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Samford event shares natural, biblical explanation for star

The star of Bethlehem is a topic that evokes interest, curiosity and an element of mystery among many Christians, particularly during the Christmas season. For those who seek to gain more understanding about this special star spoken of in God's Word, Samford University is hosting "The Star of Bethlehem" event Dec. 12, 13, 15 and 16 at its Boyd Christenberry Planetarium. Each night's presentation begins at 7 p.m.

According to George Atchley, the planetarium's director and host of the hourlong multimedia presentation, a program about the star was presented for many years by planetariums throughout the United States. But sometime in the 1970s, many planetariums switched to a more generic Christmas presentation, he said.

"When I first started working here (at Samford), I decided we needed to have our own show," Atchley explained. So he constructed a version based on his own research, and the resulting presentation is what attendees will view at the planetarium.

At "The Star of Bethlehem" event, Atchley will use the planetarium's star projector to reproduce the night sky.

The planetarium's domed ceiling is useful for showing the motion of the sky and its patterns.

The presentation's information will be presented with visual accompaniments such as images, special animations and a virtual journey to Jerusalem and Persia.

If you are searching for a natural explanation of what the star of Bethlehem was, then Atchley will cover

various sources he feels are valid for this idea.

He also will expound on the role of the Magi cited in the Bible, where these men came from and how they grew knowledgeable of the star.

The presentation will point to the Bible and why it is significant in understanding what the star really was. "There are clues in the Scriptures," Atchley said, referring to Matthew 2.

He added that he hopes the presentation will spark a "renewed sense of the accuracy of Scripture."

While the show is suitable for all ages, the material may be more appreciated by ages 8 and up.

Atchley said he will make an effort to offer special arrangements for groups of 10 or more. Contact him at geatchle@samford.edu or 205-726-4139. (TAB)



Photos courtesy of Boyd Christenberry Planetarium

SPECIAL STAR — "The Star of Bethlehem" will be presented at Samford University's Boyd Christenberry Planetarium on Dec. 12, 13, 15 and 16 at 7 p.m. The presentation will include natural and biblical explanations of the special star.

COMMENT

IMB — Bullish in Bearish Times

During the same week Alabama Baptists lowered their 2012 Cooperative Program (CP) budget goal to 2006–2007 levels, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) adopted a record budget of \$324.3 million.

Alabama Baptists' budget attempts to balance spending plans with receipts based on actual experience of the past three years. Some observers use investment terminology to call the budget a "bearish" plan that reflects decline. The IMB budget reflects hopes and prayers and calls for more than a 10 percent increase in giving for the coming year. Using the same analogy, the IMB is "bullish" about its financial future because it is going up.

The IMB's financial experience is similar to Alabama Baptists' over the last three years. Drops in income caused some international service opportunities to be eliminated, a reduction in the number of international representatives appointed and a corresponding drop in expenditures. In 2008, the IMB spent about \$319 million in its worldwide program. In 2009, the figure slid to \$306.8 million. By 2010, expenditures dropped to \$294.2 million, according to IMB sources.

Much of the reason for the IMB's bullish attitude about its financial future is based on expectations for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (LMCO) now being promoted in cooperating churches across the nation. This year's national goal is \$175 million. If that goal is reached, then the IMB will have every reason to be bullish because the annual offering provides about 57 percent of all IMB funds.

The CP, Southern Baptists' preferred method of supporting all missions and ministry causes, provides about 30 percent of the IMB's annual budget. Offerings for world hunger and disaster relief make up about 2 percent. The remaining 11 percent comes from investments, on-field income and other miscellaneous sources.

But it is the LMCO on which the IMB stakes most of its hopes and prayers. Last year, that offering total fell a little more than \$3 million — from \$148.9 million in 2009 to \$145.6 million in 2010. IMB officials are praying the 2011 offering will follow the pattern of the 2009 offering, which jumped almost \$8 million despite the sagging economy — up from \$141 million in 2008.

Still it will take a 20 percent increase in giving to the 2011 LMCO for the IMB to reach its goal. That borders on the miraculous.

Alabama Baptist giving to the LMCO has followed a different path. In 2008, Alabama Baptists gave \$11,345,886 to the LMCO. That was down from the nearly \$12 million given in 2007. In



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

2009, giving increased slightly to \$11,352,272. Then in 2010, Alabama Baptist giving decreased to \$10,964,780.

IMB officials are also bullish on CP giving. When the 2010–11 SBC budget year closed Sept. 30, CP giving had recorded a slight upturn of 0.06 percent, or \$115,492.29. But any increase is to be celebrated since CP giving had declined each year since 2007.

Alabama Baptist giving

Furthermore the IMB will receive 51 percent of the 2011–12 SBC receipts through the CP rather than the 50 percent of past years. One percent may not sound like much, but it works out to be close to \$2 million when CP receipts are nearly \$192 million as in the past year.

Again the Alabama Baptist giving pattern is a little different. Since 2007, when Alabama Baptist CP giving was almost \$45 million, CP giving has declined annually. In 2008, it was down marginally to almost \$44.8 million. Giving in 2009 fell to \$43,640,579. In 2010, giving fell by about another \$1.9 million, down to \$41,727,510.

That is a 7 percent decline in three years.

State leaders reduced the Alabama Baptist CP goal to \$43 million for 2011, but giving does not indicate that goal will be reached. At the end of October, contributions were below the base budget by almost \$2.4 million and below last year's receipts by \$714,704.

Currently CP giving is on track to reach the giving level of 2003 and 2004 — between \$40 million and \$41 million. Again the SBC is up marginally at present while Alabama continues on a downward trend.

Yet Alabama remains the top CP giving state convention. Figures supplied by the SBC Executive Committee show that slightly more than one out of every 10 dollars given to SBC missions and ministries for the past year came from Alabama Baptists. For October 2011, that trend continued. Total CP receipts received by the SBC were \$14.1 million. Alabama Baptists gave \$1,555,592.67 of

that amount, or slightly more than 10 percent of the total. The Alabama Baptist State Convention continues to lead the SBC in CP giving, and Alabama's LMCO total, as well as the totals for other SBC offerings, is near the top.

It is this kind of faithfulness in difficult times that allows the IMB to be bullish about the LMCO and total IMB budget even in bearish times.

We hope the IMB is correct in its bullish outlook. Certainly there is much to be done around the world to help make the love of God in Jesus Christ known to all people everywhere. The SBC is not the only Baptist group working in missions and evangelism, to be sure. But the SBC is the largest, and "to whom much is given, much is required." The SBC's membership of 16 million means it has a major responsibility in the United States and around the world.

Altogether there are about 70 million Baptists outside the United States and more than 220 Baptist conventions, unions and associations. SBC representatives work with slightly more than 3 million of these. That means SBC representatives have opportunity to work with and resource a large number of national Baptist believers in most every nation as, together, Southern Baptists labor to make the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ known to every tribe and people of every tongue.

Alabama Baptists have opportunity to be a part of that worldwide effort by supporting international missions with our money, prayers and participation in this season of the year.

Whether one's financial condition is bullish or bearish, all Baptists are united in the bullish enterprise of sharing the gospel.

Give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. 

WEEK OF PRAYER
for International Missions and
International Missions Study
Dec. 4–11

HIS HEART HIS HANDS HIS VOICE



**LOTTIE MOON
CHRISTMAS OFFERING**
National Goal: \$175 million
Alabama's Goal: \$11.5 million



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

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Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, Correspondent, TAB

Mernette Bayne

First Baptist Church, Headland
Judson Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "It Is Well With My Soul"

HOBBIES: Working in the yard, gardening and daily involvement at the local senior center

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 54 years of marriage to Odell; three children; and 11 great-grandchildren



BAYNE

Mernette Bayne, 82, recently retired after 54 years of dedicated work with the First, Headland, nursery program. Bayne was also director of the church's Cradle Roll ministry

for babies and is the longest-serving member of the church choir and continues to sing each Sunday.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: When I was 14 years old, I felt empty and that there was something I needed that I didn't have. I had a schoolmate [who] witnessed to me, and I gave my heart to the Lord.

Q: What led you to serve in the church nursery?

A: I've always loved babies. Ever since I can remember, I would always tend to the little ones and take care of [them]. I just love doing that. I loved my own babies as much as you can love somebody. I ... just felt called into that ministry because of my love for the little ones.

Q: What did your ministry demand?

A: Commitment. ... Be there under all circumstances if you can. I tried my best to always be there.

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

A: I am on the list if they need me; they can call for me if I need to go back there.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: He's everything to me and without Him, I am nothing. The older I get, the more I trust Him and the more I depend on Him. ... He's brought me through some difficult times in my life, and so I trust Him to continue to care for me.



BP photo

VARIOUS COMMUNITIES — Sikhs gather to worship and listen to readings from their holy scriptures in London's Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, which also is a center of Sikh community life where family events take place.

Pockets of unreached peoples

Convergence of cultures, religions makes London a missions field

Descend into the extensive London underground transport system and only station names on tiled walls tell what lies above ground.

Signs for "Victoria" and "Waterloo" signal bustling railway stations above. Climb the steps from the Oxford and Piccadilly Circus underground stations to reach premier shopping districts. The Green Park station exit leads to a walk through tree-lined park paths to the ornate gates of Buckingham Palace.

Passengers squeezing onto the crowded trains also hint at what lies above; they vary according to the neighborhoods and boroughs that the trains speed through.

Well-tailored businessmen reading the *Financial Times* appear in lines snaking through the business district or near Canary Wharf. Ride the District line to the Embankment stop and tourists fill the car, clutching maps and guidebooks, ready for their first glimpses of Big Ben. Head toward East London and the passenger balance shifts to Muslim women wearing hijabs and men, many bearded, wearing skull caps. Ride the underground tracks westward on the Central line and South Asians may predominate as the line heads toward "Little India."

Pockets of unreached peoples in urban environments like London bring unique challenges to missionaries as they look for ways to build relationships and effectively share the gospel. London, Europe's largest urban zone, demonstrates the reality that more than 50 percent of the world's population now live in urban centers like this centuries-old city. The London-based National Centre for Languages estimates that schoolchildren in London speak more than 200 languages.

For Tony Collins, a Southern Baptist representative, moving to London became a strategic decision when he and his wife Christine discovered they could not return to Central Asia. They had served there for

six years, learning the language and living among the people to whom God had called them to share the good news. But medical issues with one of their children forced them to move.

Looking for the best fit

Tony and Christine prayed about five different cities that had significant populations of their people group. They visited the strongest contenders, which included Moscow, Athens and London.

London best fit what they were looking for. Here they can connect with their people group by working in the communities where Central Asians live, by visiting local holding facilities for Central Asian refugees and by providing language help to immigrants

learning to operate in an English-speaking environment.

With London's urban zone of nearly 12 million, it's this convergence of cultures, peoples and religions from all over the world that makes London the missions field it is today.

"What I've learned is, if you get to know five Central Asians, and you really get to know them well and their families, you don't really need to [seek out] more," Tony said. Because Central Asians are such relational people, once there is a foundation of trust and understanding in a relationship, the connections go deep, he explained.

"Then you get connected with all their relatives, all their friends. It really travels fast." (BP)



BP photo

PROTEST — Arab youth call for Shariah law in Britain during a protest in front of 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's residence. As the headquarters of the British government, Downing Street is a frequent venue for protests in London.

Survey shows 40 percent of Christian pastors struggle with pornography

For years, Bernie Anderson carried a shameful secret — one he feared would destroy his marriage, his career, his standing in the community, even his spiritual identity.

He was addicted to pornography.

Like many others facing a similar struggle, the pastor, now at Wasatch Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church in Salt Lake City, wrestled with his problem alone, praying it would somehow go away.

It didn't. Never does, experts say.

The human costs of pornography have grown exponentially since the days of tattered *Playboys* tucked away in junior high locker rooms. In this digital age, porn peddlers belong to a multibillion-dollar industry, spreading sexual images for adults and adolescents to download onto their phones or to watch on big-screen TVs. Smut finds viewers in every faith, ethnicity, age, gender, profession and economic status.

According to a *Christianity Today* survey, nearly 40 percent of Christian pastors are struggling with pornography. They seem especially vulnerable, due to their time alone, their legitimate use of computers and their fear of getting help because of the public nature of their jobs. It is "one of the fastest growing problems in the lives of North American pastors today," according to pastorswives.org. "It has become such a common problem, that groups have formed which only exist to help ministers out of the entangled lives they find themselves living."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) has created a system for helping people overcome it. Five years ago, the LDS Church tapped Mormon therapist Michael Gardner to head its 12-step pornography addiction program. He says the addiction afflicts 3 to 5 percent of Latter-day Saints (about the same rate as the rest of the country).

"I've seen people lose everything," he said, "their job, their marriage, their religion."

Anderson knows those dangers all too well. One day, he limped through the house, hobbled with back pain that he attributed to the stress of managing a large Dallas church and a growing family.

Spiritual problem

But the problem wasn't physical, he writes in his 2007 book, "Breaking the Silence: A Pastor Goes Public About His Battle With Pornography." It was spiritual.

Anderson writes, "I had given in to my dark side and was headed down a path toward certain destruction."

He was not alone.

Resources

► Dr. Hal Threadcraft
(Birmingham) 205-478-2621

► Samaritan's Counseling
Center of Baptist Health System
(Birmingham) 205-967-3660

► Frazer Counseling Center
(Montgomery) 334-495-6333

► Dr. Patrick Carnes —
www.pinegrovetreatment.com/gentle-path.html

► Retreat Group —
<http://newlife.com/emb>

► www.xxxchurch.com

► www.settingcaptivesfree.com

► www.clergyrecovery.com

Source: TAB, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Pathways Christian Counseling

"Adolescents are very curious about their bodies and this thing called sex," said Jennifer Finlayson-Fife, an LDS psychotherapist in Chicago who specializes in couples counseling. "I know that masturbation and porn can be very toxic, but I would also say that flirting with these behaviors is a way for people to understand themselves as sexual beings, seeking to make sense of who they are and what sexuality is."

For most people, she said, "it's just curiosity that's important and legitimate."

Problems begin when the need becomes compulsive.

"My body seemed to have a mind of its own," Anderson writes.

During his years studying at the Adventist seminary, his addiction to online sex — "a virtual Disneyland of pornography" — took root.

Thereafter, being home alone or working in his pastor's study presented almost insurmountable temptations. Hotel rooms, with easy access to X-rated videos or free Internet streaming, were "a major trigger," where the sense of freedom and anonymity were "intoxicating."

For Anderson, there seemed no way out of the trap. And no peace while in it. Pornography addiction, experts say, is a symptom of deeper fractures. Part of the problem of pornography is that "it's easy satisfaction," Finlayson-Fife said. "It doesn't require vulnerability and openness to another person."

Those who get hooked, she said, "are those who don't have sexual self-confidence and don't have much comfort with intimacy."

Constant porn use also undermines marriages, Finlayson-Fife said. "Some people will watch porn, then have those images in their head while having sex with their spouse. That makes them completely disconnected. They are using their

spouse to have an experience that has nothing to do with them."

Gardner sees many dangers in pornography: It is not based in reality; it objectifies women; it distorts sexuality so that it doesn't match healthy relations; it erodes relationships; it destroys trust; and it undermines self-esteem.

"Pornography addiction thrives in secrecy," he said. "It produces depression and shame and guilt."

Anderson experienced all of that. It "eats you," he said, "from the inside out."

Anderson thought that marrying Christina, a gorgeous young student he met at the Dallas Seventh-day Adventist church where he served as youth pastor, would be the end of his porn problem. "What would be the need?" he asked himself.

But it wasn't that easy.

Barely a month after his wedding, he turned again to his drug of choice. It took a few years, but eventually Christina began to see the signs. She thought at first he might be having an affair. The fear and uncertainty chiseled away at her self-worth, her trust in her spouse, and, ultimately, her faith in God.

"It tore me down to my core. I felt like I am not good enough," she told *Message* magazine. "I felt betrayed. ... I questioned our relationship and my entire marriage up to that point. I felt inadequate. Why would my husband have to look at women in books or on a computer screen? I felt alone."

She nearly divorced him.

Confiding in someone

"I looked to God hoping that once and for all He would take this thing from me," Anderson writes. "In those moments God revealed to me something that he had quietly whispered to me all along: I needed to tell someone."

He chose to tell Mike, a longtime friend and fellow pastor, who responded: "Join the crowd."

One group, New Life Partners in Missouri, is for the wives and family of porn-addicted pastors.

"It wouldn't matter how beautiful, how supportive, how caring, how anything you were," the website says. Your husband's sexual addiction "is not about you and it's not about sex."

Like Anderson, scores of other porn addicts have found their way free through church-related programs. "I've seen people turn their lives around," Gardner said. "They can then live a life true to their religious values. If they are willing to work hard, they can certainly overcome the power of the addiction."

Anderson wants all addicts to know they can escape the cycle. Pornography is as powerful as cocaine, he said. "Just because people go through the waters of baptism doesn't mean they won't have to deal with it." (RNS)



Cullman's Southside Baptist celebrates 25 years

Purple, green, blue and yellow filled the sky in Cullman on Nov. 20 as Southside Baptist Church released 100 helium-filled balloons.

The West Cullman Baptist Association church was celebrating 25 years of existence with more than 120 people in attendance — nearly double the normal Sunday crowd.

Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), shared a message from Acts.

Nancy Beasley, a representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented Southside Baptist with a commemorative certificate.

As members shared what Southside means to them, a video played in the background featuring pictures of the church and its members through the years. The pictures ranged from the SBOM mobile chapel the church met in before the building was completed to Vacation Bible School to choir presentations.

Pastor Perry Knight said the day was "celebratory." He hopes for future growth at Southside and is confident he will see it because of the church's "sweet fellowship" and "a very present Spirit of the Lord." He also hopes to continue to see the church's children grow into adult leadership roles and be "faithful in their ministries."

Paulette Wilcutt, a Southside member for 24 years, served on the anniversary committee. "Everyone was in agreement and everyone seemed to enjoy it from the beginning to the end," she said. "A few people planned [the celebration], but there was something that everyone enjoyed and felt like they were a part of."

McCalla's Bellview marks 125 years, calls new pastor

Nothing but positive remarks came from the 187 people who attended the 125th anniversary celebration at Bellview Baptist Church, McCalla, according to anniversary committee member Judith Heatherly.

Heatherly said it was a "very unique" celebration.

Lonette Berg of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a commemorative plaque at the celebration Nov. 20. Billy Gray, interim director of missions for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, spoke a few words of encouragement to the church.

Hilda Turner, Bellview Baptist's historian, researched and compiled a historical timeline to share. There was a special choir performance and a slideshow with pictures, names and ages of members who had passed away. Members of Bellview's women's ministry decorated each luncheon table with old-fashioned items like perfume bottles, kitchen items and men's shaving kits. Royal Masters Quartet, of Birmingham, also performed in the afternoon.

But November marked more than just an anniversary for Bellview, Heatherly said. The church also called a new pastor, Tim Hassler, who will be taking on his role Dec. 18.

And Gray has high hopes for the "strategically located" church. He said he recently drove around McCalla and saw several new housing developments and construction.

"I hope [Bellview] will take advantage of their resources and reach out and minister to the people in [their community]," Gray said.

'Legacy' is theme of Whitewater Baptist's 150th anniversary

"What will your legacy be?"

That was the question Interim Pastor Richard Collier wanted members of Whitewater Baptist Church, Elba, to consider as they celebrated the church's 150th anniversary Oct. 9.

Collier delivered a message from 2 Chronicles 7:14 and spoke of the legacy they had received.

Music Director Fred Mallory gave a brief history of the church and the nation and led the congregation in pledges of allegiance to the U.S. and Christian flags. There was special music by Foyel Brunson, a former Whitewater member; the Whitewater choir; a trio of Mallory, Hattie White and Kathy Harrell; and a piano and organ duet by Judy Fuller and Lisa Stinson.

John Granger, director of missions for Coffee Baptist Association, presented two certificates: one from the association and one from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. The congregation adjourned to the fellowship hall for an old-fashioned Sunday dinner of fried chicken, baked ham, all the trimmings, banana pudding and iced tea. The fellowship hall was decorated with photo albums, scrapbooks and memorabilia.

International spotlight

CBS News focuses on Burmese refugees at Kentucky church

Media attention to the recent groundbreaking visit to Myanmar by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will include a network news story featuring a Kentucky Baptist church that has become a spiritual home for resettled refugees in the country historically known as Burma. Myanmar's authoritarian military government is considered one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

In the Dec. 1 broadcast of CBS Evening News, the segment focused on how refugees from Burma are settling into life in the United States and how Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., and other ministries are reaching out to the refugees.

Crescent Hill is one of a number of Baptist congregations across the U.S. encountering Burmese refugees because of connections to the Baptist faith traced back to American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson, who arrived in Burma in 1813. Burmese Baptists were some of the earliest converts to Christianity in Southeast Asia, and the Baptist witness grew quickly among minority ethnic groups such as the Karen and Chin.

Eager to connect

About 3,000 refugees from Burma have resettled in Kentucky since 2006 after living in refugee camps along the Myanmar-Thai border. In 2007 some of those refugees remembered that a missions team from Crescent Hill had ministered in one of those camps and were eager to connect with fellow Baptists who knew about them and their plight.

Rather than asking Crescent Hill to sponsor an ethnic mission where they could worship in their native tongue, the refugees insisted on worshipping alongside the rest of the congregation, even though they

didn't understand a word of English.

"That was one of the first lessons they taught us — and this was their choice — was that for them it was very important that we all be together in worship," said Co-pastor Jason Crosby. Though he can't speak for them, he speculated, "I think they're of the belief that God will move among us even if we can't understand the words that are said."

Crosby, a Kentucky native, had been working with Burmese refugees for three years as interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Battle Creek, Mich., before moving to Louisville just a few months after the first Burmese refugees were settling in and looking for a church home.

Since then Crescent Hill has welcomed large numbers of Burmese refugees. American church members have worked to help meet physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the members from Burma. In return, the refugees have inspired fellow church members with their testimony of maintaining faith and hope amid dire circumstances.

Crosby said the transition from what once was a flagship church for nearby Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to one that is now on a given Sunday roughly half Anglo and half Burmese has had its up and downs.

"It's not easy, and feathers get ruffled when you're trying to worship and people don't speak the same language or people have radically different expectations of what worship should look like and what worship should mean," he said.

"Now, four years later large num-

bers of folks in Karen and Chin communities have significantly better English skills," he said. "We've kind of turned a corner in terms of what was an initial barrier and we're now getting to the point where language is not as much of an issue. It hasn't always been easy, but we're really in a fantastic spot right now."

Crosby said people in his church have mixed feelings about Clinton's Dec. 1-2 trip to Burma, the first by a U.S. Secretary of State in more

than half a century. While encouraged by recent reforms like the release of a small number of political prisoners, they don't want the U.S. to enter into any trade agreement that fails to account for ongoing human rights violations that still need correction.

On Nov. 28 a dozen organizations, including the U.S. Campaign for Burma, sent an open letter urging Clinton to demand the Burmese government immediately release all remaining political prisoners, begin meaningful peace talks with democratic opposition and ethnic minorities and allow international humanitarian agencies to have unhindered access to populations affected by civil war and natural disasters.

An opportunity

"Secretary Clinton should use this visit as an opportunity to strengthen Burma's democracy activists and ethnic minorities and remind the regime of the consequences that will follow their failure to halt crimes against humanity," said Aung Din, executive director of the U.S. Campaign for Burma. (ABP)

"I think they're of the belief that God will move ... even if we can't understand the words that are said."

Co-pastor Jason Crosby
Crescent Hill Baptist Church
Louisville, Ky.

USCIRF's work as watchdog for global religious liberty threatened in US Senate

The work of the congressionally approved watchdog for global religious liberty will continue for at least another week.

Both the Senate and House of Representatives approved a spending bill Nov. 17 that includes funding for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the entire federal government through Dec. 16. Had Congress not acted in time, the federal government — and USCIRF — would have shut down at the end of the day Nov. 18.

Southern Baptist religious liberty leader Richard Land said he is "delighted that USCIRF is out of immediate danger of going out of business. However, this is only a temporary stay of execution."

It is the third time this fall Congress has approved a measure that keeps USCIRF operating temporarily. Legislators beat a Sept. 30 deadline by extending federal spending through Oct. 4. Then, the Senate and House passed a resolution to maintain funding through Nov. 18.

Roadblock in the Senate

Efforts to reauthorize the bipartisan commission remain at a standstill in Congress, however. The House voted 391-21 in mid-September to reauthorize USCIRF for two more years, but the bill met a roadblock in the Senate. Using one of the chamber's rules, a single senator reportedly has put a hold on the reauthorization legislation.

A senator who takes such action is not required to disclose his identity.

USCIRF has played a major role in bringing attention to the persecution of Christians and other religious practitioners since it was established by the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998. The bipartisan panel advises the White House, State Department and Congress on the status of religious freedom overseas. Among its responsibilities is to make a yearly report on global conditions for religious adherents and to recommend to the State Department governments that it believes qualify as "countries of particular concern," a designation reserved for the world's worst violators of religious liberty. (BP)



Baldwin County bike ministry distributes 'wheels,' gospel

By Brittany N. Ragon
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Need some wheels? Call us." These are the words you'll see plastered on fluorescent orange fliers in Baldwin County advertising free bicycles.

That's because 26-year-old Zac Foerster, a member of Bethel Baptist Church, Robertsedale, in Baldwin Baptist Association, caught a vision in February to help fill a need — "We're looking to show Christ's love to all those in our community," he said.

So Foerster gathered support from his wife, Amy, and good friend Jason Mann, former youth pastor of Bethel Baptist and current director of outreach at Women's Care Medical Center in Robertsedale. He collected some old bicycles donated by family and church members. And he set out in obedience to make God's vision to him a reality.

"One of our goals is shining light in dark places," Foerster said. "The main purpose (of this ministry) is helping the needy."

And they're doing so through Ridden Word, a name they chose based on Psalm 107:20. It's an apt description since each bicycle frame is finished off with a collection of handwritten Bible verses.

Before each bike is ready for Scripture, it is dismantled, sanded, painted their signature fluorescent orange, repaired and reassembled by a team of volunteers stationed in a shed outside the church.

Just before it is delivered to its awaiting beneficiary, the bicycle is taken into one of the Bethel's services to be prayed over.

"We really have a big burden of being the Church to people who need help," Foerster said. "But the most important part is that we are looking to advance the gospel and proclaim Christ to people in tough times, so that they will know they have always had someone who loves them whether they knew it or not."

Take Ollis, for example, a homeless man wandering the streets of Robertsedale.

Foerster said he was "dumbfounded" with how happy Ollis was because someone had bought

him food earlier that day. "I said, 'I don't have a burger, but I can give you a bike,'" Foerster recalled.

So he drove Ollis to Bethel, and they picked out a new bike that hadn't even received its Scripture yet.

Foerster opened the Bible and told Ollis to pick out some verses.

"He could quote John 3:16," Foerster said. "But there was another one he wanted to find. He said it was something about being naked and no one clothing him."

Foerster opened to Matthew 25 and asked Ollis to read the verses as he wrote them on the bike.

"He was stumbling over his words a bit, but it was so powerful hearing him read, 'I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me,'" Foerster recalled. "It was like I was hearing God speak straight to me about helping those who were needy."

And that was only the beginning.

By the end of December, Ridden Word will have given away more than 35 bikes.

Although the ministry still has lots of needs — like a permanent facility, monthly supporters, bike supplies, mobile sheds for storage and a large air compressor — God continually supplies for it.

Mann said it has been incredible to see not only tools and donations supplied but also "to see how God brings people or families" to Ridden Word.

'An exciting idea'

The hope is to become more than a distribution center, Foerster added. The goal is to set up a teen discipleship program.

"We have many juvenile youth facilities in our county for troubled teens," Mann explained. "We ... have hopes for those teens to come work at Ridden Word for community service, and while there, we will be able to share the gospel with them. That is an exciting idea to dwell on."

For more information, call Zac Foerster at 251-599-6160 or email Amy Foerster at mrsfoerster22@hotmail.com.

Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► The W.A.M. children of **Boones Chapel Church, Prattville**, will present the Christmas pageant "Back to Bethlehem" Dec. 18, 11 a.m. There will be a candlelight service for all ages Dec. 24, 6 p.m. The Christmas morning service will be Dec. 25, 10 a.m. On Dec. 31, the church will hold a New Year's Eve watchnight service at 8 p.m. There will be worship and activities for all ages. Mike Johnson is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **J. Douglas Dortch** is the new pastor of **Mountain Brook Church**. He comes from First Church, Tallahassee, Fla., where he served as pastor for 17 years. He also has served other churches in Alabama and Kentucky. A native of Mobile, Dortch grew up in York. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Montevallo, master of divinity, master of theology and doctoral degrees from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and his wife, Judy, have two children. ► **Birmingham Association** will hold an associational ministers Christmas luncheon for church staff and spouses Dec. 13, 11:30 a.m., at Mountain Brook Church. Don Campbell, minister of pastoral care and senior adults for First Church, Birmingham, will provide a program. There will be door prizes. For reservations call 205-599-3245 by Dec. 8. J. Douglas Dortch is pastor of Mountain Brook. Mike McLemore is executive director of Birmingham Association. ► The worship ministries of **Clearview Church, Pinson**; **Clayridge Church, Clay**; and **Eastside Church, Birmingham**, presented "The Wonder of Christmas" Dec. 4, 6 p.m., at Clearview and will present it Dec. 11, 6 p.m., at Eastside. For information call 205-



DORTCH

833-3463 or visit www.ebcbbirmingham.org. Robbie Weems is pastor of Clearview. Ron Hudgens is pastor of Clayridge. Mark Smith is pastor of Eastside. ► **Meadow Brook Church, Birmingham**, along with several area businesses will sponsor the 17th annual Meadow Brook 5K and fun run Dec. 17. Late registration and packet pickup will be from 7:30-8:45 a.m. The 5K race will be at 9 a.m. and will finish around the lakes. The fun run will be at 10 a.m. Wear your jingle bells. The awards ceremony and prize drawings will be at 10:30 a.m. Races begin and end at Aliant Bank on Highway 280 East. There will be T-shirts, indoor facilities, gift bags, prizes and food. Savings bonds will be given to overall winners. The entry fee is a voluntary tax deductible contribution to The JESUS Video Project of Alabama. For information contact Bob Cosby at 205-991-6054 or jvpoa@juno.com or visit www.meadowbrookruns.org. Ron Sumners is pastor. ► **Springdale Church, Tarrant**, will host the choir and instrumental ensemble of Jackson Way Church, Huntsville, as they present "We Have Our Savior" Dec. 11, 6 p.m. The choir will be under the direction of Executive Pastor/Worship Lenn Knight. Harold Fanning is interim pastor. ► **Cathy Holcomb Key** will retire after 40 years of service as organist for **Westmont Church, Birmingham**. She will be honored with an appreciation day Dec. 18, 10:45 a.m. Key will provide a concert and then be given a special recognition and gift. C.B. Scott is pastor.

ETOWAH

► The chancel choir of **Twelfth Street Church, Rainbow City**, will present "A

Christmas Celebration 2011" Dec. 11, 5 p.m. This is the first major choir musical in the new building. The church also will hold its annual candlelight service with traditional Christmas carols and scripture Dec. 18, 5 p.m. Ronnie Cornutt is minister of music. Craig Carlisle is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► The worship choir and orchestra of **Clements Church, Athens**, will present the multimedia Christmas musical performance "Hope Is Born, Emmanuel" Dec. 11, 9:30 a.m. They also presented it Dec. 7, 6:30 p.m., at Family Church and will present it Dec. 8, 7 p.m., at Regency Square Mall in Florence and Dec. 10, 5 p.m., at Athens Limestone Courthouse Square. For information call 256-729-1328 or visit www.clements baptist.org. Tim Anderson is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Moffett Road Church, Mobile**, will present a walking tour of the Bethlehem marketplace and live nativity called "The Bethlehem Experience" Dec. 15-17, 6-8 p.m. Terry Cutrer is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Kevin Lanier** will retire after 18 years as minister of music and outreach for **Sixth Street Church, Alexander City**, effective Dec. 31. He has served 42 years total in the ministry. There will be a reception in his honor Dec. 11, 7 p.m., following the choir's Christmas program "Down From His Glory." Matt Haines is pastor.

SBOM's Daniel Wilson accepts call to serve Kentucky's Dry Ridge Baptist

Daniel Wilson, an associate in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) office of evangelism, has accepted the call to serve as pastor of Dry Ridge Baptist Church in Kentucky.

Though born in Jonesboro, Ga., Wilson studied and served as a pastor in Kentucky for nine years, so this is something of a return home for him. He served as a pastor in Kentucky before being called to Raleigh Avenue Church, Homewood, in 2005.

In September 2009, he began serving in the SBOM office of evangelism under director Sammy Gilbreath.

Wilson's work included such varied tasks as assisting with the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference, God's Plan for Sharing Across Alabama, revival preparation and attractional evangelistic efforts such as car shows.

"I think Daniel is one of the finest, most wonderful communicators I have known," Gilbreath said. Wilson will be greatly missed, he added.

While on staff with the SBOM, Wilson attended First Baptist Church, Prattville, with his wife, Erin, and son, Samuel David.

Wilson said he was happy serving with the state board but his desire to be a pastor was too strong.

"I never wrestled free from a pastor's heart; it never got out of my bloodstream," Wilson said.

In addition, he joked, Erin enjoys "being a pastor's wife."

The Wilsons moved to Dry Ridge on Nov. 30. (TAB)



Photo by Joyce Milner

ORGANIST MARKS 45 YEARS

Fairview Baptist Church, Valley, in East Liberty Baptist Association honored Ellen Prickett for 45 years of service as organist. She also serves as church secretary and a women's Sunday School teacher. Timothy Bass is pastor.

CORRECTION

In the Church Anniversary article "Decatur's Southside honors past, embraces future" in the Nov. 3 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, the former pastor's name was incorrectly printed as John Ray. The correct name is Joe Ray.

Correction

In the Nov. 24 issue, the list of those serving on the Credentials and Tellers committees during the recent Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting and the list of those appointed to the Committee on Committees contained the 2010 information. Below are the correct lists for 2011.

Shaw names committees

Two committees, the Credentials Committee and the Tellers Committee, were appointed during the state convention's opening session Nov. 15. The Committee on Committees also was named during the Tuesday sessions.

State convention President Mike Shaw, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham, in Shelby Baptist Association, announced the appointments 30 days prior to the annual meeting in accordance with bylaw requirements, but messengers had to ratify the appointments during the meeting.

The convention Credentials Committee helps with problems regarding registration and seating of messengers.

Serving as chairman of the committee was Grant Barber, Eastern Shore Baptist, Daphne. Serving with him were Michael R. Bedford, College Park Baptist, Mobile; Phil M. Boyles, Sage Avenue Baptist, Mobile; Ellen W. Williams, First Baptist, Leroy; Patricia McGriff, New Hope #2 Baptist, Holly Pond; David Nelson, Thomasville Baptist; and John Henry Armstrong, Millry Baptist.

Tellers Committee members would have helped convention officers tabulate convention votes if ballots had been used.

Hugh Richardson Jr., First Baptist, Alabaster, served as chairman. Other members were Brooks Alexander, Government Street Baptist, Mobile; J. Derrall Marshall, Shadow Lawn Baptist, Eight Mile; David Royce Jean, First Baptist, Cullman; David Miller, Edgil Grove Baptist, Jasper; Barry S. Cater, Old Town Creek Baptist, Moulton; and David Beach, Lindsay Lane Baptist, Athens.

The following also were elected to serve on the Committee on Committees until 2014: Jim Cooley, First Baptist, Haleyville, chair; John Screws, Second Baptist, Fort Payne; Rex Kent, First Baptist, Jemison; and Chip Starnes, First Baptist, Bay Minette (filling unexpired term in 2013). (TAB)

VOICE YOUR

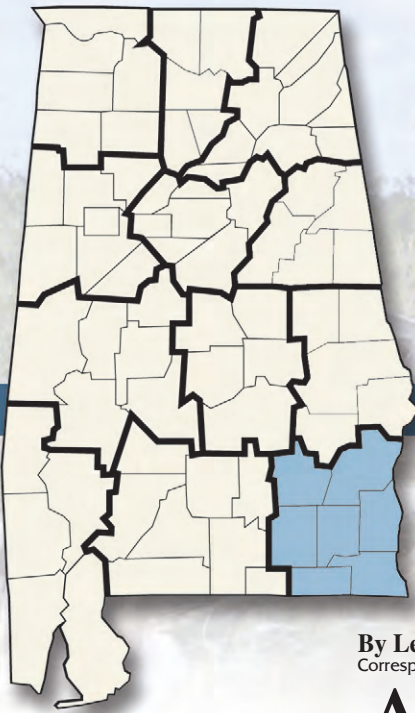
OPINION



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

Remember to:

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



Baptists RESPOND

to areas devastated by April tornadoes

Baptists in District 5 assist damaged areas

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

April 27 was a heartbreaking day for thousands upon thousands in Alabama.

A series of 62 tornadoes crisscrossed the state, leaving their mark of destruction upon lives, homes and land.

"It was an awful, terrible thing when the storms hit," said Joe Bob Mizzell, director of the office of Christian ethics and chaplaincy ministries of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Not long after the storms, the SBOM asked unaffected associations to undergird those that experienced damage.

"We had excellent cooperation" from the associations, Mizzell said.

Alabama Baptists' District 5 region of the state — which comprises the extreme southeastern counties of Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry, Houston and Pike — was spared storm damage. Nonetheless churches in the associations covering those counties swiftly went into action.

Barbour Baptist Association

In Barbour Baptist Association, First Baptist Church, Eufaula, and Louisville Baptist Church mobilized teams for relief efforts. Louisville Baptist also collected Totes for Hope, containers filled with supplies to help restock kitchens, said Donna Harrison, administrative ministry assistant for Barbour Association.

Director of Missions (DOM) Curtis Rich added that Calvary Baptist Church, Eufaula, took supplies to Tuscaloosa.

Clayton Baptist Church not only sent supplies to Elmore County but also made contributions to disaster relief, Harrison said.

Plus Pine Level Baptist Church, Louisville, provided a truckload of water. Meanwhile Parkview Baptist Church, Eufaula; Evergreen, Prospect, Pleasant Plains and Union Baptist churches, all in Clayton; Mount Zion Baptist Church, Louisville; and Spring Hill Baptist Church, Clio; gave funds toward disaster relief.

Even though seven months have



Photo by Linda Adams

HANDS-ON MISSIONS — A volunteer from Salem-Troy Baptist Association works with a chain saw unit.

passed since the storms, the association's churches are not forgetting the people whose lives were affected that April day.

Some churches and the association are planning missions trips to rebuild, hold Vacation Bible schools, whatever is needed, Rich said.

"Several of our churches are really interested in missions projects," he said.

Rich explained that he is contacting DOMs in north Alabama to investigate possibilities for missions trips.

"That's our focus right now, to follow up this coming year," Rich said.

It is his hope that there will be several trips planned for different times of the year.

He noted that congregations have grown excited about meeting needs outside their church walls. He said they want to do "hands-on" missions, making a difference in people's lives.

Hands-on missions and prayer are very important right now, Rich

said. Prayer and a "commitment and dedication of putting feet to our prayers" are the ways people can help those affected by the storms.

"We've got to see some action going on," Rich said.

Coffee Baptist Association

Members of Coffee Baptist Asso-

ciation churches also have sought to be servants to those in need.

DOM John Granger said the association has worked to connect volunteers with cleanup/recovery and construction projects.

In addition, Granger noted that members of some churches have (See 'Associations,' page 8)



Photo courtesy of Todd Clark

ENCOURAGEMENT — Members of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, in Coffee Baptist Association help Tuscaloosa residents rebuild their homes following the April 27 tornadoes.

District 5

Barbour Association

Judson Association

Columbia Association

Geneva Association

Coffee Association

Salem-Troy Association

Dale Association

Explanation of districts

Alabama's 75 associations are grouped into 12 geographical districts. The districts allow the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to work with and offer resources in a more localized way. Each district has various state missionaries assigned to it. When there are meetings or workshops that need to take place with all associational leaders, the district setup allows for a more practical model for those events. The April 27 tornadoes and resulting damage is a prime example of how having the 12 districts allowed for immediate strategizing and organization on the state and associational level. *The Alabama Baptist* will highlight storm recovery and relief assistance in each of the 12 districts once a month during the next year.

Associations give money, collect needed items, volunteer

(continued from page 7)

initiated trips. One such trip was taken by First Baptist Church, Enterprise. A sizable group of volunteers from that church worked in Tuscaloosa, Granger reported.

"Quite a few churches had their own connections" and undertook their own projects, he said.

Volunteers have worked in Pleasant Grove, Birmingham, Hackleburg and Elmore County, too, Granger said.

Also donations have been given to particular people in certain areas, as well as projects of the various teams from Coffee Association, he said.

Most of the association's 50 churches have assisted those impacted by the storms in some way: giving money, collecting needed items or volunteering, Granger said.

"A lot of people have gone, and people are still doing stuff," he noted.

"Even the small churches have given. And some of the small churches gave big," Granger said, naming Shiloh Baptist Church, Elba, as an example.

According to Granger, Coffee County understands what it is to need assistance after a tornado. After a 2007 tornado, the county experienced the kindness of people from Maine to Oregon, he said.

"It really was an amazing response," Granger recalled.

And from it, Coffee Association learned a valuable lesson about how to respond to a storm-damaged area.

In the aftermath of a tornado or other disaster, relief organizers are very taxed with responsibilities. For that reason, the association's volunteers tried to be connected to a specific need prior to leaving on a relief mission.

Once a connection was made, "we'd get a group together to send," Granger said.

Another lesson Coffee Association has learned through the years is to keep disaster relief ever on the minds of church members. Granger said this is being accomplished by having a disaster relief contact in every church in the association.

Moreover, to be better prepared to respond,

How to assist in relief efforts

For help in connecting with associations that need construction projects, call Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' tornado rebuild assistant Penny Flowers at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 597.

For a list of needs across the state, visit www.sldr.org.

For other ways to get involved, call
► Barbour Baptist Association at 334-775-8633,

► Coffee Baptist Association at 334-894-6411,

► Columbia Baptist Association at 334-794-6281,

► Dale Baptist Association at 334-774-2713,

► Geneva Baptist Association at 334-588-3276,

► Judson Baptist Association at 334-585-3274 or

► Salem-Troy Baptist Association at 334-566-1538. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Coffee Baptist Association

RELIEF MISSIONS — Disaster relief volunteers from Coffee Baptist Association work on the roof of a house in Blount County after tornadoes hit the area April 27.

the association constructed a building last year to house all its disaster relief equipment.

Columbia Baptist Association

The people of Columbia Baptist Association responded to the April 27 tornadoes with assistance in chain saw projects, debris removal and other tasks in Tuscaloosa and elsewhere, DOM Jerry Grandstaff said.

Plus "various churches in our association did things on their own," assisting in areas where they had contacts already, Grandstaff said.

To continue helping, Columbia Association has been in contact with Calhoun Baptist Association to offer assistance with rebuilding that is in progress there.

The churches and the association remain willing to meet needs wherever they can, Grandstaff added.

"We're fortunate we have a very strong disaster relief team," he said.

Columbia Association has disaster relief volunteers trained in chain saw, cleanup/recovery, chaplaincy, feeding unit, child care and construction. Probably 10 are able to respond anytime, Grandstaff noted.

Since April, "a great deal has been accomplished" through the work of Southern Baptist disaster relief, Grandstaff observed.

Yet the needs, in general, continue to be the same as they were April 28: praying for those affected, contributing funds to construction efforts and volunteering, he said.

Dale Baptist Association

Congregations in Dale Baptist Association

sent trucks loaded with supplies, food and water. Individuals and teams from churches went to help those in need. Money from the association was given to affected areas.

"A lot of our folks went to Tuscaloosa," as well as Birmingham and other locales, DOM Kenneth W. Hale said.

Chaplains from Dale Association responded also, Hale said.

The association and its churches did "basically the things you would do if you're not in a disaster. We were the blessed ones," he said of the 34 churches that comprise Dale Association.

"A great deal of our churches have participated in some way," Hale said of Dale Association's disaster relief efforts. "Our churches really rallied to do stuff."

Volunteers worked on houses, removed debris and helped some people begin to put their lives back together, he said.

Of course, much remains to be done. Hale said it is necessary to continue to pray for an awareness of needs "until everything is as back together as can be."

He said Christians must remember to give and help rebuild.

"The farther from a disaster, we forget there's a need," Hale said. To try to avoid that, Dale Association is looking at the possibility of a rebuilding missions trip.

Geneva Baptist Association

As soon as possible after the tornadoes, missions teams from five Geneva Baptist Association churches went to storm-damaged areas of Tuscaloosa and Bir-

mingham, DOM Dicky McAllister said.

One team has returned since then for a construction project, McAllister added.

Plus churches collected contributions for those affected by the storms and forwarded the funds to Calhoun County.

Also a day's sales at the association's thrift store were devoted to helping people impacted by the storms, McAllister said.

He believes that all 34 churches in his association have been involved either directly or indirectly in ministering to those impacted by the tornadoes.

But McAllister realizes recovery from such a widespread catastrophe is going to be a long process.

Prayer is crucial, he said. "Keep praying with them and for them."

Judson Baptist Association

Some members of Judson Baptist Association churches mobilized quickly and went to Tuscaloosa to work, DOM George Thompson said.

That team "was totally amazed at the damage that was done" in Tuscaloosa, Thompson said.

Soon after, a team traveled to Choctaw County to work and take water. The situation there was significant as well, Thompson said.

"I've never seen anything like it myself," he observed.

In addition, churches and the association gave financial assistance for recovery and construction in the state's northern counties, Thompson said.

For a year, Judson Association is partnering with Tallapoosa Baptist Association to help it with rebuilding projects and other storm-related needs, Thompson said.

When the tornadoes hit in April, the association had only a small number of certified disaster relief volunteers, Thompson said. It has more now and anticipates adding to the number in 2012.

"That was a wake-up call," Thompson said about being prepared to assist in a crisis.

Salem-Troy Baptist Association

Soon after the April 27 storms, volunteers from Salem-Troy Baptist Association went to Pleasant Grove and Concord to conduct chain saw projects and remove debris, said Luke Lane, moderator for the association and pastor of First Baptist Church, Troy.

Salem-Troy Association churches also collected requested items that went to different areas of the state, Lane said.

To aid in recovery, "our association has partnered with other Baptist churches in the state," Lane said. He added that the association is open to more partnerships and opportunities to help.

Linda Adams, administrative assistant with Salem-Troy Association, noted that Ansley Baptist Church, Troy, purchased Bibles and sent them to Tuscaloosa when a group from Troy University's Baptist Campus Ministries went there on a summer missions trip.

Adams said the April storms increased awareness of the need for disaster relief and the importance of corporate work as the body of Christ.

She, too, said prayer, money and time are the essentials for helping those directly impacted by the storms.

But Adams, who was on the team that responded to Pleasant Grove and Concord, said a listening ear is something people also need because they want to tell their stories — they just need someone to listen.



Photo courtesy of Todd Clark

CHRISTIAN LOVE — A disaster relief missions team from Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, helps rebuild Tuscaloosa residents' property and spirits.

Enterprise's Hillcrest builds special bond with Alberta Baptist

By Brian Blackwell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When a tornado touched down in Tuscaloosa on April 27, the disaster brought back painful memories for Bryan Peacock.

He survived a tornado that touched down in Enterprise four years ago.

"I've lived in Enterprise and Tuscaloosa for most of my life, so both towns where I had lived for so many years were hit by a natural disaster," said Peacock, a University of Alabama graduate. "It was a feeling of not that I had to help but that I should."

So he has joined fellow members of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, on disaster relief missions trips to help rebuild Tuscaloosa residents' property and spirits.

The Hillcrest Baptist members — ranging from youth to senior adults — have reconstructed porches, collected items such as blankets and food for redistribution, cleared debris from properties and prayer walked in neighborhoods.

The missions teams, composed of between 25 and 40 members, have also canvassed the community to promote events such as Vacation Bible School and carnivals at Alberta Baptist Church, whose building was heavily damaged by the tornado.

Larry Corder, pastor of Alberta Baptist, said the two congregations have formed a special bond.

"They've been such an encouragement to us," Corder said. "Without churches like Hillcrest Baptist Church, we wouldn't have been able to carry out the many [ministries] we've done so far here in Tuscaloosa. God used the disaster they experienced years ago to give them a mindset of the best ways to help us deal with this tragedy here."

He said efforts by the Hillcrest teams have helped his congregation reach more people in the community, including those from different ethnic groups.

"They've helped us open doors in our

community that weren't open before the tornado," Corder said. "They've helped us break down racial and cultural barriers."

Hillcrest member Todd Clark said helping break down those barriers through relationship building has been a humbling experience. A participant in most of the church's relief trips to Tuscaloosa, Clark said team members have demonstrated God's commandment to show His love in a real way.

"This has given us an opportunity to show we're disciples and have that Christian love for one another," he said. "We have that attitude that we're here to do whatever we can to help our fellow person in need."

While rebuilding structures has been vital, Clark said serving as a listening ear has been important as well. This became evident during his first relief trip to the city, when he and his daughter were prayer walking in a neighborhood.

'Touched my heart'

"I found it very encouraging that when we asked what their needs were, people didn't say they wanted stuff the most but prayer," Clark said. "Many people wanted to tell their story. I've never experienced anything like that, and it definitely touched my heart."

The monthly trips to Tuscaloosa reflect a larger missions effort by Hillcrest, according to LifeGroups and Missions Minister Travis Dunham. He said his congregation also has ongoing ministry efforts in Enterprise, various states in the United States and other countries.

Dunham said ministering in Tuscaloosa is another way for his congregation to actively minister on an ongoing basis.

"The most enjoyable thing is the way people in our church have responded," he said. "We haven't had to beg or twist arms for people to go to help out in Tuscaloosa, but they saw a need and an opportunity to serve. Our people are joyfully serving those in need."

Hartford's Shiloh Baptist helps Hackleburg's Emmanuel with VBS

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Michelle Darrow had never been on a missions trip before, but thanks to her church's outreach efforts in Hackleburg, she now counts herself as a missionary.

After learning that Emmanuel Baptist Church, Hackleburg, had been destroyed by a tornado April 27, Darrow and other members of Shiloh Baptist Church, Hartford, were determined to find a way to reach out.

"We asked them about their immediate needs, and they said VBS (Vacation Bible School) would be a great way to help," said Bryan Wagner, Shiloh Baptist's pastor. "We took a team up there, we provided all the material, set up everything, provided all the teachers and workers; all they had to do was provide the spot."

Because the church building had been destroyed, VBS took place both outside and within the mobile church unit — essentially a double-wide trailer — provided by Alabama Baptist disaster relief.

"Originally they didn't have anything, and we were going to have an open-air VBS, but thankfully the convention was able to bring that building," Wagner said. "So we put an arts and crafts section in one room and did the missions study in another room, then did the big worship rally in the sanctuary room. We had games and things in the field beside the building."

And even though it wasn't a typical VBS be-

cause of the circumstances, it made a lasting impression on Emmanuel Baptist.

"We were at a point where we couldn't function on our own property, and they came out and took over and did VBS and took care of everything," said Dana Crow, Emmanuel's secretary. "We couldn't have asked for anyone to share God's love in a better way than they have. They've ministered to our church in a big way."

Once VBS ended, Shiloh began looking for additional ways it could reach out to Emmanuel. Its Hearts and Hands women's group decided to organize a backpack drive later in the summer.

"The Emmanuel people didn't realize this relationship was going to extend beyond VBS, but we decided the Hearts and Hands group could help with the backpack drive before school started," Darrow said. "I felt like God was truly calling me to be a part of this outreach."

And Shiloh has a list of ways it plans to continue helping Emmanuel. Among other ventures, it's coordinated a coat drive for later in the year and hopes to help with the church rebuild next summer.

"I can't explain how grateful we've been for their support," Crow said. "Our church is a group of people who were already in need before the tornado came through, and then after the tornado, they were really in need. I think God has taken this bad thing and turned it into something to bring us closer together."

"I think God has taken this bad thing and turned it into something to bring us closer together."

Dana Crow
Emmanuel Baptist Church
Hackleburg

Haleburg Baptist 'missions-minded'

Haleburg Baptist Church may not have many members, but it does have a big heart.

That is how deacon Hannon Hall describes the church of about 50 members.

The Judson Baptist Association church was so burdened by the plight of those affected by the April tornadoes that it took up three offerings for the cause. The result was donations between \$2,500 and \$3,000, Hall said.

However, the monetary contributions did not include all the items and supplies that church members purchased to send to people in storm-damaged areas, Hall said.

"We're small in number but we've all been

blessed way beyond what we deserve," he said.

Some church members also did "hands-on work" in the days after the April 27 storms, said Ray Cobb, Haleburg Baptist's pastor since June. "The church is missions-minded."

Hall pointed out that the church gives regularly to disaster relief efforts and missions. "We believe in missions" and helping others, he said.

In fact, the church recently teamed with Judson Association to provide a mobile home for a family, Cobb said.

"There's need right around you if you just look," Hall said. "The Lord will lead you."

(TAB)

REMEMBERING THE 2011 TORNADES

April 22, 2012, has been designated

A Time to Remember: 2011 Tornadoes.

Resources will be available early next year to help your church or association observe this occasion in a significant way.

Partners in relief

Churches in Salem-Troy, Tuscaloosa associations team up to serve families

Two Salem-Troy Baptist Association churches partnered with a Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church to help two families recover from the April 27 storms.

First Baptist Church and Southside Baptist Church, both in Troy, assisted the families through Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, said Luke Lane, pastor of First, Troy.

Lane, who is also moderator for Salem-Troy Association, said the two Troy churches collected household and kitchen items, hygiene supplies, furniture, clothing and money for the families.

"Everybody really pitched in and gave as much as they could," he said. People in the community also aided in the effort, Lane said. "It was an overwhelming response."

According to Andrew Knick, pastor of Southside Baptist, "We tried to meet all those (needs) that we could. Our church really jumped in with both feet."

Knick noted that Southside is a church that ministers to needs.

In fact, the church was presented with another opportunity to minister directly to some people who had fled the damage in Tuscaloosa.

Once a month, Southside has a ministry called Connect, which serves a meal to people in need in the community, Knick explained. The people from Tuscaloosa came to that meal one night.

The church not only was able to provide a meal for those people then but also gave them food and clothes to take with them, Knick said.

Southside and First, Troy, have been involved in helping people impacted by the tornadoes in other ways. The weekend after the storms, some Southside members helped clean up in the Lake Martin area of Tallapoosa County, Knick said.

Lane said a group from his church and Troy University helped at Calvary Baptist and distribution centers in Tuscaloosa. (TAB)

"Our church really jumped in with both feet."

Pastor Andrew Knick
Southside Baptist Church, Troy



Photo by Linda Adams

ROOM FOR A CROSS — A Salem-Troy Baptist Association volunteer places a cross atop a tree stump after the April 27 tornadoes in Pleasant Grove.

Troy University BCM leads relief missions trip

It started as a missions endeavor for college students. But by the time the group left on the missions trip, it had grown to include people from 12 to about 60.

Brad Bensinger, Baptist campus minister at Troy University, said an August missions trip initiated by the school's Baptist Campus Ministries soon became an effort of about 15 people, including university students, families from the local Baptist association and others.

The group traveled to Tuscaloosa to assist with construction and recovery from the April 27 tornadoes that heavily damaged that area of the state.

Glad to help

"We were glad to have found something to do," Bensinger said.

The group worked on Habitat for Humanity homes, assisted at a distribution center at Cottondale Baptist Church and helped the local school board sort and stock supplies that had been sent to it.

In addition, the group brought with it a trailer loaded with food, supplies and furniture that were given to a rescue mission in Tuscaloosa.

"It was a productive three days," Bensinger said. "We would like to go back, but nothing (is) planned right now."

Bensinger, who worked in Tuscaloosa shortly after the tornadoes hit in April, said he could see progress in some areas when he returned in August. But other areas looked almost as if the storms happened just yesterday. (TAB)

Elba's Shiloh Baptist supports Marion church

Shiloh Baptist Church, Elba, desired to impart a love offering to an Alabama church about its size that was damaged by April's storms.

According to Pastor Joe Farris, the church makes a concerted effort to identify giving opportunities throughout the year. "Our congregation has always had a giving heart," he said.

Director of Missions (DOM) John Granger said Shiloh Baptist presented Coffee Baptist Association with a \$2,000 check soon after the April 27 tornadoes and inquired if the donation could go to a church

that had not yet been assisted.

Granger began asking around in an effort to pinpoint a specific need but soon discovered that many affected churches had already received assistance.

Damaged roof

However, it wasn't long before he was informed that the roof of Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion, had been damaged by a tornado about a week prior to the April 27 storms.

The association's disaster relief committee voted to send Shiloh's love offering to Faith Chapel Baptist. The committee then matched

Shiloh's \$2,000 with an additional \$2,000 from other church donations.

According to Lloyd Stockman, pastor of Faith Chapel, the church building suffered about \$14,000 in damage, with most of the damage concentrated on the roof. "The tornado came through there and lifted our roof up," he said, adding thankfully that it was not pulled off completely and the Cahaba Baptist Association church was able to continue its Sunday services despite not having electricity the first Sunday after the damage was incurred.

Stockman remarked that before the storm, many trees surrounded

the church. Those are mostly gone now, he said.

He reported that aside from a bit of remaining work on the grounds, the church is repaired and back in order.

Granger visited Shiloh in September and updated the congregation of approximately 50 on how its love offering had been allocated.

Farris emphasized that the church's gift was all about God and letting Him shine through the experience. "[It was] amazing to see how God's hand allowed it to unfold," he said. "We're just glad we could help." (TAB)

Coverage for District 6 is currently under way, but if your association is in one of the last six districts (7 through 12), then please email us with your tornado recovery and rebuilding story ideas.

Include photos if you have them.

news@thealabamabaptist.org

Is your church prepared for a disaster?

A disaster is defined as anything that causes human suffering or creates human needs that the victims cannot alleviate themselves.

A church must plan how it will respond to disasters, large and small, in the community. The plan needs to be well-thought-out and discussed by the church leaders. The people in the congregation need to discuss the plan and determine how they, as individuals, can become part of this ministry.

Local churches are in a unique position to respond to individual needs in ways that no other organi-

zation or group can. Churches can demonstrate the love of Christ as they meet the needs of victims in the time of disaster. Even spontaneous reaction to a disaster in or near the church community can be helpful if it is coordinated with the efforts of other disaster relief agencies.

The unprepared church will miss valuable opportunities to minister if not prepared.

By planning before a disaster occurs and coordinating with Southern Baptist disaster relief, the local government, the Salvation Army and a local American

Red Cross chapter, a church can be prepared to minister fully in a time of crisis.

A church preparedness plan is available for download at www.sbd.org/churchpreparednessplan.

The seven-page document outlines the various aspects of organizing in preparation for a disaster and details the various skills and teams needed. It also provides inventory lists and a volunteer form that can be reproduced for use.

To find out more about disaster relief training opportunities, visit www.sbd.org or call 1-800-264-1225. (SBOM, TAB)

Want to know God?

By Pastor Greg Hyché
Brent Baptist Church

The events of Sept. 11, 2001, reminded us that we live in a hostile world of constant change. However, God is always unchangeable.

God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth to give us eternal life. One of the most quoted verses in the Bible is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This verse reveals to us four keys to God's personal plan:

First the motivating factor behind God's plan was to demonstrate to all that He loves us. God has a plan for you with the simple truth that He is love.

Second we see the personal payment. Our salvation did not come without a cost. In order for our sins to be forgiven, a payment for our sin debt was needed. Jesus paid for our sins so that we might be set free from sin.

Third we see our personal belief — "that whoever believes in Him." Salvation in God is not about what we do but about what He did for us. Maybe you, like so many others, believe that the only way to heaven is by your good works. Consequently we will never be good enough to earn our way into heaven. Therefore it is our responsibility to believe in His payment for our sin. By believing in Jesus and seeking God's forgiveness for sin, we are placing our trust in Him and accepting that He sent His only Son to die for us.

Fourth we see salvation's personal promise — "should not perish but have everlasting life." Those without Jesus are dying daily, but those who believe in Jesus have the promise of "everlasting life." Everlasting life means that when you die, you have the promise of eternity in heaven.

Dear friend, is your life in turmoil? Are you looking for personal peace? Living in a hostile world means that sometimes death does come unexpectedly.

My prayer for you is that you will turn to Jesus right now. Admit that you are a sinner, believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord today. Allow His peace to grace your life. You were made for eternity. Accept His eternal life today.

Beyond excuses

Missionary appointment service has 'father of modern missions' touch

God would never call you to missions, you insist. You're too damaged. Or too average. Too inexperienced. Too tired. Too young. Too old. Too busy getting through the day-to-day. That's your story — despite the still, small voice that keeps speaking to your heart.

Despite the many excuses — er, reasons — people have for not answering the call to missions, God doesn't give up as easily as we give up on ourselves, according to some of the 77 new missionaries appointed by International Mission Board (IMB) trustees at Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Miss., on Nov. 16.

"For many years I didn't think God could really use me. I was just

a normal small-town girl with normal passions: children and education," said new missionary Naomi Singer, who is going to sub-Saharan Africa as an education consultant for children of missions workers.

"I love being wrong!" she told the crowd gathered at Temple Baptist. "God is using what I have to offer."

By the age of 9, Vicky Kane was in her fifth foster home. "I had no future," she said. "Little did I know that God would use this to burden my heart for the spiritually orphaned."

After experiencing years of His healing and grace in the Christian family who adopted her, she's going to East Asia with her husband Darin and their 1-year-old daughter to tell people as hopeless as she once



BP photo

SHARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST — Family members, friends and others gather around the 77 new international missionaries appointed Nov. 16 at Temple Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Miss.

was that they have a loving Father.

Tyson Sellers was born with cataracts and has struggled with vision problems for years. "But my eyes now [have been] opened to the nations," he said. His wife Sonya was born in a Christian home but was "determined to be ordinary, to lean on my own understanding." Now they're headed out to make disciples of Jesus among East Asians with "no excuses and no limitations."

Richard Gannet is a pastor's son who vowed he would never serve in ministry. His wife Sally didn't even become a believer in Christ until college. "We never thought that we would be going to South Asia to work with Muslims through community development," he admitted. "Through God's amazing work, we go to share the love of Christ in word and deed."

After 9/11, Taylor Bishop developed a hatred for Muslims. But as he looked out over one of the largest cities in the Middle East during a 2009 trip, "God captured my heart for Muslims. I asked myself, 'How can I not go?'" So he's going with his wife Chandra to live among a Muslim people group in West Africa.

The missionary appointment ser-

vice was held in conjunction with William Carey University in Hattiesburg and its celebration marking the 250th anniversary of the birth of Carey, the British shoemaker who became the "father of modern missions." Carey himself struggled with resistance to his missions call from Baptists of his day — as well as his own family.

Changing history

During the appointment service, the university's Serampore Players, a student theater group named for the Bengali area of India where Carey served, dramatized the 1786 incident when a leading minister responded to Carey's call for obeying the Great Commission by saying, "Sit down, young man. ... When God wants to convert the heathen, He can do it without your help or mine." Carey persevered — and changed history.

As the new missionaries stood across the front of Temple Baptist's sanctuary at the end of the service, hundreds of people came forward to make their own personal commitments to missions service, support and engagement.

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



Homegrown Alabama

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Chances are that most people who read this column are "homegrown" Alabamians. An estimated 70 percent of those who live in the state today were born here, according to recent research on homegrown populations done for *Governing* magazine, using data from the Census Bureau.

Alabama's homegrown population percentage is the 10th-highest among all 50 states. It isn't the highest in the Deep South, however. Louisiana and Mississippi rank above Alabama. In the rest of the South, the percentage of residents who were born in the state is lower.

One other region of the country is populated largely by homegrown residents: the Midwest — particularly Michigan. Throughout the country as a whole, about half of all residents were born in the state where they reside.

Varying populations

City populations also vary this way. In Birmingham, eight of every 10 residents are homegrown Alabamians, the fourth-highest percentage among U.S. cities. Mobile (72 percent) and Montgomery (70 percent) also have large homegrown populations, but in Huntsville, almost half of all residents were born elsewhere.

There are advantages to hav-

ing a large homegrown population. Perhaps the biggest is that the social fabric of the community is likely to be stronger when friends and family retain close ties. On the other hand, a lot of the population movement from state to state is based on job opportunities. Thus economic conditions may be better in states that are drawing new residents from other places and therefore have lower homegrown percentages.

Politics also are affected by demographic characteristics. William Frey, a Brookings Institution scholar who worked on this study, pointed to the challenge of governing areas with large homegrown populations. He stated that "interest groups, biases and preferences are much more well-known and harder to overcome" when populations are stable and attitudes more settled.

While Frey and his colleagues may not have any particular knowledge of this state, their work could help Alabamians understand why forward-thinking political leadership is such a rare and prized commodity in the Heart of Dixie.

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

Pleasant Hill Baptist Pastor Michael G. Maloy dies at 63

Michael G. "Mike" Maloy, senior pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Millry, died Nov. 11. He was 63.

A Mobile County native, Maloy received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Mobile.

Before he was called into full-time ministry, Maloy worked as an information technology director for a national corporation.

He began his pastoral work as a bivocational pastor for Big Creek Baptist Church, Fairview, followed by an interim

pastorate at New Faith Baptist Church, Coffeeville.

Before coming to Pleasant Hill Baptist, Maloy served as senior pastor of Stave Creek Baptist Church, Jackson; and Antioch Baptist Church, Leakesville, Miss.

According to Michael Olewski, director of missions for Washington Baptist Association, Maloy was elected associational evangelism director at the annual meeting Oct. 17.

He is survived by his wife of 38 years, Linda; two daughters; and three grandchildren. (TAB)



MALOY

Crisis pregnancy centers fight attempts to restrict free speech

The city of Austin, Texas, has relented, for now, on an ordinance targeting pro-life crisis pregnancy centers.

Lawyers for Austin LifeCare say the city agreed in court to allow the pro-life center to remove signs required by a 2010 ordinance, and that the city agreed not to enforce the law while it reviews the measure's constitutionality. The ordinance requires such centers to display signs at their entrances saying they do not provide abortions or contraceptives or make referrals for those services.

Austin LifeCare was the only one of four centers in Austin that posted the signs after the ordinance was adopted. The other three refused to post the signs, saying to do so would contradict their religious beliefs, according to *The Austin American-Statesman*.

The four centers sued the city in early October of this year, contending Austin's sign ordinance violates their freedom of speech and religion. Under the agreement, the suit will not move forward until at least Feb. 3, lawyers for the centers said. On that date, lawyers from both sides will provide updates in court.

Such ordinances approved by other local governments have not fared well in court. Federal judges have blocked enforcement of similar laws in New York City; Baltimore, Md.; and Montgomery County, Md.

Sam Casey, lead lawyer for Austin LifeCare, commended the city for halting enforcement of the law,

"particularly when there is no evidence that any pregnancy resource center in Austin is doing anything but freely providing a multitude of pregnancy services to women and men who are faced with an unintended pregnancy."

Casey is general counsel of the Jubilee Campaign's Law of Life Project. Under the Austin ordinance, punishment for a first offense is a minimum fine of \$250.

'No [one] ... misled'

Meanwhile, the city of San Francisco also has adopted an ordinance seeking to regulate pregnancy help centers. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors gave final approval in a 10-1 vote Oct. 25 to a measure that would prohibit such centers from providing false or misleading information about their services.

If the San Francisco city attorney determines a pregnancy help center is violating the law, he can urge the center to correct its advertising. If that fails, he may seek a court injunction requiring the center potentially to pay for "corrective advertising" and/or post signs saying if it performs or refers for abortions and if a licensed physician is on its staff.

Sean Elsbernd, the lone supervisor to oppose the ordinance, said Oct. 18 there had been "no testimony, no documentation, no affidavits of any woman seeking service who has been misled."

"There is nothing in the record documenting that," he said, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "What I hear we are doing today

is passing a solution in search of a problem."

According to the *Chronicle*, First Resort, a center targeted by the bill, said in a written statement the ordinance "regulates and restricts speech only by persons and organizations the city regards as having 'antiabortion' or pro-life views, exempting the rest. This viewpoint and speaker discrimination is a blatant violation of the First Amendment."

Neither the Austin ordinance nor the San Francisco law requires abortion clinics to display signs indicating what services they do not provide or empowers the city to mandate such clinics provide accurate advertising. (BP)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Good Hope Baptist Church of Purvis, Miss., is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumes to: Kristi Nelson by e-mail to: kristi@goodhopepurvis.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1117, Purvis, MS 39475.

MUSIC MINISTER: Grace Baptist Church in Montevallo is seeking a music minister to lead our congregation and choir in worship. Please contact Justin at 205-602-3847 or email us at gracebaptistmontevallo@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF YOUTH/MUSIC: Marshall Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister of youth/music. Send resume to: youth_music@marshall-church.org or Marshall Baptist Church, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 436 Marshall Church Road NE, Thomson, GA 30824.

YOUTH MINISTER: Full- or part-time youth minister (7-12) needed at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, 100 Mount Pisgah Drive, Cropwell, AL 35054. We are seeking God's direction for a new minister to our students. Please send resume to the church, ATTN: James Blair or email: marybroadwater@centurytel.net. Email: jamesblair@centurytel.net.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER: Nazareth Baptist Church, Rainsville, Ala., is currently seeking a part-time youth minister. Resumes may be mailed to the following: Nazareth Baptist Church, P.O. Box 541, Rainsville, AL 35986.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER: Maple Avenue Baptist Church is seeking a part-time youth minister to work with 6th-12th grade students. Please mail resumes to: Maple Avenue Baptist Church, ATTN: Mr. Jacky Bradley, Search Committee, 1009 W. Maple Avenue, Geneva, AL 36340. Resumes deadline: Dec. 30.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF CHILDREN: Cedar Grove Baptist. Oversee curriculum implementation for Sunday morning and evening classes, Wednesday night classes, VBS, GA/RAs. Birth through 5th grade. steven@cedargroveleeds.org.

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Sole2Soul Sisters running ministry offers encouragement

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Sole2Soul Sisters is a running club, but at its core, the club aims to generate encouragement and community among its participants. Katrina Hanks said the idea for Sole2Soul came to her last year while she was in a Bible study called "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat."

"A couple of friends and I were running together at the time, and we had lots of women at our church coming up to us saying they wished they could run," said Hanks, a member of Jubilee Baptist Church, Daphne. "And I kept thinking, 'You can run!' We felt God calling us to start a running ministry."

So, in the spring of 2010, Hanks established a plan for a Couch to 5K program in which participants spent nine weeks training before running a 5K. She spread the word at local churches and put up fliers at gyms and the YMCA, and the idea caught on quickly. The women met once a week for a group run and were encouraged to run at least two additional times per week on their own.

At the first Sole2Soul Sisters 5K, there were 60 runners. Group members have gone on to run 10K races, and one woman completed a half-marathon. For Hanks, though, the main success lies in the way Sole2Soul makes women feel.

"The most positive response we've gotten is the atmosphere, that women don't feel intimidated in our group," she said. "We're at different phases in our lives and have different physical abilities, but this is a chance to be there for other women, and it really opens the door to new friendships."

According to 58-year-old Marcy Barnhart, Sole2Soul offered the motivation and encouragement she needed to start running.

"There was a stack of Sole2Soul fliers in one of our churches and I picked one up," said Barnhart, who works for Baldwin Baptist Association. "I'd been needing to get into an aerobic exercise program, and my cardiologist had been fussing at me, so I thought this might work."

And before she knew it, she had completed a 5K.

"There's something about a group of women, most of whom are equally out of shape, being encouraged by enthusiastic and generous young ladies that really makes this work," Barnhart said. "You can't not do it, and you don't want to let them down."

Need for acceptance

That feeling of being encouraged and accepted has obviously resonated with women, judging from Sole2Soul's popularity and fast growth. More than 500 women have been a part of Sole2Soul, the Facebook



Photo courtesy of Katrina Hanks

RUNNING TOGETHER — This Sole2Soul Sisters group won the spirit award in the 2010 Jingle Bell Run 5K in Daphne. Three other Sole2Soul Sisters groups also participated.

page has 519 fans and groups now exist in five states.

One such group was started by Leah Moore, of Pace, Fla. When her husband/running buddy was injured, Moore wanted to find a new way to plug in with fellow runners. She stumbled upon a Sole2Soul runner's blog, and soon she connected with Hanks and, in February, started a group in her area.

"I used word-of-mouth to tell people about it, and people kept

coming and coming! One friend said it reminded her of the movie 'Field of Dreams' — 'If you build it, they will come,'" Moore said. "The women felt encouraged and didn't feel like people were judging them. We had more and more join every week, and women of all shapes and sizes joined in."

For Moore, seeing women accomplish their goals alongside other women offering genuine support has been life changing.

"The greatest success stories are the people who truly have not exercised and can barely run when the program starts, and in nine to 10 weeks, they're running a 5K," she said.

"I feel like Philippians 4:13 truly applies with Sole2Soul Sisters: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

For more information, visit www.sole2soul sisters.com or search for "Sole2Soul Sisters" on Facebook. ☞

Paul Radosevich and Larry Hyche of First Baptist Church, Decatur, help build a church in La Vallée de Jacmel, Haiti.

TEAMWORK

The essence of the Cooperative Program is teamwork, whether it's volunteers working together to build a church in Haiti or churches working together to reach a lost world for Christ. When you give through the Cooperative Program, you are a part of a worldwide team focused on a singular goal — fulfilling the Great Commission.

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

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 11

Explore the Bible

By Dale Younce

Professor of Christian Studies, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

STAY ON TRACK WITH GOD'S GPS

Numbers 9:1-11a, 15-19

Most adults welcome guidance in life from what they consider trustworthy sources. Indeed many pay a lot of money to get advice on everything from what to wear, whom to date or marry, what stocks to invest in and how to be successful in business. Too often, however, adults do not value or seek guidance from God, even though He is always trustworthy and has provided means by which they can receive His guidance. We are wise to seek and follow God's guidance in all situations. This week's lesson encourages us to use God's GPS for our lives.

When Commands Are Clear: Obey

(1-5)

The Lord gave these instructions to Moses during the time period between completion of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:17) and the taking of the census (Num. 1:2). These instructions have to do with the celebration of Passover, the festival commemorating the mighty deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. The Lord commanded the Hebrews to mark Passover annually with a feast. The first Passover was the event itself; the second, spoken of here, was the beginning of the annual observance (the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year out of Egypt). Observing Passover at a specific time was done in obedience to an express command God gave the Israelites. Obedience was expected. Christians today, by studying the Scriptures, can find guidance for their lives through God's commands revealed in the Bible. When God's directions are clear, we are expected to follow.

When Complications Arise: Pray

(6-11a)

To break the command concerning Passover would be paramount to a denial of the Lord and contempt for His revealed will. However, a problem arose for those faithful Israelites who, for some reason, might not be able to celebrate the festival on the designated day. Some people found themselves in such a situation because they were ceremonially unclean (that is, not ritually fit for worship), hav-

ing come in contact with a dead body. Others might be on a journey and not able to participate on the appointed day.

This new situation demanded new wisdom, so Moses turned to the Lord for help.

The Lord was gracious in His reply. Anyone away from home or ritually defiled during Passover might observe a secondary Passover a month later, conforming to all the instructions of Exodus 12. This was the original celebration extended to a different time. When a situation arises for which God's guidance is unclear, we can pray for wisdom and talk with mature believers who will also seek His guidance on our behalf.

When Guidance Is Delayed: Stay

(15-19)

God's GPS is best seen in the pillar of cloud and fire that hovered over the tabernacle. (Chronologically Numbers 9:15-19 is related to Numbers 7:1 and Exodus 40:2 and is a summary of how the Israelites followed the cloud as it hovered over the tabernacle.) When the tabernacle was erected, this cloud took its position above the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:33-34). This pillar of cloud and fire remained with Israel throughout its wilderness journey (Neh. 9:19). It was the manifestation of the very presence of God, reminding people day and night that He was dwelling with them.

To the Israelites, the movement of the cloud was the commandment of the Lord. When the cloud moved on, it was God's time for the Israelites to move on. If the cloud did not move, then the people stayed in camp until it did. The presence of the Lord, seen in the cloud by day, became a fire seen at night. What this meant practically, in the daily life of the average Israelite, was waking up each morning and looking out from his or her tent to see where the cloud was. First thing, every morning, he or she had to "check in" with the Lord to learn His plans for the day. When we seek God's guidance about a situation and clear guidance is delayed in coming, we are wise to wait on the Lord and stay faithful to Him in every respect in the meantime.

Bible Studies for Life

By Joseph F. Scrivner

Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

RECEIVE GOD'S GIFT

Matthew 1:18-20, 24-25;

Luke 1:28-31, 34-38

We seldom realize how little Mary and Joseph show up in the gospels. The references to Joseph in Mark and John are minimal (John 1:45; 6:42). Mary is rarely mentioned after the opening chapters in Matthew and Luke. In fact, the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke are the only passages where Mary and Joseph play a significant role.

Confront Your Fears

(Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:28-31)

When Joseph learns of Mary's pregnancy, he understandably assumes she has been unfaithful. He fears he has been betrayed. Then an unnamed angel calls Joseph by name, commanding that he should not be afraid to marry Mary because she has been the recipient of a miraculous privilege — giving birth to humanity's Savior (Matt. 1:18-20). In Luke, it is not the possibility of betrayal that is unsettling. Rather, Gabriel's unexpected, supernatural intrusion into Mary's life rightly scares her. Yet, Gabriel also commands that she should not fear. Moreover, he tells her she has been shown God's favor (Luke 1:28-31).

These passages remind us of Matthew and Luke's point: the birth of Jesus was a world-changing event. We must resist distractions that make this appear mundane. Joseph and Mary also show us that fear itself is not necessarily the problem. Do unexpected situations cripple us? Or do we press forward in faith?

Ask Your Questions

(Luke 1:34-37)

Gabriel announces what is impossible: Mary will conceive a son before physical intimacy with Joseph. Mary justifiably questions it (Luke 1:31, 34). Gabriel responds in turn by explaining that the Holy Spirit will perform this miracle of a virgin conception in Mary, signifying the son's special status as the Son of God (v. 35): "for nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37).

This passage does not indicate disapproval of Mary's question to Gabriel. Gabriel does not rebuke her and Luke does not offer a neg-

ative assessment. This indicates that not all questions are the same. Some may be unbelieving, others may show confusion, and others may be faithful questions in light of God's character. The attitude of the questioner may be as important as the question itself.

The snake's question in the garden may be the most infamous case of an unbelieving, scoffing question: "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1). Conversely, while Job's questions to God may appear presumptuous, his outcry is rooted in an appeal to God's justice and God ultimately praises him (Job 42:7).

Jesus also responds differently based on the questioner's posture. When John the Baptist sends a sincere question, Jesus answers with encouragement (Matt. 11:2-6). When he discerns duplicity from religious leaders, he turns the table in judgment (Matt. 22:15-46).

These examples show us that we can give ourselves and others room for honest questions. Christians are often too quick to condemn questions. Sometimes this is particularly so when they come from outsiders or naïve believers. Likewise, we should be very careful about self-condemnation when we are unsure or afraid. We should remind ourselves that sometimes it is appropriate to repeat the words uttered by that father to Jesus, "I do believe! Help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Let us err on the side of patience when confronted by sincere uncertainty, whether from others or ourselves.

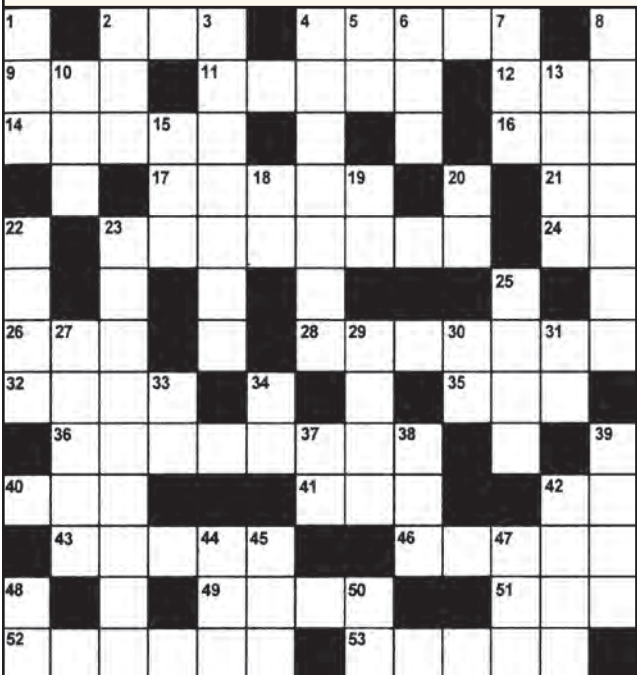
Obey in Faith

(Matt. 1:24-25; Luke 1:38)

Joseph awakens from his dream and quietly follows the angel's directions (Matt. 1:24-25). While he did not know God's long-term plans, he knew enough for the next steps (Matt. 2:13-15). His obedience shows his faith. Mary declares her faith by offering herself for God's plan (Luke 1:38; Gen. 22:1; Isaiah 6:8). Her words are followed by action as she visits Elizabeth, expecting fulfillment of a previous promise (Luke 1:39-45). These faithful responses indicate that it is often enough to simply take the next step of faith. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Christian Crossword

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- Across**
2. Behold, it ____ very good. (Gen. 1:31)
4. Thou and thy house shall be _____. (Acts 11:14)
9. Sound of sudden enlightenment.
11. Long-legged bird.
12. Before. (poetic)
14. West African river.
16. The beast ... shall make ____ against them. (Rev. 11:7)
17. Peels.
21. Intravenous. (abbr.)
23. My ____ ye shall keep. (Ex. 31:13)
24. Yes. (Russian)
26. Love worketh no ____ to his neighbor. (Rom. 13:10)
28. She bound the ____ line in the window. (Josh. 2:21)
32. A type of star.
35. ____ ye drink of the cup that I drink of? (Mark 10:38)
36. ____ them through thy truth. (John 17:17)

40. To ____ at liberty them that are bruised. (Luke 4:18)
41. The price set by a professional person.
42. ____ and fro.
43. I have sinned ... and in thy _____. (Luke 15:21)
46. Them also which ____ in Jesus. (1 Thess. 4:14)
49. Israel ... had made a great _____. (Judg. 21:5)
51. Elevated trains.
52. God be merciful to me a _____. (Luke 18:13)
53. They had a few ____ fishes. (Mark 8:7)
- Down**
1. A prohibition.
2. Every one that passeth by shall ____ his head. (Jer. 18:16)
3. The pen of the ____ is in vain. (Jer. 8:8)
4. Gird thyself, and bind on thy _____. (Acts 12:8)
5. Sent ____ angel and brought us out of Egypt. (Num. 20:16)
6. ____ certain of the church. (Acts 12:1)
7. God give thee of the ____ of heaven. (Gen. 27:28)
8. O thou wicked _____. (Matt. 18:32)
10. Let ____ that readeth understand. (Mark 13:14)
13. A sudden attack.
15. Equal Rights Amendment. (abbr.)
18. New Brunswick. (abbr.)
19. Saint. (abbr.)
20. There ____ none good but one. (Mark 10:18)
22. Use not ____ repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
23. Thou art the God of my _____. (Ps. 25:5)
25. The revenger of blood ... shall ____ the murderer. (Num. 35:19)
27. Doesn't win.
29. Sidewalk ____.
30. Royal Canadian. (abbr.)
31. Printer's measure.
33. I will be ____ enemy unto thine enemies. (Ex. 23:22)
34. How is ____ that ye are come so soon? (Ex. 2:18)
37. ____ now I have found favor in thy sight. (Gen. 18:3)
38. Yea.
39. The ____ of the mountains seen. (Gen. 8:5)
42. ____ John what things ye have seen. (Luke 7:22)
44. Tool for weeding.
45. ____ and feathers.
47. Snake-like fish.
48. This ____ the way. (Isa. 30:21)
50. High School. (abbr.)



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services

At least 45 Christians killed in north-central Nigeria

BARKIN LADI, Nigeria — Fulani Muslim herdsman along with Muslim soldiers have killed at least 45 ethnic Berom Christians in Plateau state in a week, Christians in this north-central Nigerian town said.

Smaller attacks beginning Nov. 20, reportedly over allegations by Fulani Muslims of cattle theft, preceded an attack on a Barkin Ladi church Nov. 23 that killed four Christians, and an assault the next day left 35 Christians dead in Barkin Ladi and nearby Kwok village, according to area Christian leaders.

Attendance at church services was decimated Nov. 27 as thousands of Christians have left the area. In the attack on Nov. 24, the Fulani Muslims were shouting "Allahu Akbar," which means "God is greater," said farmer Choji Pamjamo, 51.

David Gyang, 51, an elder for the Church of Christ in Nigeria Barkin Ladi church, said Muslims set off a religious crisis by attacking Christians at the church site the night of Nov. 23 and then launching the major offensive the next morning. "Some of the Christian victims in this attack that I know include a Christian police officer, one Mr. Bulus, who is the station officer of the Barkin Ladi police station," Gyang said.

"He was inside his house on that day, and these Muslims broke the walls of his room and went inside to kill him and his son." Sources said that along with 26 Christians killed in Kwok village, nine were killed in the attack on Barkin Ladi.

The area attacks on Christians began Nov. 20 with the killing of three Christians outside Barkin Ladi, and then two Christians in the town were killed Nov. 21. The next day, a Christian was beheaded behind a popular hotel in the town known as the White House, sources said.

Nepali Christians attacked as constitution deadline nears

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Two years after an explosion shook one of the biggest Catholic churches in Nepal and killed three people, the underground group that orchestrated the attack claimed responsibility for another bomb blast in November.

A crude bomb went off Nov. 22 in front of the office of the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), a leading Christian charitable organization in Kathmandu. There were no casualties, but on the same day in the northeastern district of Sindhupalchowk, local residents of the predominantly Buddhist village of Danchhe assaulted two brothers for leading worship services at their home, leaving one unconscious. Panchman Tamang, 45, and his older brother Budhiman were attacked by a mob with daggers and wooden batons. As Budhiman was bleeding profusely, the attackers left him for dead. At the site of the UMN blast, police found leaflets asserting that the majority population in Nepal was Hindu and that therefore it should be a Hindu state.

Meanwhile, for the fourth time the government has extended by six months the deadline for putting forth a new constitution, which was due Nov. 30. A draft of the document says that though people would have the freedom to follow any religion, conversions would be prohibited. "With conversions still deemed a crime in the suggested constitution, we feel that the draft retains the bias toward Christians," said Chandra Shrestha, pastor of the Nepali Evangelical Church in Bhaktapur Shrestha. "This is a direct violation of our fundamental right to practice whatever religion we want."

New rules outline religious censorship in Kazakhstan

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Kazakhstan's state Agency of Religious Affairs (ARA) has prepared — but not yet adopted — the new rules to implement the system of compulsory state censorship of almost all religious literature and objects. The rules for "expert analyses" will also apply to religious organizations' statutes.

Without such ARA approval, religious books cannot be imported (apart from in small quantities) or distributed and religious organizations will not be able to gain state registration.

The draft rules make no provisions for any challenges to ARA's censorship decisions. The draft rules were presented to a closed Oct. 27 meeting of about 20 senior government officials to devise plans for implementing that month's harsh new religion law. No one at the ARA was prepared to discuss the censorship rules with Forum 18 News Service or when they might be adopted.



SBC Representatives Around the World

I'm moving to Angeles city. I'm helping my friend Erwin with a new church plant he's starting there.

I'd like to give you a little more information regarding some of the circumstances God has orchestrated over the past few months.

In June (the start of the school year in the Philippines), I stopped regularly visiting Far Eastern University for the first time since I first began ministry here in 2002. Getting inside without an "official" purpose was becoming impossible. Years ago, I could just walk in past the guards. Now it is a process that requires signing in, signing out, etc. I've also had to be a lot more careful about highly visible ways of evangelism, such as opening a Bible or passing out tracts. In other words, the campus closed to ministry.

July was kind of a blur. I was still wrestling with my call. I knew God wanted me here in the Philippines, but I was not sure what the long-term plan was. Thoughts of pastoring, church planting and moving were on my mind. I prayed about a few of the opportunities I knew about, but nothing specific really stood out as a directive from God.

In August, two very significant events happened. The first issue was the rent drama. The building management asked me to sign a ridiculous lease. It included a 10 percent increase in rent and thousands of pesos in additional security deposits (over \$1,000 in U.S. currency). This had me rethinking everything.

Then Universidad de Manila shut down to ministry.

I visited Erwin and family the last weekend of September. Moving to Angeles City was the last thing on my mind when I went there but God had other plans. I worshiped with his fledgling congregation that Sunday evening. God put some really strong impressions in my heart about my future there.

Plans to move were in full force

by October, and God continually confirmed everything He was saying in my heart.

This verse neatly summarizes the activity of God in my life over the past few months: "What He opens, no one can shut; and what He shuts, no one can open" (Rev. 3:7).

What has happened makes me all the more thankful for the doors the Lord opened these first nine years here: incredible mentors, access to campuses, financial provision for rent, etc. He has now sovereignly chosen to close some of these doors. He's still at work on these campuses, but for now, He wants to do it a different way.

Kevin Sanders
Angeles, Philippines

During this school year, David and Jennifer are serving as missionaries-in-residence at Union University in Jackson, Tenn. We have enjoyed meeting the young people attending the university from which Blair graduated. We have participated in many events, like GO Week, which is the missions emphasis week at Union, and have had an open house for those we have met at the college. We were invited to attend a luncheon for the Union Auxiliary and also attended some of the King James Version 400-year celebrations at Union. We feel very fortunate to be able to participate in these events as well as attend many of the churches in the area. We love hearing the music and great messages offered at Union and in the churches. During the spring semester, we've been asked to teach the survey of missions class, and we appreciate the opportunity to serve in this way. It has been interesting preparing for the class.

Pray for David and Jennifer as they prepare to teach at Union. Pray that they will be mentors for every student in the class.

Many of our missionary colleagues are facing difficult times because of the economic downturn. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will provide for all their needs. Pray that churches will continue to give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Cooperative Program so those He has called can go where He leads.

Thank you for giving so generously and for praying so faithfully. Our family would not be able to do the work we do without the support of each of you.

David, Jennifer, Blair, Jenna and Anika Hoglen
Brussels, Belgium

Thank you for sending us to serve in Madrid, Spain. Your giving to the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering allows us to live here and show the love of Jesus to the 3 million Latin American immigrants living in Spain. We are profoundly grateful for your support through your prayers and giving.

In October, our team celebrated the one-year anniversary of a house church, which began as a weekly Bible study with three women. Through this time in the Word, God began a healing process in all three of these ladies, and they each gave their lives to Christ. One lady began sharing what Christ had done in her life with her co-workers and friends. They saw the change in her life and were interested to hear more about Jesus. She prayed for them and invited them to come with her to the Bible study. First her best friend came to Christ. This friend then brought her sister, who, in turn, brought her friend. All of them came to faith in Jesus Christ and began studying the Bible. The group quickly grew from three to 14.

Gary, Julie and Matthew Clifton
Madrid, Spain

Mass held in abandoned church after Turkey earthquake

Just hours before a deadly 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck Turkey's southeast Oct. 23, well over 3,000 visitors crowded into an ancient Armenian cathedral in nearby Diyarbakir for Sunday Mass.

The Mass was the first worship service in decades in the ancient St. Giragos Armenian Apostolic Church, which had fallen into serious disrepair in the early 1980s.

Built 350 years ago and still the largest Armenian church building in the Middle East, it once served as the metropolitan cathedral of Diyarbakir. In a private ceremony the following day, 10 ethnic Armenians who had been raised as Sunni Muslims were baptized as Christians in the restored sanctuary. St. Giragos was virtually

abandoned after the massacre and deportation of its congregants in 1915. The building was confiscated during World War I as a headquarters for German army officers, used for a time as a stable and later turned into a cotton warehouse in the 1960s.

According to Taraf newspaper columnist Markar Esayan, the church building was still intact until 1980, after which "because of hate ... in modern times" it was attacked, looted and fell into disrepair, with just the walls and arched columns remaining. Costing \$3.5 million, the church's two-year restoration project was funded largely by Armenian donations from Istanbul and abroad, although a third of the costs were donated by the Diyarbakir municipality.

At the conclusion of the Sunday Mass, Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir addressed the congregation, declaring first in Armenian, and then Kurdish, Turkish, English and Arabic: "Welcome to your home. You are not guests here; this is your home." (CDN)

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'The Total Package' finds God

Pro-wrestler Luger shares faith journey, gives God glory

Lex Luger — also known as “The Total Package” and “The Narcissist” — gained worldwide fame as a pro wrestling champion. He stood at 6-feet 4-inches tall, weighed 265 pounds and had a 32-inch waist. His muscles were like polished steel and his perfectly sculptured body added to the wrestling mania that had gripped the nation. His wrestling persona was designed to thrill his fans. His accomplishments in the ring are legendary.

For the last five and a half years, he's also been a Christian, learning and growing more each day. God, he says, has helped him “get rid of the last remnant of that vanity and pride” that was the emblem of his ring persona.

Born in 1958, Luger played professional football in the Canadian Football League and the now-defunct U.S. Football League before beginning his wrestling career. He did not have the privilege of growing up in a Christian home. He never went to church, but grew up chasing fame on a track that included drugs, alcohol and women.

“My life was a train wreck,” Luger admitted. “I was burning the candle at both ends. I had a beautiful wife, Peggy, and two wonderful children, Brian and Lauren. But I was living one life on the road and another life at home.

“I was making millions of dollars and had a lot of fancy stuff — cars, clothes, baubles — and never realized why I wasn't satisfied.

“I had a home with my wife and children on the ninth green of the Sugarloaf Country Club in Duluth and a townhouse with my girlfriend in Marietta,” he said. “Sometimes when you think you've got a grip on life, you really don't. The people I thought were friends were users and abusers.

“In 2003 my girlfriend, Elizabeth, died in my arms of an overdose of drugs. I was arrested later that day after a search of the townhouse revealed a number of illicit controlled substances.”

The next day Luger was released on \$27,500 bail. Elizabeth's death was ruled accidental. Luger pleaded guilty to the drug charges and was sentenced to five years probation.

“I violated probation on numerous occasions,” he said. “I was caught for reckless driving, continued to drink alcohol and abuse drugs, but somehow God protected me even though I ignored Him.”

In August 2005 he had a nightmare in his hotel room. He recalled of the dream, “I ended up in the bottom of a pond, asking myself, ‘Is



BP photo

BOLDLY SHARING — Lex Luger (left) stands with Marvin ‘Doc’ Frady, who has become a mentor to the former professional wrestler. ‘I have watched him grow in the Lord, memorize the Word of God and boldly share his faith,’ Frady said.

this all there is?’ I was on drugs at the time and actually think I died and slipped into eternity for a few moments. Suddenly, I sat up, looked up and saw a little spark — a little white light. I was enveloped in darkness, in hell, but sensed that God loved me enough to give me that speck of light.

“When I awoke, I reached for the Bible in that room, but it opened to the genealogies in the book of Genesis. When I saw all those unfamiliar names, I concluded that the answer was not in the Bible and threw it against the wall. Although I didn't understand what was happening, that was the moment of a spiritual awakening for me.”

In the latter part of that year Luger decided to make a comeback in Winnipeg, Manitoba. However, he and two fellow wrestlers were removed from a flight from Minneapolis to Winnipeg and he was held without bond due to his outstanding felony charges and failing to obtain permission to leave the country from his parole officer. After remaining in the Hennepin County (Minn.) jail for two weeks, he was extradited to

Georgia to stand trial. Luger was sentenced to three months in the Cobb County jail where he began to receive visits from Steve Baskin, a Baptist pastor in Kennesaw. But Luger wasn't interested in talking.

Then Baskin started smuggling small containers of peanut butter to Luger, who claimed he was always hungry. Luger also knew that the only way to get out of the “pod” was to see the pastor/chaplain. He started accepting Baskin's visits, and a relationship ensued.

By March of 2006 Luger was released from the jail. One day he hap-

pened to meet Baskin at Gold's Gym and the preacher asked Luger to help him get into shape, to become his physical trainer. Luger said he thought to himself, “I will give him a workout he will never forget.”

Luger's idea of an impossible workout schedule for Baskin didn't work. Baskin kept coming back for more. “Steve started taking me to all kinds of places — to places like Golden Corral and Wal-Mart,” Luger said.

Gospel tracts

“He also started giving me books to read like Josh McDowell's ‘Answers to Tough Questions.’ He would leave gospel tracts in his car, and when he would go into a store I would read those tracts.

“Then on April 16, 2006, he talked me into going to church on a Sunday night. I went to Clarkdale First Baptist Church and heard Pastor Marvin ‘Doc’ Frady preach on Matthew 7:24-29.

“I went back to my room — the same room where I had that nightmare — and Doc's message was churning in my heart. Steve came and explained God's plan of salvation. I got on my knees and prayed and asked God to forgive me and save me.

“I never felt stronger. I felt a power inside of me that I interpreted as the power of the Holy Spirit.”

“Doc” Frady has become Luger's mentor and spiritual father. They meet regularly to study the Bible and pray. “People told me that he would be back in jail in six months, but it has been more than five years and he is as solid as a rock. I wouldn't be afraid to have him speak anywhere as a representative of Christ,” Frady said.

“The Total Package” has been unwrapped and rewrapped by the transforming power of Christ. “It's been an incredible five-and-a-half years, but I have learned that God is with us through whatever challenges we face.” (BP)

“I felt a power inside of me that I interpreted as the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Lex Luger
Former professional wrestler

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Churches part of ‘Move Our Money’ from big banks

WASHINGTON — A small but growing number of religious communities across the country are removing their money from Wall Street banks to protest what they see as unfair mortgage foreclosures and unwillingness to lend to small businesses.

The New Bottom Line coalition of congregations, community organizations, labor unions and individuals is promoting a “Move Our Money” campaign with the goal of shifting \$1 billion from big banks to community banks and credit unions.

The Move Our Money website reports that \$55 million had been moved as part of the campaign as of Nov. 28, but that figure pales in comparison to the big banks' trillions in total assets.

The campaign singles out Bank of America, Wells Fargo and JPMorgan Chase for not doing enough to provide home loan modifications to help guard against foreclosure; cramping down on small business lending; and escaping federal taxes by parking assets overseas, even after each bank received billions of taxpayer dollars in federal bailouts. The Credit Union National Association reported that 700,000 people joined credit unions nationwide in the month before Bank Transfer Day — more than the 600,000 who joined in all of 2010. The Bank Transfer Day movement, a popular movement that called for people to move their money from banks to credit unions on Nov. 5, claims credit for this uptick.

Charitable giving slightly up after recession decline

INDIANAPOLIS — Charitable giving is trickling back up as the economy heals, but it could take years to return to pre-recession levels, nonprofit leaders say. Giving totaled \$291 billion in 2010, according to the 2011 annual report by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. That's up 3.8 percent from 2009 and follows two consecutive years of declines. This year shows little change. Charity Navigator, a Glen Rock, N.J., organization that evaluates nonprofits, anticipates donations will be flat during the holiday season.

About 35 percent of nonprofit contributions come from state, federal and local government grants and contracts, and those gifts are declining, CEO Ken Berger said. Only 15 percent is from individuals.

“Staying the same is generally not a great place to be when you've got increases in demand and operational costs because of inflation and so on,” said Patrick Rooney, executive director of the Center on Philanthropy. If the recuperation continues at its current rate, it will take U.S. charities six years to return to where they were financially in 2007, Rooney warns. “We are not out of the recession, and we are not recovered from the recession.”

NCC general secretary Michael Kinnamon steps down

WASHINGTON — The National Council of Churches (NCC) announced Nov. 9 that General Secretary Michael Kinnamon is resigning due to health reasons.

Kinnamon, 63, told the ecumenical group's governing board that he must “immediately and significantly” reduce his activity, especially the frequent travel required by the job, under the advice of his cardiologist. A minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kinnamon was elected to lead the New York-based NCC in 2007, amid staff layoffs and budget cuts. NCC President Peg Chamberlain said in a statement that “Kinnamon's announcement comes at a challenging time for the life of the council but we're encouraged that Michael is willing to work with us on this important transition.”

The financial and membership declines of the mainline Protestant churches that form the backbone of the NCC have forced the ecumenical group to reduce programs and staff in recent years.

Study on women links optimism to religious services

NEW YORK — A new study in the *Journal of Religion and Health* suggests that — at least for some women of a certain age — there's a link between optimism and attendance at religious services. “We looked at the religious practices of nearly 100,000 women and — like it or not — found a strong connection between going to church or synagogue or any other house of worship and a positive outlook on life,” said Eliezer Schnall, clinical associate professor of psychology at Yeshiva University in New York.

Those who attended services frequently were 56 percent more likely to have an optimistic outlook than those who did not, and were 27 percent less likely to be depressed, according to the study.

Schnall's research, which focused on post-menopausal women, is far from the first to associate church attendance and happiness. But it cements previous work that seems to show that those who engage in communal religious services are better able to cope in life.