ministry when such effort can often carry them on their talent or giftedness.

Bartholomew Orr, senior pastor of Brown Missionary Baptist Church, Southaven, Miss., warned against "drops" in Christian ministry resulting from a lost connection to God.

"Too many pastors in too many churches have lost contact with the Master," Orr said. "They're still in business but they're not doing His business: His gospel is not being preached, and His truths are not being proclaimed." He explained that the only way for a cell phone to hold a charge consistently is to remain plugged into a power



BP photo

'LIVE FOR JESUS' SAKE — Evangelist Bob Pitman, of Muscle Shoals, speaks during the June 12 evening session of the 2011 Southern Baptist Pastors Conference at the Phoenix Convention Center.



PIPER

source. Such is the case for a pastor as well.

"The power is not from us, but the power is from God Almighty," Orr said. "Just stay plugged in."

Speaking from Ephesians 5:15-16, Paul Gotthardt, lead pastor of Life Baptist Church, Las Vegas, said it's important to be positioned correctly in ministry to be effective for Kingdom activity. Once in position, he noted that the best way to accomplish this is to walk in wisdom and make the most of one's time.

"Our walk is how we live from day to day," Gotthardt said. "We are to remain alert. We are not to be foolish and self-centered, but we are to walk as wise people who are acknowledging God. Whenever we're in the habit of remaining alert, and we're not living for self but we are acknowledging God in His purposes, we are strategically positioned at that moment to buy back some time for God and His purposes."

But Darrin Patrick, lead pastor of The Journey church, St. Louis, and vice president of the Acts 29 Network (church-planting network), told the pastors, "God must work in us if He is to work through us. The preparation, the work, the battle is in the soil of your heart. It is a war for control."

Preaching from Galatians 5:16-26, Patrick explained Paul's use of fruit as a metaphor for how spiritual growth takes place.

Fruit, Patrick said, grows holistically, internally, gradually and communally.

"You have to be a person that is willing to deal with their own sin

as they are dealing with the sin of others," he said.

"Your sin is a bigger deal than their sin. You should be more worried about your sin than that sin."

Patrick said only when pastors are more concerned about their own sin can they deal appropriately with the sin of others.

When dealing with others, Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa, Fla., encouraged attendees to look beyond their outward appearance and seek what God sees: the internal need for salvation in Him.

Not only did pastors and others at the Pastors Conference hear passionate pleas to be active in taking the gospel to the nations but they also had the chance to give to make that happen in two key ways.

Pastors Conference leaders hope to raise \$100,000 to engage an unreached people group in the Arabian peninsula with the gospel through a translation project and humanitarian relief. The second objective for the Pastors Conference offering is to fund similar pastors conferences in Africa, India and Asia.

Bob Roberts, senior pastor of NorthWood Church, Keller, Texas; John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis; Louie Giglio, lead pastor of Passion City Church, Atlanta; and Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif., also preached on the theme "Aspire: Yearning to Join God's Kingdom Activity."

(Compiled from BP stories)

Alabama Baptists elected

Alabama Baptists were among those elected to serve on Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) boards and committees.

► Steve Loggins, director of missions for North Jefferson Baptist Association — second term, Executive Committee.

► Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions — GuideStone Financial Resources.

► Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery — International Mission Board.

► Max F. Croft, associate pastor of Agape Baptist

Church, Scottsboro — International Mission Board.

► Larry Gipson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oneonta — second term, North American Mission Board.

► Edwin J. Hayes, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cullman — second term, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Alabama Baptists serving on the Committee on Committees for the June 14-15 SBC annual meeting in Phoenix were

► Danny Wood, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, and

► Roy Hill, pastor of First Baptist Church, Satsuma. (BP)

CONVENTION SERMON

Platt urges messengers to engage unreached

Pastors are responsible to lead their churches to engage the world's unreached people groups with the gospel, David Platt said in the convention sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting June 15.

Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, noted that people groups by the thousands worldwide are unreached for Christ. "This is not a problem for the International Mission Board to address," Platt said. "This is a problem for every local church in this convention to address."

Platt emphasized that he was not advocating the neglect of local ministries and missions but added, "at the same time, global missions is tragically neglected."

He pointed to an example from northern Yemen, which has a population of about 8 million people but only about 20-30 Christians.

"That is a problem," Platt said. "Masses of people groups. Millions upon millions upon millions of people who do not have access to the gospel."

Preaching from Matthew 24:14, Platt said Christians are often confused about their message, their mission and their motive. Christians' message, Platt said, is that God is King and that He rules over all. "Our God is sovereign over all nature," Platt said. "The wind blows at His bidding. The sun radiates with heat from His hands. Every single night, our God brings out the stars one by one and He calls them each by name."

'Sovereign over all'

In addition to being sovereign over nature, Platt said God is sovereign over nations and holds the rulers of the world in His hands. The good news, he continued, is not just that God is King but that the King has come in the person of Jesus Christ — and all who believe in Him and trust in His name will be both children of God and heirs of God's Kingdom forever.

But the Church, Platt said, is guilty of minimizing and maligning that good news.

"We have reduced Jesus the King to a poor, puny savior who is just begging for people to ac-

cept Him into their heart or invite Him into their life, phrases that are never used in the Word of God," he said. "We have reduced the gospel of the Kingdom to a shrink-wrapped presentation that if we can get people to say and pray the right things back to us, we will pronounce them fit for heaven and free to live their life on earth however they desire.

"Not true," he continued. "Our King is not a savior who is begging for anyone's casual approval. Our King is a sovereign who deserves everyone's eternal praise."

Platt took aim at author/pastor Rob Bell and others who have questioned the reality of hell, warning Southern Baptists to "be very cautious when anyone says, 'Did God really say this? Would God really do that?'"

"This is the question that ushered sin into the world in Genesis 3," Platt said.

The message of good news, that God offers eternal life to those who trust in Christ regardless of their station in life, works anywhere in the world, Platt said, and Christians' mission is to proclaim that news throughout the whole world.

If Christians and churches are not intentionally going after unreached groups with the gospel, Platt said, then they are disobeying the Great Commission — because God's command was not a general one to make disciples among as many people as possible but to make disciples among every single people group.

The motivation for Christians to pursue such a mission is their desire that God be praised and to complete the task He has given them, Platt said.

"What drives passion for unreached peoples is not guilt. It's glory," he said. "Glory for a King, for a King who deserves the praise of every people group on the planet."

Platt said pursuing that goal will come with a cost, because Satan is opposed to God's people reaching the world with the gospel. Some people will hate Christians for their message, and some may even kill them. But Platt reminded Southern Baptists that the reward is worth the sacrifice and challenged them to be bold and intentional in their efforts. (BP)



Our King is not a savior who is begging for anyone's casual approval."

Pastor David Platt
The Church at Brook Hills

WMU annual meeting sees leadership elections, return of RAs

Wearing an umpire uniform, Jeff Iorg said he wanted to show off his "missionary clothes" during the concluding session of the 2011 National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting on June 13.

WMU sessions took place June 12-13 at the Wyndham Phoenix Hotel. "Proclaim!" was the theme for this year's celebration based on Luke 4:18-19.

Alabama Baptists' Rosalie Hunt was elected to a third one-year term as recording secretary. Also re-elected to a second one-year term as president was South Carolina Baptists' Debby Akerman.

Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., shared how umpiring baseball on the side for 20 years and serving as a chaplain for the San Francisco Giants has allowed him to break free of "the Christian subculture" and share Christ with people who need to hear about Him.

"If you're going to make a difference in the culture, you must go where lost people are and where lost people are in control," said Iorg, who has served as a chaplain for the Giants for seven years.

Iorg set forth that challenge in his new book, "Live Like a Missionary: Giving Your Life for What Matters Most." In a WMU gathering during which International and North American Mission Board missionaries and others shared stories about victories and struggles in their ministries to a lost world, Iorg challenged the crowd to push beyond its ministry leadership positions and regular church duties to share Jesus with others.

Christian leaders too often become cocooned and isolated from those who don't follow Jesus, Iorg said. It's a temptation against which Iorg admits he's struggled.

"The trajectory of my life has surprised me because at each step along the way, I have become more closely identified with the Christian community," he said, "and less and less identified with the people of the community that I so desperately want to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"There's a good place for Christian ministries, but what I'm talking about ... is stepping out of the Christian subculture, stepping out of what we control and moving instead into venues in the community and engaging in those," he said.

It's in those positions that Christians "will have to earn our position by our service," Iorg said, "and then earn the right to speak about the name of Jesus Christ."

"And I'll transform culture by



BP photo

TRANSFERRING RESPONSIBILITY — Kevin Ezell (left), president of NAMB, presents Royal Ambassadors and Challengers patches to Wanda Lee, executive director/treasurer of WMU, symbolizing the transfer of the missionary programs from NAMB to WMU.

what I accomplish in this process."

Ginger Smith, executive director of the Mission Centers of Houston, was the keynote speaker for the Sunday night session. She recounted how God is setting people free in Houston through three questions that she has asked every day for the past year: 1. What if we believed God? 2. What if we really loved people? 3. What if we served others — even if we didn't want to or wanted instead to teach them a lesson?

Sharing that she often felt "more freedom on the streets than in church," the inner-city minister acknowledged that answering these questions has changed her practice of doing things "for" people to doing things "with" them, empowering them and teaching them ownership.

Exploring human exploitation, the current focus of WMU's Project HELP, Smith noted examples of the human exploitation prevalent in the Houston area: Cantinas offer "beer with a girl" for \$13; a homeless man sells girls for \$10.

Rather than rescuing victims, Smith focuses on prevention programs that teach children how to protect themselves, how to communicate when things don't feel right around them and how to respect one another.

"These children are seen as disposable. We have to do something," Smith said.

Also speaking during the event were Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board (IMB) and Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Elliff urged the 350 WMU attendees to encourage their church leaders to join the IMB in launching an initiative to reach the 3,800 presently unengaged people groups in the world (see story, page 5).

Ezell presented Wanda Lee,

WMU executive director, with an oversized Royal Ambassador (RA) racecar to commemorate the transfer of responsibility for RAs back to WMU.

"We love RAs. They were born out of our hearts and ... now is the perfect time to welcome them back home," Lee said.

News on mission boards

In a missions focus segment, Gordon Fort, vice president of the IMB's office of global strategy, facilitated a discussion of current missions issues as the two SBC mission boards cooperate to reach all peoples of the world. Fort countered rumors that the two boards were merging but did stress they are working together in unprecedented ways.

"When we failed to take the gospel to the people groups, God brought them to us," Fort said, explaining that IMB and NAMB missionaries work stateside and internationally to reach the same people groups.

In her first presidential address, Akerman said, "God has purposed WMU to equip our churches to be on mission, to educate ... and to be intentional supporters for our more than 10,000 missionaries," she said. "Our missions purpose has not changed in our 125 years. [Nonetheless] we need to lessen entertainment venues and increase involvement in God's Great Commission. And WMU does this so well."

In other news, two WMU leaders were recognized for outstanding service.

Judith Edwards, a member of First Baptist Church, Rio Rancho, N.M., received the Dellanna West O'Brien Award for Women's Leadership Development. Laura Morris, a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky., received the Dr. Martha Myers GA Alumna of Distinction Award, which is given to a GA alumna who influences others for Christ and serves as a positive role model for girls. (BP)



AKERMAN

What kind of change does SBC need to grow again?

By Ed Stetzer
LifeWay Christian Resources

It is time for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to move from denial to decision.

It has happened again. The SBC reported membership has declined, again. And baptisms are at their lowest level in 60 years.

I remember the first time the membership declined, just a few years ago. I pointed out (based on data from Cliff Tharp, LifeWay Christian Resources' now-retired statistician) that it was not an aberration, but a pattern. The 50-year membership trend was moving into negative territory.

"Put simply," I wrote in April 2008, "membership may go up

next year, but the trend points to the negative. It probably won't go up. But even if it does, I believe we will have more declining than growing years over the next decade. Unless the trend changes, membership has peaked."

How did we respond? I remember how strongly these observations were denied. A segment of the SBC seemed to think closing our eyes or disputing the data would change our reality."

In 2008, we were again faced with the data of a continuing trend. I noted then, "Today we are facing a set of numbers to which we are not accustomed. ... This year, I believe that our tipping point continues to tip. Unless things change, we are about to enter a time when we grow accustomed to decline and think back to the good ol' days of growth."

Following that report, there was a little less denial. Actually more spoke up. Chuck Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, warned that Southern Baptists are in danger of entering a deep decline with all the accompanying problems.

Subsequently the data for 2009 revealed no reversal.

Now we can see four years in a row of statistics confirming a long-term trend of membership decline in the SBC. It is what it is.

It is time for the SBC to move from denial to decision. I am only echoing what others have said before: It is time for change in the SBC. But change, just for the sake of change, is not enough. We must ask, "What kind of change do we need?"

For me, as a missiologist and denominational servant, change needs to come in several places.

► A need for 'missio dei'

First we need a renewed passion for churches to live on mission.

We need to see the church not simply as an institution but as an agent of God's Kingdom-mission. Increasingly people must recognize the church is a missionary body with a divine call to be a sign and instrument of God's Kingdom.

In short, God is a sending God and we are a sent people.

► A need for diversity

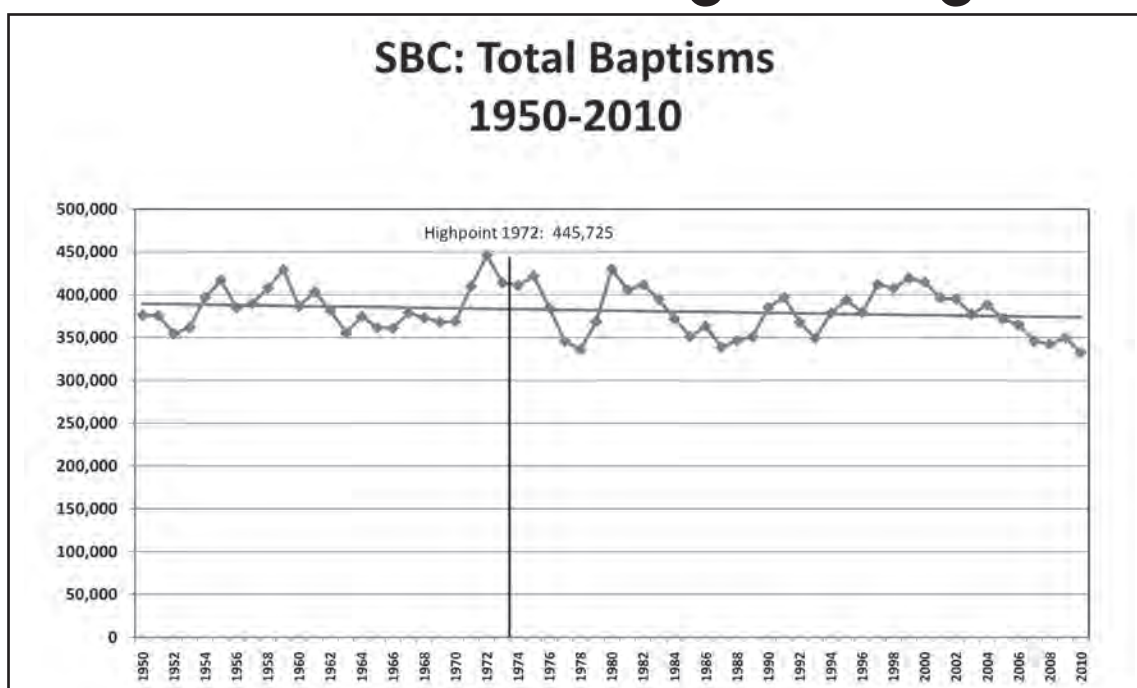
Second we need a greater emphasis on ethnic diversity. We've been so Southern and so white for so long that the annual meetings look like a loaf of Wonder bread.

Ethnic diversity

Our ideas of "reaching out" are less impressive than striving to create an intentionally multicultural family that reflects the population of heaven. Simply put, denominations will not embrace ethnic leaders without a plan and strategy to do so. The Executive Committee is pressing in on this issue and it is about time (see story, page 4).

► A need for a new generation

Third we must have a plan to raise up a new generation, not just of leaders but young people through-



out the SBC. The oldest generation may indeed be the "greatest," but it must not be our last. The SBC will not last forever based solely on the presence of its elder statesmen and women. Mentoring, in which the younger learns from the elder, and reverse mentoring, in which the elder learns from the younger, create the kind of dynamics that perpetuate an effective denomination without the bloodletting of civil war.

► A need for a renewal in church planting

Finally we need more new churches in our convention. I'm thankful for the efforts of President Kevin Ezell and the team at the North American Mission Board, as they are taking bold steps to refocus on church planting (see story, page 7). Even in the Bible Belt, there are large segments of people who have not been and are not being reached with the gospel. In our large cities, one could surmise that so much "urban blight" is the result of a spiritual vacuum.

In the lesser-evangelized parts of our own country are people who have been insulated from the gospel in the most gospel-saturated society

in history. Only a vast movement of church planting across North America will see these people reached with the message of Jesus Christ.

Telling the truth has been controversial in SBC life. But facts are still our friends. The fact is our denomination is struggling and needs to change.

Yet it is not the denomination that is "great," rather, it is that a denomination is a family of great churches.

I love those churches and pray God will use them to advance His name and His fame. The denomination is the tool the churches use to accomplish the God-given goal.

When will change come? I don't

know. Some will keep going as before — considering slow decline as acceptable as long as they can keep doing church in a way they have grown to prefer.

Some are content to successfully manage decline. Yet, for others, knowing that 2010 saw the fewest number of new believers going through the baptismal waters since Eisenhower was president will break their hearts.

We don't change until the pain of staying the same grows greater than the pain of change.

May the truth break our hearts, drive us to our knees and compel us into the mission. (LifeWay)

2010 SBC baptisms decline by 5 percent

The number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 2010 fell by nearly 5 percent, according to the Annual Church Profile compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources in cooperation with Baptist state conventions.

Southern Baptist churches reported 332,321 baptisms in 2010, down from 349,737 in 2009. Total membership in 2010, reported at 16,136,044, represents a 0.15 percent decline from 2009 and is the fourth straight year of decline.

However, the number of churches in the SBC rose to 45,727, an increase of 1.59 percent from the 45,010 reported in 2009. Primary worship attendance in SBC churches mirrored the decline in overall membership, declining 0.19 percent to 6,195,449 in 2010.

Total missions expenditures in 2010 totaled \$1.3 billion, down from \$1.33 billion in 2009, with one state convention not reporting these figures. Total tithes, offerings and special gifts received in Southern Baptist churches totaled \$10.68 billion, a decline of \$153 million

from 2009, but again with a state convention not asking churches for this information.

Impacted categories and their 2010 totals include:

► Total tithes, offerings and special gifts: \$10,680,023,357

► Undesignated receipts: \$8,911,796,522

► Total receipts: \$11,720,820,320

► Total missions expenditures: \$1,302,479,654

► Value of congregational property: \$42,509,449,468 (BP)

SPECIAL OFFERS JUST FOR ALABAMA CHURCHES

We know many Alabama churches were affected by the recent tornado. While we continue to pray for you, we've also worked with two suppliers on special pricing to help you in your recovery efforts.



LifeWay and Church Interiors are offering free evaluations, special discount pricing on all of our products, and storage of furniture and stained glass. Call us today at **800.622.8610** or visit lifewaystores.com/churchsales to learn more.



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LifeWay
CHRISTIAN STORES



BAPTISTS RESPOND

to areas devastated by April tornadoes

For 12 days in late April and early May, members of **Lake Martin Baptist Church, Dadeville**, served hot meals to nearly 1,200 law enforcement officers, Red Cross personnel, local fire department volunteers and tornado survivors in the storm-ravaged area in **Tallapoosa Baptist Association**.

Lake Martin Baptist housed the command center trailers for law enforcement and the Red Cross. Church member Wanda Martin, who led the food service effort, said the opportunity to serve was “the most amazing experience” of her life, with God allowing the church to “work in His Kingdom and to minister right in [its own] back yard.”

Food was donated by local grocery stores, restaurants, individuals, church members, schools and Fat Boy’s Bar-B-Que Ranch of Prattville, which provided 400 plates of barbecue beef and pork May 7. On that day, more than 600 meals were either delivered to survivors or volunteers in the community or served to those in Lake Martin Baptist’s fellowship hall (which remained open to those in need 24/7). The church continues to serve the community by collecting nonperishable goods and distributing them in its neighborhood.

On behalf of the people of **Walker County**, I am writing to express our heartfelt appreciation for the wonderful people who make up the **Florida Baptist disaster relief team**.

After the recent tornadoes that struck our state, some of the very first out-of-state responders to arrive in our area was the team from Florida. It did an outstanding job of helping our hurting people and representing our Lord in a very significant way. It has added its considerable resources to that of our own disaster relief team to help our families begin the long process of recovery from the devastating damage by very high winds and tornadoes that blew through our county on April 27. I have heard several testimonies regarding people who came to know Christ as personal Savior because of the team’s witness for Christ while it worked. Obviously the Lord is using it in more ways than the removal of trees and debris from people’s property.

We are so thankful for the team’s hard work and commitment to the cause of Christ in this special ministry. The team has been superbly led by Fritz Wilson, who is a native of our area and who, of course, heads up disaster relief for Florida Baptists. His work is marvelously com-

plemented by his associate, Terry Ryan. It has been a pleasure to get to know these men and all the wonderful volunteers who came to offer their help and support during a very challenging time.

I am very grateful to be a part of the Southern Baptist family, who has a heart for people. I am also grateful for those of our Christian family who are willing to go much farther than the second mile by training and being willing to be a part of such a demanding ministry.

Reuben “Lucky” Teague
Director of missions
Walker Baptist Association

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) is providing one-day conferences — **After the Storm: Ministry Support** — for pastors, associate pastors and other church ministers and their spouses who were affected by the April tornadoes.

Endel Lee, national disaster relief chaplain coordinator with the North American Mission Board, is the conference leader.

Dale Huff, director of the SBOM office of LeaderCare and church administration, is organizing the conferences.

“We started from the very beginning trying to project out from the tornado time ... when there’s possibility of them backing off a little bit, pulling away and getting some sense of the stress it has created for them,” he said. “This also is an effort to help them best understand the stress of other folks and grief response.”

The remaining conferences are
June 23, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Albertville — 9 a.m.–3 p.m. (last two hours are optional)

June 28, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville — 9 a.m.–1 p.m.

June 28, DeKalb Baptist Association office, Rainsville — 5:30–8:30 p.m.

No registration is required unless child care is needed.

For more information, call Sandra Lewandowski at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 316, or e-mail slewandowski@alsbom.org.

Two mobile chapel units have been delivered to **Mountain View Baptist Church, Phil Campbell**. These make four units that have been provided and set up by Alabama Baptist disaster relief. Nine more are in the planning stages for other damaged churches.

‘Storming back’ Youth help rebuild St. Clair County

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Cropwell-based Extreme Ministries is ready to see St. Clair County come “storming back” from an April 27 tornado that destroyed 300 homes and took 13 lives in Shoal Creek Valley. So it identified nine rebuilding projects and arranged for dozens of youth groups from around the state and outside of it to work on them June 5–25.

But youth aren’t the only ones involved in the disaster relief effort. Jeff Huey, director of Extreme Ministries and a certified Alabama Baptist disaster relief volunteer, contacted state disaster relief leaders about feeding units preparing meals for the youth.

So while the youth replaced roofs, built wheelchair ramps and even started rebuilding some homes from the ground up, six disaster relief volunteers from Morgan Baptist Association provided them with three meals a day the first week.

More than 70 youth from Bethel Baptist Church, Odenville, made up the bulk of the volunteers that week.

“(A year ago) we didn’t know ... where we would go (on our youth missions trip), but once the disaster in St. Clair County came, we knew we had a focus,” said Youth Minister Brad Tollison.

The disaster also changed the plans of the youth group at Crestway Baptist Church, Birmingham.

“Our youth were scheduled to go to Chattanooga on a fun trip. But the youth themselves chose to work this week close to home,” explained Bill Ezelle, an adult worker who accompanied the youth.

Maria Wall, a youth worker from Crestway Baptist, said, “I wouldn’t have been able to live with myself if we used all this money to go on a fun, out-of-town trip when there was so much need and heartache in our own area.”

At press time, disaster relief feeding units from Limestone and Tuscaloosa Baptist associations were scheduled to prepare meals for



Photo by Gary Hardin

SUMMER HEAT — Dwight Rice, a member of FBC Oxford, prepares homemade ice cream for the youth volunteers.

weeks two and three. Coosa River and St. Clair Baptist associations are providing shower units.

The youth begin each day with breakfast and a devotion and then head to the job sites. After showering and eating dinner, they attend a nightly praise and worship service.

Building relationships

For this event, Ragland High School’s lunchroom and gym are perfect places for everyone to have meals and sleep for the night.

“It’s really special having the school available, and their kitchen facilities are first-class,” said Tom Bennich, a member of First Baptist Church, Hartselle, who served as Morgan Association’s disaster relief team leader.

As the youth line up for breakfast and dinner, the volunteers talk to and even joke with them, calling many by name. After eating, many youth thank and hug each cook.

The youth also are rebuilding even more than Huey first envisioned.

“Our rebuild projects are going much better than expected,” he said. “We have finished three of the nine original projects and have added nine more new ones.”



Photo by Gary Hardin

TEAMWORK — Youth from Bethel Baptist Church, Odenville, prepare to lift a newly constructed wall.



Challenge: Increase CP gifts 1 percent

A pastor, a seminary student and Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Executive Committee, delivered a challenge for renewed commitment to unified ministry through the SBC's Cooperative Program (CP) by even a 1 percent-of-budget increase in 2012.

Kevin White, pastor of First Baptist Church, Longview, Wash., was 4 years old, living in a mining town of 80 people in northern Nevada, when a CP-funded missionary began visiting and repeatedly witnessing to his father.

"Through his devotion, my family came to Jesus Christ," White said. "I watched a radical change in my father," who five years later was pastor of a church the missionary planted in the remote town. He also planted several other churches, primarily among Native Americans, during the next 35 years.

White also became a church planter, as will his son, a recent seminary graduate who will soon engage in church planting among an unreached people group overseas.

Quincy Jones, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, asked, "Is our vision of the Cooperative Program the Lord's vision? ... Could the Cooperative Program actually be about more than numbers and dollars, actually be about a spe-

cial stewardship from God given to Southern Baptists?"

The questions — part of an initiative started at Southwestern by Jones — should "stimulate a greater awareness and appreciation ... for ... the Cooperative Program," he said.

Page echoed that sentiment.

"What we do together, we do to the glory of God," he said. "And He is using cooperative ministry, unified ministry, in a

mighty way across this land."

But the SBC has "been headed in the wrong direction in several ways," he said. "Our convention is fracturing into various groups, some theological, most methodological.

"I believe our unity affects our evangelism," Page said. "And it's time to come together in a principle of unified ministry.

"We're challenging you; would

you please do more than you've done before?"

Page introduced a video showing that a 1 percent-of-budget increase in CP giving from all SBC churches would add \$100 million to the CP.

This would allow hundreds of churches to be planted across the United States and 380 international missionaries to be commissioned and boost seminary student enrollment by 16,000 students. (BP)

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► **Hunter Street Church, Hoover**, will celebrate Buddy Gray's 25th anniversary as pastor June 26. Services will be at 9:30 and 10:45 a.m. There will be a reception from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the gym. ► **First Church, Sandusky**, in Birmingham, will host a Bellevue Church reunion June 26, 10 a.m., with former staff members Max Youngblood, Chris Crain and Jerry Otts. Lunch will follow in the fellowship hall. Former members, friends and families are invited. Herman Pair is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► **Bluff Springs Church, Ashford**, will celebrate homecoming

July 17. There will be a meet and greet from 9:30 to 10 a.m. The worship service will be at 10 a.m. Homer Davis Jr. will speak. Lunch will be provided. Brad Hardy is interim pastor.

ETOWAH

► **Sibertown Church, Attalla**, will hold a Vacation Bible School parade June 25, 10 a.m. For information call 256-538-6820. Gary Webb is pastor.

FRANKLIN

► **Waco Church, Russellville**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary July 17, 10 a.m. Lunch will follow at noon. There will be a singing at 2 p.m. Billy George is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **First Church, Dadeville**, will host Lee Bradley June 29, 6 p.m. Bradley is a missionary to Albania and director of the Albanian Bible Institute in Durres. For information visit www.albanianbibleinstitute.com. Gary Wiggins is pastor.

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue July 7. Please submit announcements for the July 14 issue by July 5.

MARKET PLACE

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT PLACING A CLASSIFIED AD, CALL THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST, 205-870-4720, EXT. 102, OR E-MAIL ADS@THEALABAMABAPTIST.ORG. COPY DEADLINE IS TWO WEEKS BEFORE PUBLICATION.

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.

FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: Good Hope Baptist Church, Purvis, Miss., in Lamar County is accepting resumes for a full-time minister of music. Resumes may be submitted to kristi@goodhopepurvis.com or mailed to: P.O. Box 1117, Purvis, MS 39475.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC: Dora First Baptist Church is accepting resumes for this position. Please send resumes to: The Personnel Committee, P.O. Box 357, Dora, AL 35062.

PART-TIME INTERIM MINISTER OF WORSHIP: Clearview Baptist Church in Pinson, Ala., is seeking a part-time interim minister of worship to lead in a blended worship format. Experience in leading choir, praise team and worship band required. Send resumes and DVDs to: Interim Music Search Committee at 5271 Old Springville Road, Pinson, AL 35126. E-mail inquiries to: music-search@clearviewbaptist.com. Deadline for resumes is Friday, July 1.

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.

MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT: Grace Life Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister to provide leadership toward the spiritual growth of our children and families. Send resume to Grace Life Baptist Church, 6200 Lou George Loop, Bessemer, AL 35022, or Lkitch73@att.net.

FULL-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Brookwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, seeks a full-time Children's Minister who is passionate about leading children to a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Send resumes to timc@brookwood.org.

CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Hillcrest Baptist Church, Franklinton, La., is currently seeking a Children's Minister. Please send resumes with references to childrenresumes@hbcfranklinton.com.

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.

BUSINESS

CHURCH SIGNS: Reliable Signs offers design, fabrication, installation and service. All types of signs from electronic messaging to traditional. Ask about our exterior light maintenance service. Statewide coverage. Christian-owned. Church references available. www.reliablesigns.com. 800-729-6844, 205-664-0955.

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CONFERENCES/RETREATS

STONE CREEK: Stoney Creek, new 52 acre Christian based retreat facility perfect for family reunion rentals, church gatherings, weddings and receptions. Amenities galore. Reservations: 256-338-5583 or visit www.stoneycreekalabama.com. Vinemont, AL.

RETREAT CENTER — NE GEORGIA MOUNTAINS: Church groups, family reunions, 10 fully equipped cabins and lodge room for 65 to meet, sleep and eat. 866-754-2010. www.TwinRiversResort.net.

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

FOR RENT

ROOMMATES FOR PATIO HOME: Two Christian female roommates wanted to share small patio home in Northport with University of Alabama freshman. Call Sherry, 334-365-6719 for more information.

Want to know God?

By Pastor Bryan Wagner
Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford

God planned salvation. Jesus Christ purchased it with His blood and death on the cross. You and I must accept it by faith.

As a sinner, your life is in the midst of tragedy and despair. You are incomplete because God has a purpose for you, but without salvation, that purpose is not fulfilled. Without Christ, you are lost, and in that lost condition, you can't know true peace, joy and contentment.

God's Word also says without Christ, you are condemned, which simply means that you are held accountable for your sin. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death."

God cares deeply about your sinful condition, and He loves you enough to offer you the gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus.

Jesus is God's love gift to you and me. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the sin debt for us. The rest of Romans 6:23 says, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We receive the gift by claiming Jesus as our Lord. Because salvation is a gift, there is nothing we can do to earn or purchase it. The only way to be saved is by faith in Jesus.

The moment we turn from our sin and believe on Jesus, God promises we will get a new life: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). In John 3, Jesus referred to this as being born again.

Do you want to know God? You must realize that you are a lost sinner and believe that Jesus died for your sin and rose from the grave. Ask for His forgiveness, ask Him to change your heart and ask Him to give you everlasting life. Confess Jesus as your Savior and claim Him as your Lord. Let Jesus be the Master of your whole life and rely on Him day by day.

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Alabama Baptists among new NAMB faces

Three Alabama Baptists have taken on new roles with the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

► Kathy Ferguson Litton is the new national director of ministry to pastors' wives. Litton will be working with NAMB's leadership development team in the area of support and encouragement for ministers' wives.

"I'm grateful and humbled that God would call me to this task," Litton said. "And thankful that NAMB would extend to me this opportunity. I definitely have a passion for pouring into ministers' wives and seeing them step into their calling with passion, freedom and purpose."

"Ultimately this role is about advancing the gospel," Litton said. "It's about helping ministers and their families be effective in their ministry."

Litton, wife of Ed Litton, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland, said she looks forward to the challenge of helping NAMB minister to and get resources into the hands of ministers' wives on a national level in the areas of encouragement,



LITTON



ALBRIGHT



MILLICAN

directors of missions across North America.

He is coming to NAMB following a five-year role as state director of missions and missions mobilization team leader for the Baptist Convention of New Mexico.

The Alabama native previously served

as associate executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention; associate director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association and a minister of education and evangelism in several Anniston churches; associate pastor of evangelism and missions at North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville; and in several other ministry positions.

► Micah Millican is joining NAMB's staff as director of church planter relations after serving as pastor for middle school, high school and college students at Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster.

In his new position, Millican will be NAMB's "pastor" to its church planters — "investing in them, resourcing them and helping them develop a network among each other," said NAMB President Kevin Ezell. (BP)

leadership and crisis care as well as the areas of education and spiritual formation.

Litton served as director of women's ministries for four years at Cross Church at Pinnacle Hills, Rogers, Ark., during which time she traveled extensively, speaking to women, teaching and encouraging pastors' wives and training leaders.

Litton was married to Rick Ferguson, former pastor of Riverside Baptist Church, Denver, until his death in 2002.

In 2009, she married Ed Litton, who lost his spouse in an automobile accident in 2007.

► Stan Albright was recently named national director for associations. In his new position, Albright is NAMB's principal interface, connecting and coordinating the mission board with state directors of missions and associational

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 26

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

RISE ABOVE THE TIDE Jeremiah 15:10-21

During Judah's last days as a nation invaders had already taken the most promising young men and carried them away for reprogramming. One member of the royal family, Zedekiah, had replaced another as king, since he was more compliant to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia.

Jeremiah's prophecies were rejected, his writings were confiscated and destroyed and his patriotism was called into question. Few wanted to listen to him, though God had called him to the task. In the early verses of Jeremiah 15, God told the prophet that even if Moses or Samuel were bringing this news to the people, they would reject it.

Readers, the gospel's message is as unpopular as always. Christ's death and resurrection, a call to true repentance and transformational faith, absolute surrender and accountable discipleship are ancient history or foreign concepts to many in churches today. People are looking for an economic Messiah. They want to hear how he provides them a job without layoffs and a home without natural disasters and that good times are just around the corner. The temptation is to soften the brash message of judgment on the nation and tell them what their itching ears want to hear.

God Cares (10-14)

The stress of announcing doom and destruction brought Jeremiah to the point of apologizing to his mother for bearing him. Confessions of his feelings reveal a man who faced rejection and isolation from his countrymen. He mentioned that he did not engage in financial dealings, yet his unpopularity seemed comparable to a loan shark.

Believers today know the reality of isolation. Discouragement comes with the territory. Why else would Joshua be challenged several times to be strong and courageous? Why would Paul need to encourage Timothy in both epistles? God knows the weight of your calling and He cares for you.

God Knows (15-18)

In verse 15, verbs are most significant in

understanding his request. To "know" is to be intimately acquainted. Jeremiah asked God to remember, take note and avenge him. Even as he prayed about his circumstances, he recognized that only God avenges justly. Verse 16 focuses upon the word of God and the name of the Lord God of Hosts, who reveals truth and reigns over heaven and earth. The next verse indicates Jeremiah's frustration with God. After all, he did what God required, yet he was rejected because of the message God gave him. He then wondered aloud if God was really there or simply a mirage in the desert that looked like an oasis.

God knows our circumstances, frustrations and doubts. Young people who grow up isolated from their peers often wonder about the reality of God or what His motive is to allow suffering in their lives. Rather than scolding them, God prefers their honest evaluation. God is not threatened by our wonderings, doubts and frustrations. God knows us as believers, and as we see Him for who He is, we will have intimate fellowship with Him.

God Strengthens (19-21)

In this final passage, God answered the priest's words of doubt. When Jeremiah returned to fellowship, God would restore him. Once he stopped speaking meaningless words, he would be welcome to stand in God's presence again. No matter what accusations arose or threats were made against Jeremiah, God would strengthen and protect him. Then God's word would be proclaimed without hindrance. Yahweh was both his Deliverer and his Redeemer.

God calls us to come to Him on His terms, not ours. Without repentance, there is no restoration. God required Jeremiah to stop talking foolishly before fellowship with Him could be restored. Only after doubting Thomas repented, crying out "my Lord and my God," was he restored to fellowship with Jesus. Once we verbalize our doubts or frustrations, we need to return to God, taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ. If we want to experience true fellowship with God, then we must rise above the tide of doubt and discouragement.

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

WHY BE GENEROUS?

Luke 19:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:3-4; 1 John 3:16-18

This is the last lesson I will write from Israel. As I sit on the front terrace of the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem, I cannot help but think of the generosity that our group has received from Jews, Christians and Muslims alike in this country. Indeed we get it so constantly that we have come to expect it, which means that the freshness of the surprise has worn a bit. It's nice to see the delight register with new students and volunteers. We accept every generous act from anyone as a gift from God. In this week's passages, we see a common thread: We should be generous so that we become more like God.

Grace Compels Generosity (Luke 19:1-10)

Two things stand out in the story of Zacchaeus. The first is that it is Jesus' enthusiastic followers who block Him from Zacchaeus' view. This can serve as a powerful metaphor for how our actions (say a lack of generosity) can make it more difficult for nonbelievers to "see" Jesus. If Jesus' followers lack generosity, then how will other people come to understand God's generous grace?

I encountered this idea one morning at the 6:30 Latin Mass at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. I, two other professors and some students worshiped with a group made up largely of Catholics, but with a few Baptists like me thrown in. The celebrant pronounced Christ's peace upon us and we responded in kind, we confessed our sins together, we were offered and received the Lord's Supper and we were dismissed with a blessing. We then had to vacate the premises for the Greek Orthodox Mass. The space in front of the sepulcher that had just welcomed us was now blocked off by metal barriers, and none of us was allowed to partake in the Greek service. Our group felt decidedly unwelcome by this turn of events, so we left for other open parts of the church.

The second part of Zacchaeus' story that stands out is his response to Jesus. Zacchaeus

seems to say, "You wish to eat with me?" (Yes willingness to break bread together is a universal sign of acceptance and generosity.) He immediately responded with a generous act of his own. He not only felt gratitude toward Jesus (an intensely personal reaction) but, like a good Jew, also acted out that gratitude by giving generously (half of what he owned) to the poor and offering four times what he owed to anyone he had cheated. Contrary to the stereotype of the toll collector, Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' generosity by becoming generous himself.

Love Requires Generosity (1 John 3:16-18)

Even the biblical authors who are the most famous for emphasizing faith (Paul, John and the author of 1 John, to name three) never abandoned the centrality of actions, probably because Jesus talked about both (see Matthew 21:21-22; 25:31-46). The author of 1 John talked about practicing righteousness (2:29), and here he did some clarifying: We love when we lay down our lives through generous acts of giving to brothers and sisters in need. How do we know that this is love? Because Jesus showed what love is by laying down His life (by both ministering and dying).

Ministry Is Fueled by Generosity (2 Cor. 8:3-4)

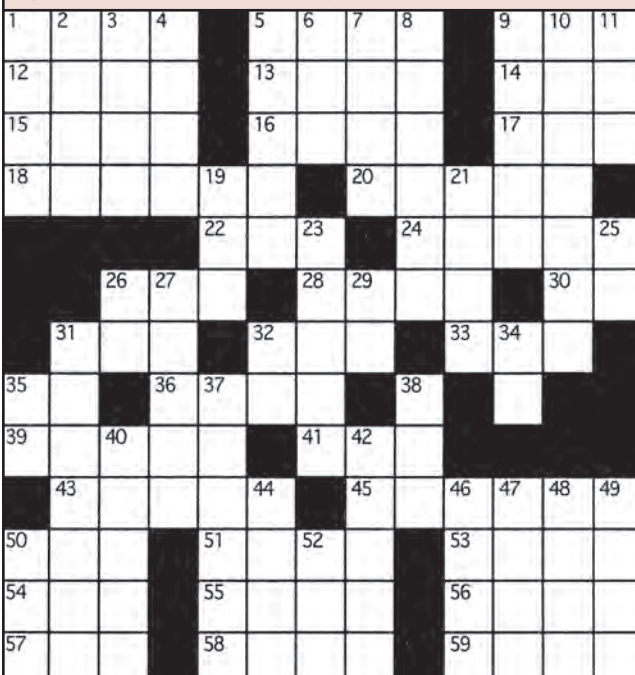
Notice in verse 1 how Paul called the Macedonian churches' acts of generosity "grace" that God had given to them. When they supported the "ministry of the saints," the churches were enacting God's own generosity.

Have you seen the tornado relief happening in our state? Who is doing the bulk of it? Neither the National Guard nor government agencies but people from Alabama and all over our country who simply responded to God's prompting to give graciously.

This is how it has always worked. The ministers and directors of missions have never been able to do all the work themselves, nor can they support it monetarily. They have always required believers to enact God's grace and say, "We will give," "We will come" and "We will pray."

Christian Crossword

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Across

- "The ___ above the liver, with the kidneys." (stomach part mentioned in Lev. 3:15 for an offering)
- Gasp.
- Mordecai the ___.
- A king of Israel. (1 Kings 16)
- West African tribe.
- Japanese apricot.
- Disfigure.
- "We spend our years as a ___ that is told." (Ps. 90:9)
- Uproar.
- Make possible.
- Aka Araunah the Jebusite.
- "Do not ___ because ye know not the Scriptures." (Mark 12:24)
- Makes less difficult.
- Summer drink.
- Actor Robert.
- Ancient Thebes. (Jer. 46)
- Mid. East. country.
- ___ Grande.
- Witty remark.
- I ___. (God)

- "Shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ___." (2 Tim. 4:3)
- Judah's daughter-in-law. (Gen. 38)
- Compass dir.
- Hosea's wife.
- Area of Judea that included Beersheba.
- "All they are brass, and ___, and iron." (Ezek. 22:18)
- Appear indistinctly.
- Kaiser ___.
- Chemical suffix.
- "God ___ respecter of persons." (Acts 10:34)
- Duke ___. (Gen. 46)
- Cruise the ___. (pastime for the '90s)
- "Justified in the Spirit, ___ of angels." (1 Tim. 3:16)
- ___ room.

Down

- "___ unto me." (Matt. 11:28)
- "Will ___ rob God?" (Mal. 3:8)

- Auk genus.
- Arm, for example.
- Cephas.
- Alias. (abbr.)
- ___ contendere.
- Layered.
- ___ tree.
- "Thou buildest thine ___ place in the head of every way." (Ezek. 16:31)
- Benign skin tumor.
- Actress Grant.
- Son of Caleb. (1 Chron. 4)
- "I will ___ me up a faithful priest." (1 Sam. 2:35)
- Egyptian king. (2 Kings 17)
- Preposition.
- "Your old men shall ___." (Acts 2:17)
- Biblical interjection.
- "The people ___ a vain thing." (Ps. 2:1)
- B & O, e.g.
- ___ a roll.
- Preposition.
- Belonging to the son of Gad. (Num. 26)
- "Take up thy ___, and go unto thine house." (Matt. 9:6)

- French impressionist.
- "___, called Peter." (Matt. 4:18)
- ___ of Sharon. (Song of Sol. 2)
- "The breastplate of judgment the ___." (Ex. 28:30)
- Less is ___. (fashion dictum)
- Zeal.
- "That thine ___ may be in secret." (Matt. 6:4)
- Mus. part.
- Chemical. (suffix)



'What gets rewarded gets repeated'

To turn around SBC must change the way it keeps score, Warren says

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The more than 100,000 names on the roll of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif., could allow famed pastor, conference speaker and author Rick Warren to start and lead his own denomination. He could even be a mayor, he says jokingly.

While he's not interested in doing either, he is interested in sharing some of his latest ideas with Southern Baptists, Warren said during a rare appearance at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting and related meetings June 13-15 in Phoenix. He is also interested in completing the fourth decade of major goals for Saddleback before he retires as pastor in 2020.

The new ideas and current goals focus on church planting and reaching the world as Jesus did, helping church members live healthier lifestyles and improving biblical literacy among believers.

"I think our convention is in a huge transition right now. And I don't think anyone knows where it is going," Warren said during a June 14 news conference at the Phoenix Convention Center. "If the SBC is to have a turnaround, we are going to have to change the way we keep score," he said. "Whatever gets rewarded gets repeated. What has been rewarded is size of church."

Pastors of large churches are given the positions and the accolades, while pastors of small churches

are "assumed falsely" to not be as good of a preacher or pastor, Warren said. But the No. 1 characteristic for growing a church is location, not the pastor, he noted. "Some guys just get lucky ... like me."

'All kinds of churches'

"There is no correlation between the size and strength of a church," Warren said. "Bigger isn't better. Smaller isn't better. Better is better."

"It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people."

While large cities need a megachurch because "you need a big rock in a big pond," not every church should be a megachurch, he explained. In fact, "the vast majority of churches are never going to be megachurches."

Along with changing the mindset that a church's size matters, Warren said a church-planting emphasis is vital to continue growing the denomination. And no church is too small, he said, noting Saddleback began planting churches its first year of existence with less than 100 members.

"Every church typically grows 15 years, then plateaus and starts on a decline, either slow or rapid ... and the only way to stop the decline is to start a new bell curve at the top of the curve," Warren said. And the only way to start a new bell curve in church life is to reach a new generation, he noted.

And if anyone knows about creating a new bell curve and reaching

a new generation, then it's Warren.

When he moved from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, to Lake Forest in 1980 to plant Saddleback, Warren made a 40-year commitment to the church during the first service. He also began leading the church to plant more churches on day one.

Warren has kept the church from declining by initiating a major shift of ministry focus each decade.

In the 1980s, the church focused on the local area. In the 1990s, it focused on North America. In the 2000s, Warren's five-point P.E.A.C.E. Plan to reach people at all points of life went global and Saddleback missions teams made it to all 195 of the world's recognized nations.

During this decade, Warren wants to reach all 3,800 unengaged people groups in the world. "Unengaged" is a missiological term meaning the people group has no established church. Unreached means that less than 2 percent of a people group is Christian. There are 6,000 unreached people groups.

"We've known about [these people groups] since 1974, but they are still there this many years later. This is nonsense," Warren said. "If we start [reaching them], then maybe we can change the way people keep score. It's OK to celebrate fruit on other people's trees."

"The P.E.A.C.E. Plan is not an organization; it's just an idea," he said. "It's not enough to just share the gospel; we must do the five things Jesus did:

- ▶ Plant churches
- ▶ Equip servant leaders
- ▶ Assist the poor
- ▶ Care for the sick
- ▶ Educate the next generation



BP photo

EXPERIENCED CHURCH PLANTER — Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, Calif., challenges pastors attending the 2011 SBC Pastors Conference to plant churches this year.

"We are not in competition with the International Mission Board (IMB) or the North American (Mission) Board (NAMB)," Warren said, noting IMB's challenge to "embrace" all 3,800 unengaged people groups over the next year and NAMB's shift to a major church-planting focus. "We are 100 percent behind what they are doing."

But Warren said he would "love to share" with IMB and NAMB officials "if they are interested" because "we've learned a thousand ways that don't work but also 50 or 60 things that do work."

Noting he has baptized 22,000 believers at Saddleback, Warren said he makes sure they are given the opportunity to mature as Christians once they join the church. His strategy is to move them as Jesus did "from come and see to come and die" through a series of classes such as what he did with Purpose Driven Life, which later became the best-selling book (besides the Bible) of all time.

From there, they are sent out to reach others, Warren said, noting 14,896 members have gone overseas on some type of missions experience since 1980. And when they go, they go quietly, allowing the local church to get the credit for what is done.

"The Great Commission is a training mission — teach them to do; don't do it for them," Warren added.

As far as promoting healthier lifestyles for his members, Warren said the idea started out with his own conviction to lose 90 pounds when he realized he was not being a good model for his congregation.

"One billion people are dying of malnutrition, but there are also 1 billion people dying of obesity," Warren said. "We are dying because of lifestyle issues. We are killing ourselves."

So Warren created The Daniel Plan (www.saddleback.com/thedanielplan); recruited three well-known doctors in the area of brain, heart

and metabolism; and invited church members to join him.

"We had 12,000 people sign up," he said. "It became an evangelistic outreach."

Since January, Warren has lost 37 pounds and the church collectively has lost more than 200,000 pounds.

40 Days in the Word

Coming in January 2012 is a small-group curriculum focused on biblical literacy — 40 Days in the Word. "We do a spiritual growth study every year. We just don't always release it," Warren said. "We do 40 days because it takes six weeks to create a habit."

He's releasing this study, however, because "I'm concerned about the lack of Bible literacy and so many people don't know how to study."

Then, later in 2012, Saddleback will hold a pastors conference to introduce pastors to a new Church Planting Academy Retreat Center coming to the church. Its purpose will be to train and equip church planters, worship leaders and ministry executives in starting healthy and reproductive churches.

NAMB President Kevin Ezell said this new center will be another resource available to Southern Baptists as NAMB develops its new focus on church planting.

"When we do the Send (North America) strategy, we want to use every resource we can to plant Southern Baptist churches," he said. "We don't see this as a competition. We're about helping churches plant churches ... and someone like Rick will help mobilize other pastors."

And while Saddleback has found a renewed role in Southern Baptist life, Warren is less than 10 years away from retiring as pastor.

"In 2020, I'm turning the reins of Saddleback over to someone else," he said. "It's not because I don't have the energy but because the church needs a younger leader." ■

"There is no correlation between the size and strength of a church."

Pastor Rick Warren
Saddleback Church



Someone You Should Know

By Elaine Price
Correspondent, TAB

FAVORITE VERSE: Proverbs 3:5

FAVORITE HYMN: "He Lives"

HOBBIES: Taking care of plants and enjoying great-grandchildren

MARGE WRIGHT

First Baptist Church, Oxford
Calhoun Baptist Association

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Phil for 65 years; three children, Kathy, Phil and Wendy; six grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren with another due in July

Literally hundreds of children's lives have been touched by the ministry of Marge Wright. The 85-year-old has been teaching grades 1-3 in Sunday School for 58 years.

Q: What was your childhood like?

A: I grew up with a very special family. I lived with my mother and father. I also had one brother. As long as I can remember, we were always in church.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: I came to know the Lord by attending Sunday School and church. My relationship with Him grew from early childhood and continues to grow today.

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

A: I have worked in GAs (Girls in Action) and taught children's Sunday School for 58 years.

Q: Why have you continued your involvement?

A: I love children and feel like this is what God has planned for me to do with my life.

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

A: As long as I am able, I plan to keep on teaching children.

Q: What does the Christian life mean to you?

A: God has cared for me and my family for all these years. ■

'Greedy for souls' in India

Pastors, Christian workers encourage all to share their faith

Shiny, yellow Ambassador cabs wait in a queue and dirt-stained, homeless men sleep on benches at the airport in Kolkata.

The odor of toilets permeates the baggage claim area.

Walk into the city formerly known as Calcutta, and marvel at how the British colonial architecture blurs the Hindu temples into the background.

The former capital of British India, Kolkata offers both traditional chai (tea), sold on the narrow street corners in disposable cups made of unglazed clay, and Subway sandwiches, consumed inside a new glass-and-steel-structured mall.

Next to tall buildings that cost millions of dollars to build, families bathe on the street and hang their clothes on a railing to dry.

Most people in Kolkata's slums live on 80 cents a day, while billionaires live in mansions with hosts of servants.

Welcome to Kolkata — a city of drastic contrasts.

No one who comes here will leave unaffected. International worker Lonnie Tepper points out the endless needs — economic, social, infrastructure and ecological — of this seemingly endless city of 14.3 million people.

The most important struggle, however, is for the souls of the people of Kolkata. "The greatest need of the city is for the church to boldly share about Jesus in their daily lives," Tepper said.

Christianity is not new to Kolkata. For more than 200 years, the roots of faith have struggled to penetrate hard spiritual soil. William Carey, the father of modern missions, came to West Bengal in 1793. It was 10 years before Carey finally baptized his first convert.

Not much has changed since Carey's time. The process of spreading the gospel is still slow. Today international workers estimate Kolkata has more than 100



BP photo

PRAYER — Kolkata pastors and international workers want ordinary people within their city to catch a vision for taking the gospel to their neighbors, like the woman seen here.

churches, with perhaps 5,000 people attending them. That means less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the people of Kolkata are believers.

Kolkata pastors Upendra Basant, Ohit Sanyal, Vaskar Datta and Dural Iyers are not content with these numbers.

Basant prays against strongholds and for the church to multiply in the city, where the path to church planting has been slower than in the villages.

Sanyal explains that there seems to be a spirit of mediocrity in the churches. The pastor said he sees church members sitting back and thinking, "Let somebody else do it," instead of responding with "Lord, here am I, send me."

"Our people in Kolkata need to get greedy for souls," Sanyal stresses.

Iyers agrees wholeheartedly: "Only God's love can change the hearts of the people. It is the message of God's love that brings the revolution."

These pastors say the timing has

never been better for a fresh vision of discipleship. Rand Carruth, another international worker in Kolkata, said the goal of church planting in the city is to grow ownership among Bengali believers, which will lead to churches of every tribe and tongue in West Bengal.

"If we can't help bring the idea of the Christian faith being owned by every Kolkata believer," Carruth said, "then the story stays the same."

Church planting is about relationships and reaching beyond the drastic contrasts in this mega-city, Carruth explains. If Christians choose to work together to see a common goal, then through the church the many needs of Kolkata's sick and dying, impoverished and destitute, abused and enslaved can be met.

Carruth's prayer is to see churches started through ordinary people who are working regular jobs — not just pastors. Many believers see the need for this change and are stepping

away from a "traditional church" mind-set.

In one year, Sanyal has seen 12 house churches formed in the city — house churches focused on discipleship and growing the body of Christ in Kolkata.

'God is moving'

"God is really moving. People are actually shifting the boundaries of the church out, just like Isaiah chapter 54 says to enlarge your tent and take away the curtains that people may see what is happening in the church," Sanyal said. "We need to take church to the street."

Sanyal teaches Kolkata Christians they have the power to minister to the world and encourages them to step outside the walls of the church and sit beside sinners in the streets. His friends are not all seminary-trained preachers. They represent all of the contrasts in his city — farmers, electricians, politicians, vegetable vendors, lawyers, snake catchers and rickshaw men.

"We want to tell people that God has called them to preach," Sanyal said. "[We want them] to think, 'I've got the Word, the Scriptures, the training. I am the man. I should do it.'"

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons.

(BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Is it OK to disagree on abortion, homosexuality?

WASHINGTON — Significant majorities of Americans say it is possible to disagree with their religion's teachings on abortion and homosexuality and still remain in good standing with their faith.

The findings, released June 9 in a detailed survey by Public Religion Research Institute, held true for major religious groups, including Roman Catholics and white evangelical Protestants.

The findings reflect the complicated tasks faced by Roman Catholic bishops to discipline politicians who stray from church teaching, or evangelical groups that try to toe a traditional line as cultural values shift around them.

Overall 72 percent of Americans say it's permissible to disagree with church teaching on abortion, and 63 percent say the same for homosexuality.

Roman Catholics closely mirror the general population's position on abortion and church teaching, but are more progressive than the general population on the issue of homosexuality and church teaching. Two-thirds of evangelicals (67 percent) said they could differ with church teaching on abortion, and slightly less than a majority (47 percent) said the same about homosexuality.

Researchers found a link between biblical interpretation and opposition to abortion: almost six in 10 Americans who say the Bible is the literal Word of God believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. More than 80 percent of people who don't see the Bible as the Word of God but rather a book written by men think abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances.

The report also found a religious divide on the sinfulness of having an abortion, with more than 60 percent of white evangelicals, black Protestants and Latino Roman Catholics seeing it as sinful.

White Roman Catholics, meanwhile, were evenly divided (46 percent each), and white mainline Protestants were the sole major religious group where a majority (55 percent) did not believe it is sinful.

The overall survey, based on telephone interviews with 3,000 people between April 22 and May 8, had a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Nine in 10 Americans say they believe in God

WASHINGTON — A new Gallup poll finds 92 percent of Americans say they believe in God, a figure that has dropped by only a few points since Gallup first asked the question in the 1940s.

Gallup pollster Frank Newport offered some background on those numbers: Americans' self-reported belief in God has been relatively constant over the last 6 and a half decades; the percentage of Americans who respond that they believe in God now stands within six points of the all-time high in the 1950s and 1960s.

Previous Gallup surveys have shown that when respondents are given the ability to express doubts about their belief, the percentage of Americans who report a certain belief in God drops to 70 to 80 percent. Additionally about 12 percent of Americans say they believe in a universal spirit or higher power instead of "God" when given that option.

Still the May 2011 poll reveals that when given only the choice between believing and not believing in God, more than 9 in 10 Americans say they do believe.

The age group least likely to claim belief in God is 18–29-year-olds, at 84 percent, compared to 94 percent of older Americans. In addition, 98 percent of Republicans claim belief, compared to 90 percent of Democrats and 89 percent of independents.

42 percent of young people are 'pro-life'

ARLINGTON, Va. — The 18- to 34-year-old generation leads all age groups in the percentage (53) that believes abortion is morally wrong, according to a new Gallup poll. And just 31 percent of that age group says abortion should be legal under any circumstance. The annual Gallup poll on abortion, released May 23, found that 42 percent of young people identify as "pro-life," but a closer look at the numbers show that "pro-choice" doesn't mean support for abortion at all times and for any reason.

"More and more young people want abortion to be illegal," said Kristan Hawkins, executive director of Students for Life of America.

Jonathan Rogers, field coordinator for National Right to Life, said the challenge is to get young adults to take their pro-life views with them to the polls.

"In 2008, what young voters marked on their ballots did not line up with their instincts," he said. "One of the most pro-life generations ever voted for one of the most pro-abortion candidates ever." ■

"[We want them] to think, 'I've got the Word, the Scriptures, the training. I am the man. I should do it.'"

**Ohit Sanyal
Kolkata pastor**