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Christian perspective

Most churches to hold Christmas Day services despite conflicting opinions among Americans

While nine in 10 pastors plan for their churches to host Christmas Day services this year, there may be plenty of space in the pews for those who actually attend.

A recent LifeWay Research study of 1,000 Protestant pastors shows that 91 percent of Protestant pastors plan to have services on Christmas Day while 69 percent said they plan to host Christmas Eve services.

"Having church on Christmas Day when it falls on a Sunday seems as if it would be as much of a given as having Thanksgiving on a Thursday, but this has been an issue of discussion and contention in recent years," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research.

"Also just because an overwhelming majority of pastors think that way doesn't mean those in their congregations necessarily share their perspective."

According to a December 2010 LifeWay Research report, 74 percent of Americans agree (strongly or somewhat) that "Christmas is primarily a day for religious celebration and observance," yet 67 percent of all Americans also agree that "Many of the things I enjoy during the Christmas season have nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ."

"Churches see these conflicting values, and we wanted to know how many churches plan to conduct services on each day — since that is also such a family day, particularly the morning," Stetzer said.

Pastors were asked, "Christmas and New Year's Day both fall on Sunday this year. As a result, does your church plan to have services on the following days: Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day?"

Six percent of Protestant churches plan to have a Christmas Eve service but no service on Christmas Day. Twenty-eight percent plan to have a Christmas Day service but no service on Christmas Eve.

Almost two-thirds (63 percent) plan to host both Christmas



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Eve and Christmas Day services.

Protestant pastors in the South are the least likely (62 percent) to host a Christmas Eve service compared to other regions.

Full-time (71 percent) and part-time (74 percent) pastors are more likely to be planning a Christmas Eve service than bivocational or volunteer (53 percent) pastors. Pastors identifying themselves as mainline (87 percent) are more likely to have a service on Christmas Eve compared to those identifying themselves as evangelical (70 percent).

New Year's Day, too

Nearly as many Protestant pastors plan to host services on New Year's Day (88 percent) as Christmas Day (91 percent).

Far fewer are planning New Year's Eve services. By comparison, only 26 percent said they are planning for their church to host a Dec. 31 meeting.

In Alabama, an informal survey of 225 people by *The Alabama Baptist* found that 41.7 percent of them are in churches that will hold a Christmas Eve service, while 96.9 percent of those same churches will hold a Christmas Day service. Of those same churches, only 6.9 percent will hold a New Year's Eve service, while 95.1 percent will hold a New Year's Day service. (LifeWay, TAB)

Christmas season church services in Alabama

The Alabama Baptist conducted an informal survey through SurveyMonkey to which 225 people responded over a five-day period. The following information came from the survey.

Those planning to hold a service:

Christmas Eve — 41.7%
Christmas Day — 96.9%
New Year's Eve — 6.9%
New Year's Day — 95.1%

The majority of those holding Christmas Eve services are planning a candlelight and/or Communion service. Several also mentioned lighting the Christ candle in the Advent wreath, Christmas carols, the reading of Luke 2, a short sermon or devotion, a come-and-go Communion or an emphasis on the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. One church is having an identical service Christmas Eve and Christmas morning so members can choose.

The majority of those holding Christmas Day services plan to hold one worship service and no other activities. A small percentage does plan to keep the normal Sunday routine.

For both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, a large majority believes about a quarter of those in attendance will be guests.

The majority of those holding New Year's Day services plan to follow the normal Sunday routine, but a good number do plan to make some adjustments to the schedule such as holding only one worship service, not having Sunday School/Bible study or not holding an evening service.

COMMENT

Looking at the Value of STMs

Fifty years ago, STMs were unheard of; today they are commonplace. STM is the abbreviation for “short-term missions.” Most STMs are two weeks in duration or shorter, but they can last up to one year. Churches of every size and description regularly sponsor STMs to the most distant parts of the globe.

A report released earlier this year by Dennis Horton, associate professor of religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, found that in 1965, only 540 U.S. Christians took part in a missions trip lasting a year or less. Now that number has swelled to more than 1.5 million.

Horton’s finding is consistent with a study done by Kurt Ver Beek, assistant professor of sociology at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. Ver Beek’s study charted the rise in STM participants from 120,000 in 1989 to 450,000 in 1998 to 1 million in 2003 and a high of 2.2 million in 2006.

With STMs’ growing popularity and the elapsed time over which they have been held, it was inevitable that they would be scrutinized to evaluate their effectiveness as well as their impact on participants. Horton and Ver Beek both offer important findings that Alabama Baptists should note.

Horton concluded, for example, that with proper follow-up, students who participate in STMs tend to have lower levels of materialism, greater appreciation for other cultures and a better understanding of missions as a lifestyle.

Simply participating in a STM does not produce these outcomes, Horton emphasized. Long-term involvement is where transformation takes place. He said sponsoring groups must do follow-up to help missions team members incorporate what they have learned and experienced on their trips into patterns of daily living.

Follow-up must be coupled with appropriate preplanning and on-site mentoring to interpret what participants experience if STMs are to be anything more than “spiritual tourism” in which participants travel to an exotic place, take a myriad of photos and return to their home environments as well as pre-trip behaviors and routines.

Preplanning includes selecting volunteers who are already involved in local ministries where they learn about helping others. As one writer put it, “Simply wanting to go and coming up with the money is not sufficient to qualify somebody to join a (short-term missions) team.”

Most Baptists have heard reports of the “mountaintop spiritual experiences” from those who participated in STMs. But without proper preplanning, on-site mentoring and yearlong follow-up to translate the experience into a life-changing event,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Horton said, “Studies show little difference between those who have participated in short-term missions trips and Christians who have not.”

That conclusion challenges the oft-repeated statements that STMs result in more missions giving by participants and sending churches, serve as a recruitment tool for career missionaries and produce profound cross-cultural relationships.

Challenging the assertions

Ver Beek’s study challenges all three assertions. His study found no significant increase in long-term missions giving for either the team members or the sending churches. While acknowledging anecdotal accounts of God’s call to missions service during a STM, he pointed to the stable number of career missionaries despite the explosion in STM volunteers as evidence challenging the important role of STM as a precursor for a missions calling.

As for cross-cultural relationships, Ver Beek found, “The reality is that only a small percentage of STM team members ever have any contact — at all — with their new ‘friends’ after the trip ends.”

None of this lessens STMs’ importance. It is important for people to touch, taste and experience missions firsthand. The findings simply affirm that visiting a place, even doing a project in that place, is not sufficient to change one’s life. A church must do much more than sponsor a trip if the value of STMs is to be realized by the volunteers and those they serve.

Both Ver Beek and Horton agree on STMs’ financial impact. Ver Beek reported Americans spent \$1.6 billion in 2006 on STMs. Horton placed the number for 2010 at \$2 billion. That is a lot of money. It is 10 times the Southern Baptist Convention’s Cooperative Program (CP) receipts for 2010–11. It is almost six times the money spent by the International Mission Board for the last year of record.

Some argue this is all new missions money, that those who paid for participation in STMs would not have given the money through regular giving channels to support denominational missions and ministries. Perhaps. But a growing number of churches are cutting back CP giving in order to provide scholarships to some members who want to participate in a STM.

If the \$2 billion is all new missions money, then, certainly, Southern Baptists and others are investing much more than what their denominations report as funds to support international missions.

The huge investment in STMs is causing some people to ask if funds could be better spent. An example cited in the book “When Helping Hurts” compared the cost of a STM to Africa with the cost of supporting a national evangelist who traveled the continent sharing Christ. The African received a \$1,200 salary, a mountain bike (\$250) and a backpack, team shirt and bedroll (\$90). The \$1,540 supported a national evangelist who spoke the languages and knew the cultures for a full year while the cost of a STM volunteer for two weeks was far more than \$1,540.

It is true that with improved communications, partnerships between churches in the United States and other parts of the world will take on different characteristics in the future. There will be more collaboration between partners, more emphasis on providing resources and more exchange of information. But there will always be going.

STMs are not just about the national partner’s needs. STMs are also about helping U.S. Christians touch, taste and experience missions, and there is no substitute for that. Recognizing Western Christians need for STMs changes the dynamics from an over-under relationship where the Westerners are doing something for the nationals to an equal partnership where each learns from the other.

Neither Horton’s nor Ver Beek’s study was solely about Southern Baptists. Both were about Christians in the United States including Southern Baptists. But both have much to say to us and demonstrate that when done correctly, STMs can help lower commitment to materialism, create a more sensitive appreciation of others and spur participants to a lifestyle of missional living.

If only for what they can do for us, then STMs are a worthwhile part of any church’s missions program.

Letters to the Editor

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“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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Australian pastor loses church over 'marriage' issue

LILYDALE, Australia — An Australian Baptist pastor and his congregation have parted company over the issue of gay "marriage."

Matt Glover, pastor of Lilydale Baptist Church, said recently on a marriage-equality website that allowing same-sex "marriages" would benefit marriage as an institution: "When a couple want to be part of the institution of marriage, when they fully accept the same rights and responsibilities of marriage and treat marriage with the respect it deserves, why should they NOT get married?" he asked. "As a Christian minister, I believe that marriage is under threat from many angles, but also believe that recognizing same-sex unions will help return marriage to its rightful place in society."

That prompted two months of congregational turmoil that ended with a closed-door meeting that the pastor was not invited to attend, the *Victoria Age* reported Dec. 6. Church leaders told the newspaper that Glover is no longer senior pastor but the congregation was instructed not to comment.

Glover said earlier that he didn't know if his ministry there would survive the controversy. "I have a young family," he said in a Nov. 27 article about an earlier meeting to decide his future that was cancelled. "I've wondered whether I can survive this because of the wounds and the mistrust it creates."

Glover has worked with gays and lesbians for about 15 years. He said church members knew that when they hired him.

Southwestern Seminary opens new chapel

FORT WORTH, Texas — Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary opened its new 3,500-seat chapel with a daylong celebration Dec. 1, including a ribbon-cutting, dedication chapel service, baptisms and a free Christmas concert. The J.W. MacGorman Chapel and Performing Arts Center is the largest venue of its kind in Fort Worth.

The 96,000-square-foot complex will serve as the setting for the seminary's weekly chapel services, as well as graduation ceremonies, musical performances, conferences and other special events. Beginning in July 2012, it will also house the "Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible" exhibition.

Alongside its excellent acoustics, the auditorium features state-of-the-art sound, video and lighting systems, as well as a combination pipe-digital organ that can support congregational worship as well as large choral and instrumental ensembles. The main stage is large enough for a 90-piece orchestra and 200-voice choir. Two projection screens are mounted on each side of the stage, each one equivalent to a 330-inch television. Behind the stage, choir and orchestra rehearsal rooms provide space for musicians to prepare, and a hospitality suite offers a reception area for intermissions and private gatherings.

Baylor professor fights dismissal charges

WACO, Texas — A Baylor University professor is fighting dismissal charges that supporters say are aimed at silencing a dissident voice in America's Jewish community.

According to published reports, Marc Ellis, university professor of Jewish studies and director of Baylor's Center for Jewish Studies, said during a Nov. 21 speech to the American Academy of Religion he has become a victim of "selectively enforced" policies regarding practices that are routinely overlooked.

Ellis, an expert in Holocaust studies and liberation theology, said former Baylor presidents defended his outspoken opposition to U.S. and Israeli policy toward Palestinians. He claimed current Baylor president and former Bill Clinton prosecutor Kenneth Starr was personally involved in efforts to fire him, a charge denied by Baylor spokeswoman Lori Fogleman.

CP contributions 11.14 percent below last year

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee are 11.14 percent below the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank Page. The total includes receipts from state conventions and fellowships, churches and individuals for distribution according to the 2011-12 SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget.

As of Nov. 30, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget totaled \$28,427,727.02, or \$3,563,526.89 behind the \$31,991,253.91 received at the end of November 2010.

November's CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$13,846,198.10.

Andalusia's Hopewell Baptist sends 40 members on 15 missions trips in 10 years

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

How did a small, rural church outside Andalusia send 40 members on 15 missions trips to 12 countries in the past 10 years?

Most folks at Hopewell Baptist Church would bring up Phyllis Walters' testimony.

Before 2001, no one at the Covington Baptist Association church had ever gone on a missions trip. But that year, Walters' uncle invited her to take part in a missions trip to Honduras. There she helped cook meals for a church construction crew from Georgia and Florida. The trip, and what she saw God do, set her on fire spiritually.

"When Phyllis returned, I asked her to share a testimony from her missions trip," Pastor Barry Wilkinson said. "Her testimony got people excited, and it also convicted other members to go on missions trips."

Not long after Walters gave her testimony, four church members participated in an Alabama Baptist partnership missions trip to Venezuela. They returned and shared their experiences. Soon other members signed up for missions trips. They shared their testimonies, which prompted more members to go.

In fact, in the past 10 years, Hopewell Baptist members have done short-term missions in Honduras, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Poland, China, Uganda, Zambia, Japan, Panama, Ukraine and Haiti. A group will return to Haiti in early 2012.

Jan Gager, a church member and nurse, went to Ecuador for the first time in 2003 on a medical missions trip. Since then, she has gone back three times, doing both medical and English as a Second Language ministries.

"God has given me a heart for the people of Ecuador," Gager said. "I am amazed how God has used me."

Tara Bulger stepped out of her comfort zone to go to Haiti, where she taught Bible studies to women. Before this trip, Bulger had never been away from her preschooler, flown on an airplane or been outside the United States.

"I'm quite the homebody," she explained. "A small-group study



Photo courtesy of Tara Bulger

STEPPING OUT — Hopewell Baptist Church, Andalusia, member Tara Bulger ministers to children of Children's Hope Orphanage in Haiti.

of the book 'Radical' made me aware I needed to do something for others. I prayed and prayed about going to Haiti, and God gave me the courage to go. And I didn't get homesick."

'Operating by faith'

Glen Walters has participated in several missions trips to Honduras and Haiti to work on construction projects. He has helped build a Christian radio station, housing at a Christian camp, a missionary house and churches.

"On a trip to Honduras, I was a crew leader with one missions trip under my belt. We had no interpreter, no place to stay, and we endured a long bus ride to our work site.

We really were operating by faith," he said. "But God provided everything we needed. Even the pilot of our plane helped us find a hotel to stay in."

So why do so many church members keep going on missions trips?

Longtime members Marcus and Joyce Godwin credit Wilkinson's leadership and, of course, God's direction.

"When I came to this church, I never imagined we would see God taking us in this direction," Joyce Godwin said.

Lori Foreman, who grew up in the church, said, "It's been incredible to see our church's missions journey. We now view ourselves as a missions control center."



Photo courtesy of New Hope No. 2 Baptist Church

HOLLY POND'S NEW HOPE NO. 2 HOLDS NOTE BURNING

New Hope No. 2 Baptist Church, near Holly Pond, holds a note burning service Nov. 29 in celebration of paying off its building debt with treasurer/trustee Donald Gunter (front) and (l to r) deacon Chuck Marcella, deacon/trustee Billy Shikle and trustee Bob Duren.

CORRECTION

In the "Cahaba, Hale associations partner to help rebuild homes" article in the Dec. 1 issue, Grady Montz's name was misspelled. The article also indicated the homes of Butch and Sue Hardy and Kenny and Carol Leavelle only needed repairing, but they also had to be rebuilt.

Americans have mixed impressions of Southern Baptists

The majority of Americans have a favorable impression of Southern Baptists, according to a recent LifeWay Research study. However, 40 percent of respondents have an unfavorable view of the denomination, more than a third strongly assume a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) church is not for them, and the negativity is higher among the unchurched.

The study was conducted in September 2011 after the president of the SBC appointed a task force to consider a possible name change for the 166-year-old convention. The study indicates a segment of Americans have unfavorable opinions of Southern Baptists in comparison to other faith groups. However, with 53 percent being favorable toward Southern Baptists (including 15 percent very favorable), both sides need to be considered, said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research.

"On one hand it does look like the SBC has higher negatives than other faith groups — and the unchurched numbers are particularly disconcerting," Stetzer said.

"But on the other, most people don't seem to be concerned either way because there is a level of indifference to denominations or religion in general."

In fact, two-thirds of Americans are without strong feelings in regards to all the Christian faith groups included in the survey with a third or less either very favorable or very unfavorable to them.

Impact of the name

Respondents were shown the names of five "denominations or faith groups" and asked to "indicate if your impression is very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or you are not familiar enough to form an opinion." The study indicates 62 percent of Americans have a favorable view of Methodists compared to 59 percent for Catholics, 53 percent for Southern Baptists, 37

percent for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and 28 percent for Muslims.

The study sought to determine how the name might impact the interest or connection with a congregation. When asked their level of agreement with the statement, "When I see (fill in denominational affiliation) in the name of a church, I assume it is not for me," 35 percent "strongly agree" a Southern Baptist church is not for them — higher than for Catholics (33 percent), Baptists (29 percent), Methodists (26 percent), and community or nondenominational churches (20 percent).

Significantly more respondents disagree with this statement for community or nondenominational churches, indicating they are considered as a possible fit compared to other Christian faith groups included in the survey — 58 percent compared to Baptists, 44 percent; Catholics, 43 percent; Methodists, 42 percent; and Southern Baptists, 38 percent.

This positive reaction to community or nondenominational churches reflects other recent LifeWay Research analysis that showed growth among nondenominational churches while Southern Baptists are trending in a membership decline.

Respondents were also asked: "If you were considering visiting or joining a church, would knowing that the church was Southern Baptist impact your decision positively, negatively or have no impact?"

Forty-four percent of Americans indicate that knowing a church is Southern Baptist would negatively impact their decision to visit or join the church, 36 percent say it would have no impact and 10 percent say it would positively impact their decision. "The negative impact numbers concern me most," Stetzer said. "Knowing a church is SBC would make four out of 10 Americans less likely to visit and join — and many of those are the unchurched."

"The study did not explore why some respondents hold a negative

view of Southern Baptists," Stetzer said. "For instance, one reason may be because they disagree with positions Southern Baptists take on certain issues such as sanctity of life or the exclusivity of the gospel, and that is the only point of reference they have for Southern Baptists."

Subgroups of Americans responded more or less favorably to Southern Baptists including:

▶ Americans who attend religious services weekly or more frequently and Protestants are more likely to have a "very favorable" opinion of Southern Baptists (30 percent and 22 percent respectively).

▶ Those groups more likely to have a "very unfavorable" opinion of Southern Baptists include those who never attend church (44 percent), Hispanics (29 percent), respondents who live in small cities (26 percent), and young adults ages 18–29 (25 percent).

▶ Those most likely to be unfamiliar with Southern Baptists include residents in the Northeast (15 percent) and West (13 percent), those who never attend worship (14 percent), as well as young adults (13 percent).

Unbiased observation

"An unbiased observer will conclude two things: a lot of the unchurched people assume certain denominations are not for them — and Baptists at the highest rate; and, that most of the unchurched don't have strong opinions or awareness of denominations," Stetzer noted. "This would be especially true in areas of the country such as the West where the concentration of Southern Baptist churches is considerably fewer than in the South."

Stetzer said he has shared the study results with Jimmy Draper, chairman of the name change study task force (see story, this page). "I am hopeful the results will be useful to the members as well as to all Southern Baptists seeking to be more effective in their witness by better understanding the culture in which their churches exist."

Stetzer also said LifeWay Research will conduct further research focusing on what Southern Baptist pastors think about the image issue. (LifeWay)

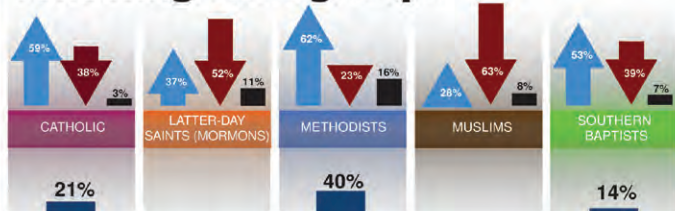
"Knowing a church is SBC would make four out of 10 Americans less likely to visit and join."

Ed Stetzer
LifeWay Research

SBC Identity

online survey of adult Americans

Impression of the following faith groups



Favorability score

calculated by subtracting unfavorable percentage from favorable percentage

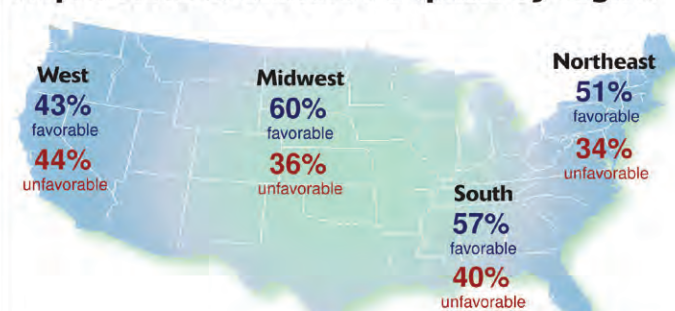


Americans who attend religious services weekly or more frequently and Protestants are more likely to have a "very favorable" opinion of Southern Baptists (30 percent and 22 percent respectively).

Over a **third** of Americans strongly agree they assume a Southern Baptist church is **not** for them.

Knowing a church is Southern Baptist would have a **positive** impact for only **10%** of Americans.

Impressions of Southern Baptists by region



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SBC name change task force reaches decision — to be announced in February

The task force appointed to study the possibility of changing the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) name has reached a decision that it believes "will please the Father and greatly strengthen our ability to reach more people with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The 20-member group, including Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, appointed by SBC President Bryant Wright gathered for its second meeting Dec. 7 in Atlanta.

"Every member was represented in this important meeting," task force chairman Jimmy Draper said. "Again I was impressed with the

seriousness of the group as we discussed vital issues related to this issue and the openness to discuss every aspect of the assignment given to us. There was a unanimity both in the discussions and in the decisions we made."

The task force, Draper said, has been asked by Wright to present recommendations "with full explanation and rationale" during the president's report to the Executive Committee meeting Feb. 20 "so all Southern Baptists can understand how we arrived at our conclusions."

"We are excited to make these recommendations believing that we have come to decisions that will please the Father and greatly

strengthen our ability to reach more people with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," Draper said. "From the beginning we have desired only to discern God's will in this matter."

The task force meeting came on the same day a study was released by LifeWay Research (see story, this page) saying the majority of Americans have a favorable impression of Southern Baptists but 40 percent of respondents had an unfavorable view of the denomination. Draper said the task force had the study results in hand when it met.

"It pretty well confirmed things that we expected, and I don't think it was necessar-

ily a surprise," he said. "When you've got a culture where 35 to 40 percent of the people have repeatedly said they would not even consider an evangelical church, it's not surprising that 44 percent of the people said the Southern Baptist name would impact them negatively."

The flip side, Draper said, was positive in that more than half of the people surveyed had a favorable impression of Southern Baptists. "It was helpful to reinforce things that we had felt and that we had discussed," Draper said, adding that LifeWay Research conducted the study at the request of the name change task force. (BP)

Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, Correspondent, TAB

Bobbie Warmack

Cedar Springs Baptist Church, Jacksonville
Calhoun Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES: Psalm 23

FAVORITE HYMNS: "Blessed Assurance" and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

HOBBIES: Playing the organ and piano, sewing and working at her family's dry cleaning business in Jacksonville

FAMILY STATUS: Married 57 years to Ed; one son, Doug; and one grandson



WARMACK

Bobbie Warmack is the organist and church clerk at Cedar Springs Baptist Church, Jacksonville. She joined the church 30 years ago when she became the pianist.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: I was 15 at the time, and our church was having a week's revival. You had it [in] the morning and at night. Midweek during revival week ... I came to know the Lord.

Q: What difference has Christ made in your life?

A: (He's made) all the difference in the world. Once you become a Christian and want to live for Him, it just makes a difference.

Q: How have you been involved in ministry over the years, and what has ministry demanded from you?

A: I taught Sunday School — all the way from the little kids to senior adults. You need to be faithful to the Lord to teach. I've been GA (Girls in Action) director and I've been VBS (Vacation Bible School) director.

Q: What led you to serve in all these different capacities?

A: Service to the Lord and He's always blessed me in my work for Him.

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

Getting involved

Choctaw Association has record-setting year for missions

By June Mathews
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Dennis Kennedy, pastor of Lusk Baptist Church, Gilberttown, traveled to Trinidad in January, he had no way of knowing his annual missions trip to the tiny island nation would kick off a record-setting year for Choctaw Baptist Association.

With projects ranging from local to international, groups and individuals in the small southwest Alabama association spent the year working to reach others for Christ in a big way.

"I just believe the Lord moved on our people, impressing upon them that the time is short and the need to get the word out is important," Director of Missions Franklin McLelland said. "The Holy Spirit has done the work of getting our people involved."

As to specifics regarding the association's banner year for missions, McLelland reported

► Kennedy ministered alongside members of Mohess Road Baptist Church in southern Trinidad. Lusk Baptist is involved in building a second Baptist church there and recently helped create a para-church organization through which donations for supporting missions on the island are channeled.

► In February, Billy Harris, pastor of Isney Baptist Church, traveled to Haiti to lead a school for teaching and encouraging pastors. He also held preaching and evangelistic services in tent cities and used multicolored soccer balls as tools for sharing the plan of salvation with youth. He saw 120 professions of faith.

► In April, tornadoes damaged more than 100 Choctaw County homes and destroyed more than 20 others. Hundreds of people volunteered to assist with cleanup and repairs. With the help of a building team from Bethel Baptist Church, Canton, N.C., several Choctaw Association churches joined forces to replace the home of a retired couple and their disabled daughter. More than \$30,000 was donated for materials.

Volunteers from the association also traveled to other areas of the state to assist with tornado relief. Several area pastors, including Chris Giles of Cullomburg Baptist Church; Brad Bakane of Gilberttown Baptist Church; and Don Whigham of First Baptist Church, Silas, worked in Phil Campbell and Hackleburg during May and June to clear storm debris and deliver powdered drink packets to displaced people.

► In May, Johnny Prichard, a member of New Life Fellowship, Gilberttown, traveled to Ardmore, Okla., to help erect a building for Ardmore Indian Baptist Church.

► Scott Harrell, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Butler, and his wife, Susan, made their sixth missions trip to Uganda in mid-May.

► In mid-June, 20 members of First, Silas, traveled to Fortaleza, Brazil, to conduct a four-day Bible school. The pastor lead worship services in two prisons and saw 30 people saved, including the warden and several prison clerks. The team also visited slums, handing out Bibles, baby items and health care kits.

► In late June, Jimmy and Martha Thompson, members of First Baptist Church, Butler, joined the Bethel Baptist Builders from Bethel Baptist Association on a missions trip to Betsy Layne, Ky. The group constructed a pulpit and a choir and baptistry area, performed electrical work and framed the inside walls and second story of a building now serving as a sanctuary for Calvary Southern Baptist Church.

► Cierra Giles, Miss University of Mobile 2011 and a member of Hickory Grove Baptist Church, Silas, traveled to Gulu, Uganda, with a group of fellow students to teach kindergarten classes in late June and early July. Giles characterized her experience in Uganda as "life-changing" and hopes to return there in the future.

► In mid-July, Angie Taylor and Jerry Bonner, members of Toxey Baptist Church, joined a team from Bethel Baptist Church, Citronelle, in Mobile Baptist Association on a missions trip to Antigua, Guatemala. The team helped a local pastor to purchase land and build a small church with adjoining bathrooms. Team members also built 10 tiny houses, conducted Vacation Bible School (VBS) and handed out toys, candy, food and clothing.

► During July, Michael Rowell, pastor of Morgan Chapel Baptist Church, Toxey, along with wife Amanda and other church members, traveled to Los Parcelos and San Bonita, Nicaragua. The team built and planted a new church, dug a freshwater well, distributed food and shared the gospel at a city garbage dump, where people were scavenging for food. Nearly 100 people received Christ. An additional 150 professed their faith during five nights of crusades and three days of VBS.

► At the end of July, Billy May, a member of Chappell Hill Baptist Church, Gilberttown, joined a team from Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham Baptist Association on a missions trip

to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Composed of doctors and construction workers, the team joined Roger and Vicki Grossman, Southern Baptist representatives to the area for 25 years, in building a medical clinic — the only clinic serving 2.1 million people. The team saw approximately 25 people make professions of faith.

► Laymen from First, Butler, joined people from several churches in Butler to assist with repairs to the home of a disabled woman in the community. Over a period of months, the construction team installed a new roof, siding, an upstairs outside exit with porch and steps and a new back porch and side porch with steps and rails; leveled the kitchen floor; remodeled the kitchen; painted rooms; and hung new latticework around the porch.

Travel assistance

Close to home, Choctaw Association operates two food banks, collects aluminum tabs for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Mobile, coordinates an annual school supply roundup, conducts an aluminum can recycling program to benefit Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries and serves as a drop-off location for Operation Christmas Child.

The association's Men on Mission group builds wheelchair ramps free of charge and the Woman's Missionary Union supplies school uniforms for needy children.

Choctaw Association recently adopted guidelines to make it more financially feasible for member churches to send their members out all over the world.

"We had some surplus money in our reserve fund that we're making available for travel assistance whenever possible," McLelland said. "We're encouraging

our churches to let members who wish to be on mission know about this support. All we ask is that they give us follow-up reports on where they've been and what God is doing there.

"I hope this is the beginning of what will be a growing thing," he continued.

"God is using ordinary people here in our county to do Kingdom work and I'm excited about it."

"The Holy Spirit has done the work of getting our people involved."

DOM Franklin McLelland
Choctaw Baptist Association

"God is using ordinary people here in our county to do Kingdom work."

DOM Franklin McLelland
Choctaw Baptist Association

Survey examines 'sexting' habits of youth

About 10 percent of youth ages 10-17 have participated in sending or receiving a sexually explicit or sexually suggestive picture of themselves or others electronically, according to a new survey that is the most detailed yet in examining the "sexting" habits of youth.

The Youth Internet Safety Survey, published online Dec. 5 on the website of the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* of Elk Grove Village, Ill., shows that only 1 percent of all youth have appeared in, created or received a picture that involved nudity — of themselves or someone they know — via text message or the Internet.

But if the category involves sexually suggestive semi-nude pictures, that percentage jumps to 9.6 percent.

The cell phone and landline survey of 1,560 youth, conducted between August 2010 and January 2011, helps shine the light of the extent of sexting.

Most surveys about sexting have not defined the term, leaving it unclear if the images were or were not nude.

"In the face of some widely cited, but flawed, studies claiming to show as many as one in five youth 'involved in sexting' these results are to some extent reassuring," the survey authors wrote.

"Sexting of explicit images involves a low percentage but still a considerable number of youth."

The authors acknowledge that the poll, like all surveys that rely on self-reporting, may have missed youth who chose not to disclose their sexting involvement. (BP)

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Across Alabama's Associations

BESSEMER

► **Canaan Church, Bessemer**, is holding several events leading up to Christmas. The theme is "Journey to Bethlehem." On Dec. 17, there will be a birthday party for Jesus for preschoolers and children at 9 a.m. On Dec. 18, there will be a Christmas visitor during the worship services at 9 and 10:30 a.m. On Dec. 21, there will be a family candlelight service at 6:30 p.m. On Dec. 25, there will be one joint service at 10 a.m. There will be child care for preschool to 4-year-olds. For information call 205-425-4381. Morgan Bailey is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Ridgecrest Church, Trussville**, will present Kirk and Patti Lytle in a missions drama called "Lottie Moon, Daughter of Destiny" Dec. 18, 9:30 and 11 a.m. The live inspirational drama written by the Lytles is an entertaining yet challenging look at the hardships of early missionary work through the eyes of Lottie Moon. For information call 205-661-3722. Brian Branam is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Evergreen Church, Jackson**, will present the Christmas cantata "Journey of Faith" Dec. 19, 3:30 p.m., at the Jackson Nursing Home and Dec. 25 during the

worship service at 11 a.m. Howard Gaston is pastor/choir director.

COLUMBIA

► The adult choir ministry of **Bay Springs Church, Dothan**, will present a concert and candlelight service Dec. 18, 6 p.m. For information call 334-692-3138. Scott E. Wyatt is pastor.

GENEVA

► **First Church, Geneva**, will host a men's conference Jan. 22, 3:30-5 p.m. with Dennis Swanberg. A meal will be served. To register call 334-684-9910 or visit www.fbcgeneva.org. Nathan Carroll is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Mountain View Church, Union Grove**, will present "Christmas campfire" Dec. 18, 11 a.m. The story is about a group of campers as they search for a Christmas tree for their church.

MONTGOMERY

► **Open Acres Church, Montgomery**, will present "Joy ... Joy ... Joy," a story of the birth of our Savior in song and word, Dec. 18, 6 p.m. For information call 334-263-6215. Ron Davis is pastor of the church.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Unity Church, Tuscaloosa**,

will host guest speaker Amy McNair, wife of retired U.S. Air Force Col. Nimrod McNair, Dec. 18, 11 a.m. For information call 205-758-2233. Gene Dockery Sr. is pastor.

WALKER

► The music ministry of **Blooming Grove Church, Jasper**, will present "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" Dec. 17, 6 p.m., and Dec. 18, 10 a.m. Kerry Sparks is minister of music. Keith Hudson is pastor.

OTHER

► **Union Hill Church, Bessemer**, hosted Carson Tinker, starting long snapper for the University of Alabama football team, Nov. 20. Tinker shared with the student ministry about football and his encounter with the April 27 tornadoes. The church will hold a candlelight service Dec. 18, 6:30 p.m., to honor lives lost this year and to pray for the families going through the first Christmas without their loved ones. The church will kick off 2012 with a special message series from Pastor Mickey Bell called "The Power to Change" every Sunday morning in January at 9:15 and 10:30. The series will help provide information and determination to keep new year commitments.

Judson launches new nursing program

Amid reports of thousands of qualified students being turned away from U.S. nursing programs because of such factors as faculty shortages and enrollment limits, Judson College in Marion has been making headway with starting its nursing program. The college was recently granted provisional approval by the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABN) in Montgomery for the new nursing education program.

"It's been a long process, and we're grateful to the ABN for their guidance and support," said Kandace Shoults, director of nursing education at Judson.

This initial approval allows Judson to enroll students into the program, according to Shoults.

Judson has 42 current students enrolled in the pre-nursing program, and 32 students have been accepted in the associate degree nursing program that starts spring semester 2012.

'Overwhelming response'

"We have received [an] overwhelming response from potential students and faculty for our program," Shoults said.

She said the associate degree in nursing requires 19 nursing and general education courses. Within

the nursing program at Judson, an emphasis will be placed on rural health.

"We have partnerships for clinical education with neighboring hospitals and nursing homes," Shoults said, adding that clinical agreements have been made with "excellent facilities."

The college first considered a nursing program in the late '70s and revisited the idea several times. "There's a real shortage of nurses in the country, and the nursing program here fits like a glove," former Judson trustee chair Charles Dunkin said.

"It's a natural outgrowth of our science program, and it gives Judson another opportunity to serve the community."

Judson President David Potts noted that the nursing program will offer a number of advantages over other schools' programs.

"We're a Christian college and the school has always been solid in science and in pre-professional programs in allied health professions," he said.

Shoults said applications are currently being accepted for the fall semester 2012.

For more information, call the Judson office of admissions at 1-800-447-9472. (TAB, JC)



FBC Oxford marks 175 years with missional focus

The welcome center of First Baptist Church, Oxford, was transformed into a time machine Nov. 13 with old directories and lots of memories. That's because the Calhoun Baptist Association church was celebrating its 175th homecoming and anniversary.

Missionaries who came out of the church were among the roughly 400 in attendance, noted Paula East, who helped coordinate the celebration.

The special morning service included music from the senior adult choir, adult choir, children's choir and preschoolers. Songs included "Awesome Is the Lord Most High."

Members of two other congregations shared their musical talents as well. Church Biblica Berea sang "Because He Lives" in Spanish for the congregation, and Faith Baptist Deaf Mission, Oxford, signed the song "Hope of the Nations."

Director of Missions Sid Nichols gave a brief message to the crowd.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, delivered the main message, titled "What Do You Want Them to Say About Your Church?," based on Colossians 1:3-5.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a framed certificate commemorating the church's 175 years.

Also during the service, a special baptismal video was shown. It featured everyone who was baptized in the last year.

While looking to the future, Senior Pastor Terry Bostick maintains a missional focus. "I want us to be a missional church, that we're reaching everybody in Oxford ... and participating in missions around the world."

Following the service was a dinner on the grounds. The meal included fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, macaroni and cheese, green beans and rolls. For dessert, attendees enjoyed cobbler accompanied by 30 gallons of vanilla and chocolate ice cream made on-site by church member Dwight Rice.

Hartselle's New Center celebrates 125th anniversary

You could literally count the number of people who attended the first meetings of what would become New Center Baptist Church, Hartselle, in 1886 on one hand.

On the other hand, about 230 people attended the Morgan Baptist Association church's recent 125th anniversary celebration. Many attendees are descendants of the founders or former pastors. Pastor Ben Bates, who has been at the church for one and a half years, said all former pastors, their widows or their descendants either attended or sent notes that were read in the service.

The service featured former Pastor Rayburn Morgan, who served from 1980 to 1987, talking about how much the deacons helped him and what a loving church New Center Baptist was during his tenure.

Bates said, "We still have a wonderful group of deacons who are really involved and loving. The tradition of New Center has apparently always been that of a loving family. In going through the minutes in preparation for the service, I found a reference in the minutes to a man in the community who was sick. The church appointed people to take care of him."

Francis Scott Ferguson's descendants presented a photo of him. Ferguson, along with wife Drucilla, donated the land for the church. Several family members still attend New Center.

The church used the opportunity to burn the note on its only mortgage, making it debt free with a 5-year-old sanctuary and Sunday School rooms.

Bates brought the main message, focusing on the faithfulness of Drucilla Ferguson, who attended church for the first year without her husband. Citing Ephesians 3, Bates said, "She and the other four original members couldn't have imagined what their faithfulness would lead to."

Alabama Cooperative Program Gifts

Alabama Baptist Giving
Year to Date through November 30, 2011

NOVEMBER

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,641,666
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$3,444,613
Under Goal for Month	\$197,053

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$40,058,326
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$37,407,460
Under Goal for Year	\$2,650,866

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Gospel ed

Off-campus Bible classes offered to public schools in Escambia County

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

Dressed in cotton-candy pink overalls and vibrant green and orange saddle shoes, Ms. Tippytoe makes her way to her classroom. But it's not what typically comes to mind when a person thinks of a classroom setting.

Ms. Tippytoe teaches inside Redemption's Promise Ministry Outreach (RPM) Outreach's 28-foot-long trailer. It is set up like a Sunday School classroom with colorful posters lining the walls and two benches stretching the length of the trailer.

Monday through Friday, during the school year, Cindy Johnson (or Ms. Tippytoe), a member of Little Escambia Baptist Church, Flomaton, teaches Bible classes through RPM, a nondenominational children's ministry she started in Escambia County.

Since 1995, Johnson and her husband, Daniel, have felt called to serve together in a children's ministry.

While members of Pineview Pentecostal Holiness Church in Brewton, they volunteered at Camp Victory, a children's camp near Floral, where they anticipated serving full time after Daniel's retirement from his job at a paper mill.

But he began to struggle with health issues in 2002 and underwent five bypass surgeries, and the couple wondered if and how their dream might ever be fulfilled. In fact, at the time, doctors gave Daniel a rather grim prognosis.

Listening to God

But he began to slowly heal. He continued to pray for guidance and felt impressed to share what was on his heart with Cindy.

"If we listen to the doctors, it doesn't look good," Daniel said. "But if God really wants us to minister together, I feel like we have to

try to do (children's) ministry here, where we live."

And that was the start of RPM.

In January 2005, Cindy went to the Escambia County school board and presented her idea of using the same five-year curriculum as Camp Victory — Released Time Bible Education — in the schools.

According to the Released Time website, the curriculum — created in 1914 by a public school superintendent in Gary, Ind. — teaches "religious education during the school day to public school students off campus with parental permission." The curriculum was approved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1952 and is legal in every state, Cindy said.

The school board allowed her to try the program at three of the county's six schools in 2005. But getting the board's permission was just the beginning of many "God-sized tasks" that had to be accomplished before RPM was up and running.

Help from churches

The Johnsons' church raised more than \$6,000 for the trailer. Volunteers from several churches of various denominations teamed up with Cindy and prepared more than 1,500 gift packets that included an explanation of the program, an evangelistic letter, a small New Testament and a permission slip for each student in the three participating schools: W.S. Neal Elementary in East Brewton, A.C. Moore Elementary in Atmore and Pollard-McCall Junior High in Brewton.

During the first semester, 704 students attended the Bible classes.

In 2006, after the school board approved RPM for another year, a fourth school participated: Flomaton Elementary. Two years later, a fifth school joined: Hux-



Photo courtesy of Redemption's Promise Ministry Outreach

READY TO STUDY — Cindy Johnson (center) and volunteer Mike Tucker (left) teach a Bible class in the Redemption's Promise Ministry (RPM) Outreach children's trailer. This is RPM's seventh year of ministry.

ford Elementary in Atmore.

In 2010, the Johnsons felt led to join Little Escambia Baptist and asked the Escambia Baptist Association church to handle RPM's finances. They also began to look to the church's deacon board for guidance and accountability.

This school year, 1,648 students are enrolled in RPM's classes.

In a summary of findings from research compiled by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, the Released Time curriculum "improves academic performance and the development of positive moral character among youth."

But for Cindy, Daniel and the approximately 25 RPM volunteers, it is much more than character development. It's a chance to give real hope — Christ.

Every month, according to each school's schedule, the trailer is transported and parked off of school property, but close enough for students to walk to. Volunteers help gather the students (a maximum of 35 at a time) for their assigned 30–45 minute Bible class, and when the class is finished, they help guide them back inside the school.

Volunteers also serve in other capacities such as folding permission slips, delivering gift bags, praying with students and teaching classes. Several volunteers come from Catawba Springs Baptist Church and North Brewton Baptist Church, both in Brewton. And churches from several other denominations — Pentecostal Holiness, Presbyterian, Freewill Baptist, Mennonite, United Methodist and Assembly of God — provide volunteers and financial support for RPM.

The Baptist Men's group of First Baptist Church, Flomaton, did an "extreme children's trailer makeover" this year with a team of eight men in four weeks. The team made the trailer look "brand-new," Cindy said, with new subflooring

and carpet, new paint and repaired ceilings and air conditioners.

Daniel, who transports the trailer from school to school, keeps up with the trailer maintenance and helps Cindy with planning for RPM during the summer months.

Judy Wilson, a member of North Brewton Baptist and RPM's advisory committee, has volunteered with RPM for five years.

She recalled one day when Cindy asked the students if there were any prayer requests and a third-grader did have a special need. Cindy stopped the class and all the students got down on their knees and just started praying.

"I haven't heard adults pray like they did (with such fervor)," Wilson said.

Esther McMath, a member of First, Flomaton, was a part of RPM even before it had a name. McMath became a prayer partner with Cindy and has watched the ministry grow, a special blessing for her, she said.

McMath volunteers once a week at Flomaton Elementary and remembers a special day when a first-grade girl, sitting at the edge of one of the benches, was reading all the Bible posters on the walls. She felt a tug on her heart and went to sit by the girl and wrapped her arms around her. The girl looked up at her and said, "My aunt died."

'God loves us all'

McMath tried to console the girl as she continued with tears in her eyes, "She wasn't a Christian."

McMath listened to the girl and nodded in assurance as she said, "I [want to] love Jesus. What can I do to go to heaven?" McMath shared

the gospel message and that "God loves us all and has a plan for our life."

"God gave all the right words for her level (of understanding)," she said. "Right there, while class was going on and no one else knew, we quietly prayed."

Pausing in her interview, her voice full of emotion, McMath said she prays every time she walks into the trailer.

"I have a very urgent feeling for this generation," McMath said.



CINDY & DANIEL JOHNSON

"There are so many children out there ... if we could just get the gospel to them."

And Cindy Jackson, a member of Catawba Springs Baptist and the school board, is happy to be a part of making a way for RPM to continue to do that.

"I think it is wonderful that our schools allow RPM

to come and open up doors for children that want to come and hear God's Word," she said.

As for Cindy Johnson, at one point, she asked God, "How can I make a difference in these children's lives if I'm only seeing them once a month?"

But she recalled how the Lord worked in her life when she was a child and a Christian woman came to her school once a month, sharing the gospel in the cafeteria. Cindy Johnson knows her main purpose in the ministry is to point the children to the same hope she found as a child.

"I don't want to just teach the lesson," she said. "I want to lead to the Savior."

For more information, call Cindy Johnson at 251-236-1626.



Photo courtesy of Redemption's Promise Ministry Outreach

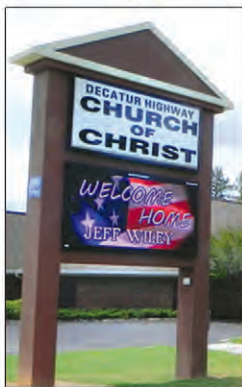
BIBLE DRILLS — Cindy Johnson (right), founder/director of Redemption's Promise Ministry Outreach, does Bible memory verse drills with children in one of her Bible classes.

A monthly advertising supplement — December 2011

Church Resource Guide



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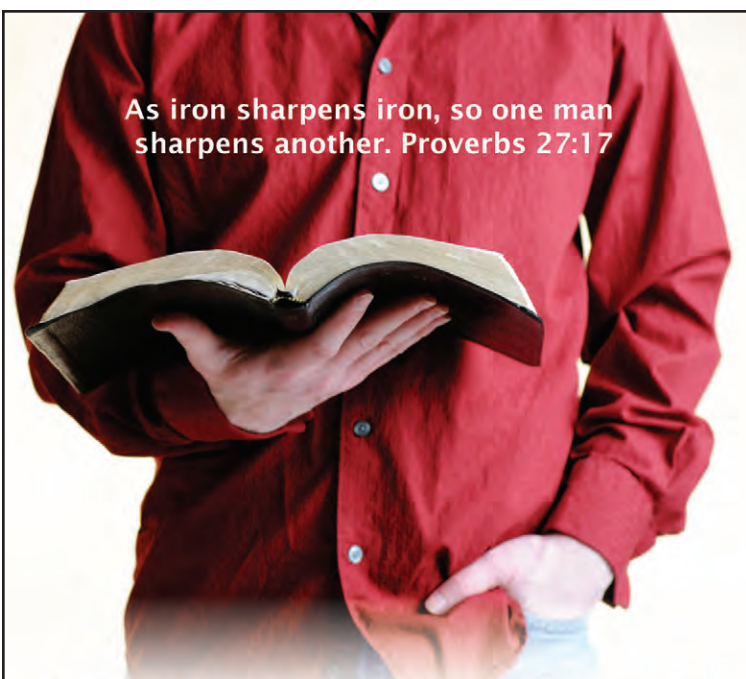
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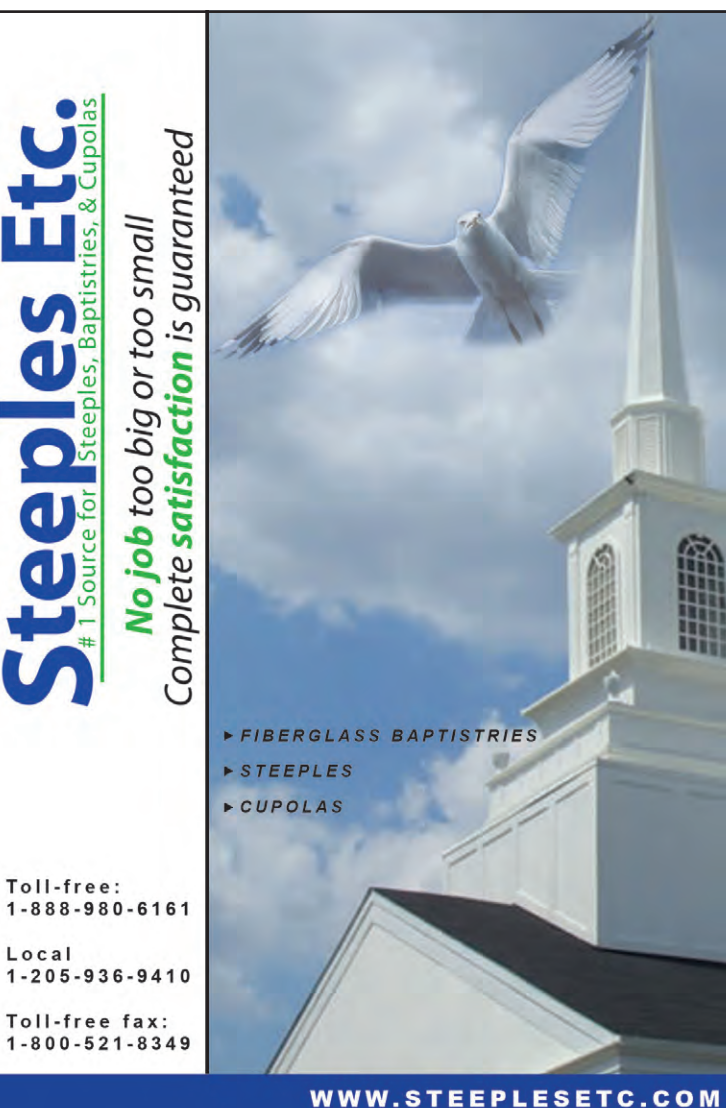


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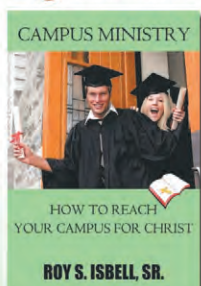


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Churches not immune from 'anti-child culture' in US, SBC's Land says

Richard Land, the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) top spokesman on moral concerns, says the Penn State sexual abuse scandal is symptomatic of a larger "anti-child culture" in the United States and that churches are not immune.

During the Nov. 19 broadcast of "Richard Land Live!," the head of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission said reporting of suspected child abuse is a moral imperative.

"The law requires you, if you have any reason to believe a child is

being abused or a child is being molested, you have a legal obligation to report it to the police," he said. "It's their job to investigate to see if it's true or not, and I believe that you have a moral obligation — a moral obligation as a Christian — to protect innocent children, to report any idea that there might be sexual abuse going on."

Land said if the allegations involve a church, that cannot be allowed to make any difference. "If you do, then these places become havens for abusers," he said. "There should be safe places for children,

and a safe place for children should be any church."

Land said the Penn State scandal, where officials apparently put protecting the reputation of an institution ahead of safety for children, shows that internal reporting is not enough.

"The church is not immune to this," Land said. "People have mistaken loyalties." He recalled one interview with a woman who had come out of a life of prostitution and drug abuse who was a Baptist preacher's daughter molested by the youth minister when she was 13.

"The parents didn't do anything about it," he said. "They dismissed the youth minister, but they didn't do anything other than that. And so she felt like she had been betrayed, and this started the downward slide."

Land heard from callers who told stories of trying to report sexual abuse to church leaders only to be disbelieved and shunned.

"This situation, I believe, is epidemic, and too often, we don't listen to the children," Land said. "We don't take what they say seriously, and when we do we cover it up. We sweep it under the rug, and it allows more children to be victimized."

(ABP)

New Salem Baptist Pastor Richard H. Anderson dies at 75

Richard H. Anderson, pastor of New Salem Baptist Church, Owens Cross Roads, died Oct. 14. He was 75.

Anderson retired as Criminal Investigation Division commander with the Huntsville Police Department after more than 37 years of service.

He served as pastor of New Salem Baptist for more than 35 years.

The church went through numerous major facility improvements under his leadership, including the completion of the family life center in October 2010.

In addition to Anderson's pastorate, he preached at many revivals.

Anderson is survived by his wife of 55 years, Betty Worley Anderson; two daughters; two sons; and five grandchildren. (TAB)

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PASTOR: The Thomaston Baptist Church is now accepting resumes for a full-time pastor. Please send resumes to: The Thomaston Baptist Church, c/o Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 303, Thomaston, AL 36783.

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.

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

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.

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PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Muslim extremists kill Christians, destroy churches

GEIDAM, Nigeria — In Nigeria's increasingly dangerous northeast, Muslim extremists in Geidam in Yobe state helped members of the Islamic terrorist sect Boko Haram destroy five church buildings Nov. 26, while previously, in neighboring Bauchi state, Islamic radicals killed four Christians, including three girls.

Boko Haram members' weekend rampage in Geidam destroyed all Christian-owned businesses, as area Muslims pointed them out for the sect raiders, according to local Christians.

Five of the eight church buildings in town were ruined and the violence displaced about 700 Christians, sources said. Only two of the eight pastors in the town remained. Pastor Amos Ajeje, 48, vice chairman of the Geidam



CDN photo

ATTACKED — Deeper Life Bible Church, Geidam, Yobe state, was destroyed Nov. 26 by Muslim extremists, said local Muslims assisted Boko Haram members in carrying out the attacks on Christians.

Pastor Bitrus Mshelbara, pastor of the Church of Christ in Nigeria at Geidam, confirmed that local Muslims led the Boko Haram members to the church buildings and Christian-owned businesses. In neighboring Bauchi state, 48-year-old Samaila Darabo lost his wife and 12-year-old daughter to a night raid by Muslim extremists Nov. 18. "They killed my wife, Rifkatu, and my daughter, Laraba," Darabo said. "They also attacked some of my family members with machetes and shot them, too."

Pakistani police beat, shoot at Christians in land-grab

KOT ADDU, Pakistan — In an attempted land-grab in southern Punjab province, police and cohorts of a retired military official beat two Christian women and shot at Christians who came to help them Nov. 25, area Christians said.

About eight police officials led by Subinspector Muhammad Arif of Kot Sarwar Shaheed police station, along with armed associates of a retired senior military officer, Air Marshal Maqbool Shah, arrived at the fields of Nazeer Masih in the Kot Addu area and ordered the six or seven women working there to leave, said area Christian rights advocate Waseem Shakir.

The women included Masih's wife, Martha Bibi. The men told the workers that they had come to take possession of the 12.5 acres that Masih owns in Mauza Sadiqabad area of Muzaffargarh district, which they claimed had now been allotted by the revenue department to the Pakistan Army for distribution among retired officials. Bibi said the women are still in shock.

"They pulled away our headscarves from our heads and started hitting us indiscriminately with clubs and punches," she said. The deputy superintendent of police declined to comment on the case.

Uzbek Baptist fined for holding religious meetings

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — Sergei Kozin, a Baptist, has been fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage for holding unregistered religious meetings after a police raid on a group of Baptists who were reading on holiday together. The case — as also in one other recent case — was brought even though it was beyond the legal time limit to bring charges. Baptists stated that the case was "fabricated," with the alleged witness not producing the required identity documents. The judge in the case had noted the lack of evidence of legal documents produced by police.

In another case, five officials raided a home in Fergana without a search warrant. When the wife of the occupant refused entry to the officials, they "pushed her out of the way" and "with threats" entered the house. The occupant is expected to be charged with storage of religious materials. And in another case, after being summoned to a police station for questioning, two schoolgirls stopped going to a church. The police threatened them that "they will be in police records and thrown out of school," Baptists said.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Making forward progress

In 13.1 miles and a little more than three hours, my year's focus of balancing life and working toward healthy living became as much of the celebration as crossing the finish line in my first half-marathon. So much of what I experienced nearly two weeks ago during the St. Jude Memphis Marathon depicted what I've been learning and attempting to practice.

The journey was difficult, tiring and painful. It also was exhilarating, rewarding and encouraging.

Completing the run (most of which was a fast walk for me) meant I had to train in advance. I would not have been able to achieve the goal without a consistent building up of endurance, cardio, muscles and desire. In order to train, I had to eat properly and get enough rest, which meant I had to carve out time to make all of this happen. Finding the time meant setting priorities, improving efficiency in all areas and cutting out unnecessary items.

And through it all, working to find more uninterrupted time with the Lord became the key to staying sane for me.

But as I alternated running, jogging and walking through the streets of Memphis with more than 12,000 others (most of whom were much faster than me), I also realized how much more I could have done. I remembered all the times my training didn't stay on schedule and wondered what difference it would have made that morning if I had maintained better training. What if I had done more to build up muscle mass? What if I had put more focus

on meal planning and nutrition? What if I had worked harder

on cardio endurance and running? Could I have run more than I walked instead of vice versa? And, ouch, what if I had trained on hills rather than staying on flat terrain? Those hills were quite painful.

The answer to all the questions is yes. I certainly could have done better with more training and better focus, but isn't that always the deal? We can always do better in all areas of life, and I certainly plan to build on the lessons I've learned this year and hope to do even better next year. But I'm not going to be disappointed about this year's achievements, even with various setbacks along the way, because I still made forward progress.

On the day of the run, I found the ability to keep going even when my muscles screamed otherwise because the cause is near and dear to my heart (see www.caringbridge.com/visit/bellemitchell) and a group of about 15 of us were on the same team (Team Belle). Having the right motivation and working together with others rather than alone really made a difference. Another major help came from the support I received from family and friends leading up to the big run as well as the cheers from people I didn't know along the course.

I believe this result can happen in all aspects of life. Knowing you have the support of others, feeling confident you are not alone, being encouraged by hearing a good word here and there — it truly does provide those necessary boosts along the way.

I started the year with a goal to figure it all out — how to balance life and maintain a sense of freshness and energy consistently. I certainly didn't master it nor officially achieve it, but I have learned a lot and come a long way on the journey. As I think through my goals for next year, I plan to start with the foundation I've built this year. Maybe I'll outline a few specific goals on which to focus as well as continue my quest of achieving near-perfect balance while maintaining the ability to adjust to whatever life circumstances surprise me.



Rashional EXTRAS ...

What topics are on your mind?

Email jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Thanks for attempting to capture what can be a difficult subject for print (Nov. 17 issue, "Healing a hurting heart").

My brother, Mark, died on Halloween. He was 56 and was taken by a sudden and massive heart attack. He leaves a wife of 32 years and four children.

Mark had pastored Zion Baptist Church in Brownsville, Tenn., for the last 16 years. They had launched a new discipleship initiative that Mark and his wife, Lisa, wrote. Mark led 15 men through, and they are now leading 30 men. Twelve women just started. Mark was leading eight new men through. The deacons have stepped in to continue that work. Three other churches in the area began using the material this year. Mark finished well.

I had the privilege of leading the graveside service. I am thankful we had been working together on polishing his writing. No regrets and nothing unsaid. I loved him dearly.

Joe Conway
North American
Mission Board

Read your column "Healing a hurting heart" (in the Nov. 17 issue). I am encouraged by your empathetic heart towards others, and I wanted to share a song with you — "Blessings" by Laura Story. It relates to heartache and helps keep a godly perspective on trials.

And here is a Bible verse for you from Daniel 10:12 — "Then he (Gabriel) said to me, 'Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.'"

Anna Price
Louisiana

The CD "Every Falling Tear" by Matt Hammitt (lead singer of Sanctus Real) is one I would recommend. It is based on what God has revealed to him the last year as he has a son who was born with a heart disease.

Chris Mills
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Conquering the weight battle

If you struggle with weight issues, then I want you to know I understand. I've dealt with weight control most of my life. In fact, food too often has been a source of comfort for me when I am overwhelmed.

It is a daily struggle to make wise choices and not give up on what the Lord has for me. But through the right focus on conquering the weight battle, God is now showing me other areas I need to tackle. I am finding the opportunity to encourage others through this journey as well.

Has it been easy? Absolutely not.

I have been my own worst enemy through the years and have tried almost every diet book and eating plan available. I did lose weight in my mid-20s with diet pills, but I didn't make lifestyle changes so the weight came back. Even my mother's concern for my health because of my weight didn't help. It just added to my defeated feeling.

I knew I should be a good steward of the body and life the Lord allowed me to live, but following through with that was not easy. I learned I could not do it on my own but I could with the Lord's help.

In February of this year, I saw an article in *The Alabama Baptist* that has allowed me to connect all the dots. It was about the Body 4 Believers (www.facebook.com/pages/Body-4-Believers/180324178672325) eating plan.

At first, I thought, "OK here we go again." But I downloaded the plan that day and decided to try it. I did not tell anyone I was on the plan and took small daily steps toward better choices.

The plan was not extreme, nor complicated. It was helpful and dealt with everyday food.

And while it is not a diabetic program, it does work well for me as a diabetic because it is designed to control the way the body pro-

cesses food, resulting in less sugar spikes.

I have not reached my ideal weight, but, with the loss of 53 pounds, I am well on my way.

Just know you are the only one who can make choices as to your health in regard to weight and fitness.

I encourage you to never give up because Christ never gave up on us.

Sharron Atkinson
Secretary, Bluff Park Baptist
Church, Hoover



ATKINSON

From the Twitterverse

Ed Stetzer (president of LifeWay Research) — Too much to do and really need to catch up on some things. Gotta say "no" more. Sigh.

The Daniel Plan (Health program through Rick Warren and Saddleback Church in California) — Make sure you're drinking enough water! Water helps detoxify, keep you feeling fuller, and is essential to great health!

Email your experiences from this year to jrash@thealabamabaptist.org. Which goals worked out for you? Which ones didn't? What did you learn along the way? What goals do you plan to set for next year?

Grandfather's witness inspires professor's work in Nigeria

Nearly 18 years after his death, the reach of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's first full-time evangelism professor C.E. Autrey continues.

In 2008, a letter addressed to Autrey made its way from Nigeria to Southwestern Seminary and was forwarded to Autrey's grandson Denny Autrey, dean and professor of pastoral ministries at the seminary's Harvard School for Theological Studies in Houston.

The letter — a plea for help addressed to his grandfather — prompted Denny Autrey to respond by venturing to Africa this summer.

"A need for help," the author of the letter, an Anglican theology student, wrote as a heading to his letter.

"Thanks be to God almighty," the student wrote to the late professor, "for the gift and opportunity given to you for opening the eyes of many towards the understanding of the

Scriptures, mostly to seminarians and individuals who are seeking to know the facts of the written word of God."

For many years, C.E. Autrey equipped men and women to understand and proclaim the gospel.

After receiving master's and doctoral degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he served as a pastor and then as director of evangelism for the state of Louisiana. Then, after serving with the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), Autrey became the seminary's first full-time professor of evangelism, filling the seminary's L.R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism ("The Chair of Fire"). He then returned to the Home Mission Board as an executive director of evangelism, where he wrote his book, "Basic Evangelism."

In 2008, a guest lecturer at the Ezekiel College of Theology in

Ekpoma, Nigeria, drew from C.E. Autrey's book on evangelism, leaving a photocopy in the library. One of the students, not realizing that Autrey had passed away years before, wrote a letter to the professor and sent it to Southwestern Seminary.

'Plea for help'

"It was just a plea for help," Denny Autrey said, summarizing the Nigerian student's request. "He said, we realize you're a man of God by what you've written in this book, and we were hoping there were other books that you might have that you might make available to us and help us with additional resources for our library."

"It was really humbling for me to receive the letter," Autrey said, amazed that his grandfather contin-

ues to influence lives on the other side of the world. "My grandfather has been dead almost 18 years, and his legacy, his ministry, his witness continues on through his writing."

When Autrey received the letter, he had never heard of the Ezekiel School of Theology. But with the help of John Olagbemi, a Nigerian M.Div. student at Southwestern's Houston campus, Autrey made contact with the Nigerian school and traveled there this summer. He gave them a copy of "Basic Evangelism" and another of his grandfather's books, "The Theology of Evangelism," along with two books by Southwestern Seminary faculty members, "Calling out the Called" and "Text-Driven Preaching." He also provided a cash donation to help the school continue to build its library collection. (BP)

"My grandfather has been dead almost 18 years and his legacy ... continues on."

Denny Autrey
Southwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary

Letters

PROUD TO BE BAPTIST

Reading the Nov. 10 issue, we were concerned about a possible name change for the Southern Baptist Convention.

Also we have been concerned why Baptist churches are dropping the word "Baptist" from their name.

We are proud to be part of the Southern Baptist Convention and also be a part of a Baptist church and think a name change should not be.

Gary and Reba Helms
Pell City, Ala.

IS SBC MOST EFFECTIVE?

As I understand it, and my memory may be faulty on this point, the study committee (to consider whether a name change of the Southern Baptist Convention is needed) was formed to determine whether the SBC's name was any hindrance to the work of Baptists — evangelism, discipleship, things of that nature. That is something of which I am highly in favor.

That ought even to be an ongoing process. Shouldn't we as Baptists always be certain we are carrying on our work in the most effective manner possible?

I speak as an ex-Northerner and an ex-Presbyterian and an ex-Methodist. Like it or not, the words "Southern" and "Baptist" do carry their own baggage, and if we're more proud of our name than we are concerned about its effect, then something is certainly wrong. And I fear that is the case, at least from

what I observe is the reaction to President Bryant Wright's appointment of a committee to study the matter.

Bob Cleveland
Pelham, Ala.

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Christmas

Blessings

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Want to know God?

By Pastor J.B. Wells
Louis Street Baptist Church,
Gadsden

As you read this, we are in the midst of celebrating one of the two greatest miracles that ever happened. That is that God loved us so much that He sent His Son so that anyone who believes on Him will have eternal life (John 3:16).

Jesus, God's Son, became man that He might die so that we could know God and His love. You can be changed by Jesus' death and resurrection.

In His act of obedience to His Father, He made it possible for you to have eternal life.

Let me share with you an experience I had a number of years ago. I flew to Austin, Texas, to preach a revival. The revival was to start on Sunday night. When I got to Austin, my luggage, with all my clothes and Bible with sermon notes, didn't arrive. I preached that night without notes.

That next day, we went to the airport and still no luggage. I preached that night totally relying on the Spirit of God to give me the message that I should preach. Right in the middle of the message, a man sitting next to the center aisle stood up and fell on the floor dead. The next night, there were people standing around the walls.

God worked in a mighty way that week. Fourteen people prayed to receive salvation, and four young men were called into the ministry.

I came to know God better and walk in His Spirit as never before. God was lifted up and He drew people to Himself (John 3:32).

In 42 years of ministry, I have seen many people, maybe just like you, come to know God in a personal, life-changing way. I do not know where you are in your life, but I know One who does and He wants to come into your life and make you a new person.

Will you ask Him to forgive all your sins, come into your heart and be the Lord and Savior of your life? Will you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is God's Son who died for your sins and was raised from the dead (Rom. 10:9-10, 13)?

I can tell you it will be the best Christmas you will ever have.



The Baptist Foundation of Alabama has been blessed with many new opportunities to serve Alabama Baptist churches and their members in 2011. We have enjoyed teaching the message of Christian estate planning through our seminars and workshops. Each time we are involved with a “Stewarding Your Stuff” class, we can see the impact being made on the world for Christ.

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been
born to you: he is Christ the Lord.”
Luke 2:11 (NIV)

Our staff wishes each of you a Merry Christmas!



Seated: Stephanie Coston, Jennifer Ogburn, Sarah Snell, Donna England and Connie Westover
Second Row: Nathan McCarthy, Paula Smith, Marie Norrell, Robbie Willis and Bill McCrary
Third Row: George King, Rodney Bledsoe, Barry Bledsoe and Tom Randall

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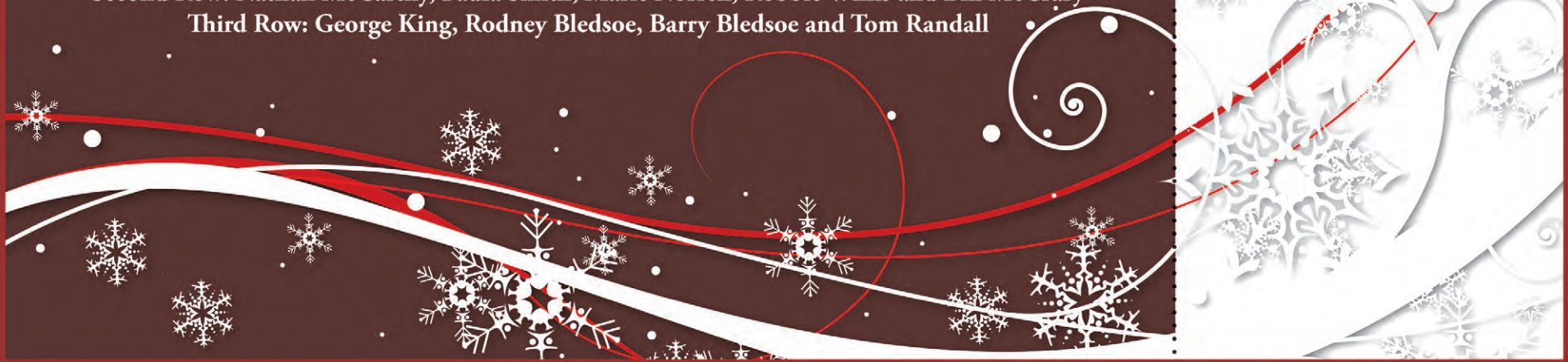
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 18

Explore the Bible

By Dale Younce

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

STAY FEARLESS IN YOUR OBEDIENCE

Numbers 13:26–28, 31; 14:6–9, 17–23

Obedying God is always right but can sometimes land believers in fearful situations. They may expect that obeying God will put them in opposition to someone in authority over them or even in conflict with cultural norms. If the latter occurs, then believers may become targets of ridicule, ostracism or hostility. Fear is a normal human response to threatening situations, but believers can combat their fears associated with obeying God by remembering that He will always encourage and help them. This week's lesson records the Israelites' fearful refusal to enter the promised land and God's judgment upon their disobedience. The emphasis is upon courageously obeying God in view of His promises.

What's Keeping You From Obeying?

(13:26–28, 31)

The central section of the Book of Numbers records the events resulting in the Israelites spending 40 years in the wilderness. On their march from Mount Sinai to the promised land, they came to the oasis called Kadesh about 50 miles southwest of Beersheba on the promised land's southern border. From there, 12 tribal leaders were sent to survey the land and report on the quality of the land and its inhabitants. They were to find out whether the land of Canaan was agriculturally fruitful or not; whether the inhabitants were few or many, militarily weak or strong; and whether they were nomads living in tents or a people long settled, having walled fortresses.

The survey of the land may have been wise from a conventional military point of view, but it was not in God's sight. God had already given them the land and had instructed them to go in and take it. This reconnaissance was a first step toward failure.

After traveling more than 500 miles in 40 days of reconnaissance, the spies found that the land was indeed all that God had said it would be. But 10 spies gave a negative report. They emphasized the obstacles and concluded that Israel was too weak to conquer the enemy. The land's people were giants, the city

walls were high and the spies felt themselves to be grasshoppers. They revealed fear and a lack of faith, which discouraged the people. Only Caleb and Joshua voiced a minority report in favor of boldly entering the promised land, trusting God's promise.

Fear and lack of faith cause spiritual stagnation and ultimate defeat. The man of faith is assured of victory because, in the final analysis, the victory is the Lord's.

Like Caleb and Joshua, we need to trust God's Word and carefully avoid letting personal considerations, including our fears, turn us aside from fully obeying His plans for us.

What's Good About Obeying?

(14:6–9)

Joshua and Caleb, both of whom had been part of the spying team, passionately disagreed with the other 10 spies' negative report. Joshua and Caleb declared their confidence that God would deliver the land and its inhabitants into their hands. They urged the Israelites to obey the Lord, trusting in His presence, power, promises and good pleasure.

What is good about obeying God? When we courageously obey His commands and leadership, we please Him, enjoy His intimate presence and experience more of His power and good purposes for us.

How Does God Handle Disobedience?

(14:17–23)

As he had done on a previous occasion (Ex. 32:11–14), Moses interceded for the people on the basis of God's character and glory. His intercession resulted in God's forgiveness of the nation; He spared the people's lives. However, there would be judgment upon the 10 unfaithful spies (they died by a plague — Num. 14:37), and the Israelites would wander in the desert for 40 years, until everyone 20 years of age and older died. Of that generation, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the promised land. Obedience brings blessings, while disobedience is rebellion and brings loss. When we are disobedient, we miss out on things God wants us to have; yet because God is patient, loving and merciful, we can seek and receive His forgiveness.

Bible Studies for Life

By Joseph Scrivner

Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

RESPOND TO GOD'S GIFT

Matthew 2:1–12, 16

After recounting Jesus' genealogy and birth (Matt. 1:1–25), Matthew continues to show the significance of Christ's Advent with the wise men's visit to Jesus (Matt. 2:1–18). Like Joseph in the previous passage, the wise men are obedient to God's direction. Their joyful reverence for Jesus stands in sharp contrast to Herod's evil reaction.

Seeking the Gift (1–6)

Matthew begins his Gospel by describing Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). In the second chapter, he refers to David's hometown, Bethlehem, where his messianic descendant has been born (1, 3–6). This messianic rule is not a reality at Jesus' birth, however. Herod has functioned for more than three decades as Rome's designated "king of the Jews" (1). Yet the strange visit of Gentile sages to Jerusalem, Judea's capital, indicates that God is about to depose those in power. In fact, the wise men have been anticipating these developments; after sighting His star, they travel to pay their respects to the newborn "king of the Jews" (2).

In addition, the wise men's actions foreshadow recurring themes throughout Matthew's Gospel. First they anticipate the contrast between Jesus' rejection by Jerusalem insiders, on the one hand (Matt. 13:54–58; 21:23–27; 23:1–39; 26:1–27:66), and Jesus' acceptance by Gentile outsiders, on the other hand (Matt. 8:5–13; 28:16–20). Second, the wise men exemplify an attitude of openness to God's plan. They are willing to follow God's direction, even if it takes them into unexpected, uncharted territory.

Rejecting the Gift (7–8, 16)

Unfortunately seeking God's Kingdom is not the goal of those with entrenched positions of power. In fact, Herod and others in Jerusalem are afraid when they hear about this momentous birth (v. 3). Herod's motives are clear when he consults the wise men secretly to learn the when and where

of Jesus' birth. After the wise men visit Jesus, they are warned about Herod's plot in a dream (v. 12) and are obedient once again, avoiding him in their return. Herod responds in an evil rage, ordering the slaughter of countless boys in an attempt to kill Jesus. There is precedent for Herod's paranoia. He reportedly ordered the deaths of his brother-in-law and wife. Herod's irrational rage also resembles Pharaoh's massacre at Moses' birth (Ex. 1:15–22). Moreover Herod's murder of the innocent foreshadows Jesus' fate in Jerusalem many years later (Matt. 27:1–56).

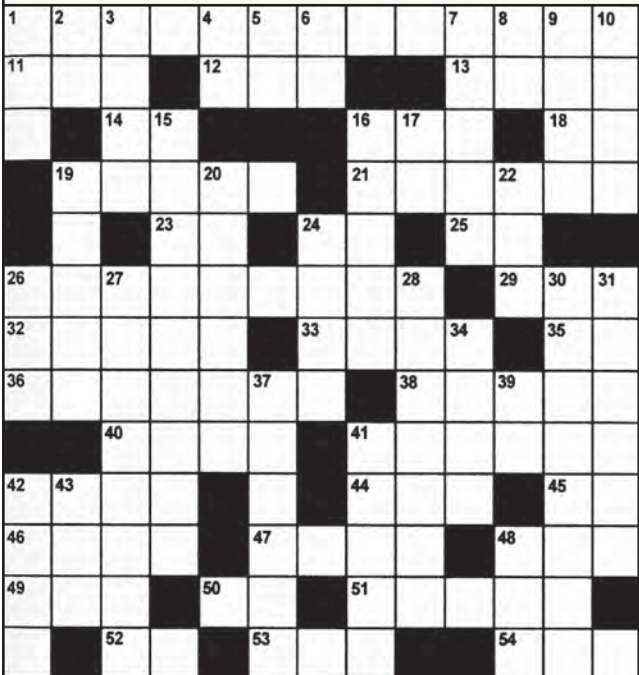
Careful reflection on Jesus' rejection by the powerful should warn us against prejudice. We should view Jesus' persecution in terms of power and tradition, not as a premise for prejudice against particular people. Christians have used Jesus' rejection as a rationalization for the abuse of Jews over several centuries. This shameful, sinful behavior was chastised by the apostle Paul (Rom. 9–11) but often tragically ignored. Christians using the Jewish rejection of Jesus as a basis for prejudice would be similar to African-Americans citing the Jim Crow era as grounds for stereotypes about whites. We should keep in mind the ability of power and tradition to blind us so that we cannot see when God may be moving in our midst.

Worshiping the Gift (9–12)

The wise men model selfless worship when they encounter Jesus. First they simply appreciate the magnitude of the moment, as they are "overjoyed beyond measure." This shows the importance of meditating on God's gift in Christ. Second the wise men offer their gifts as expressions of their reverence. Centuries earlier, the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon with many valuable presents, acknowledging his accomplishments with the Temple and his palace (1 Kings 10:1–12). We now know One who is greater than Solomon and the Temple (Matt. 12:6, 42). Further the best expression of our faith today may be through giving to the most unfortunate among us (Matt. 25:31–46).

Christian Crossword

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Across

- They delivered him to _____ the governor. (Matt. 27:2; 2 words)
- Despise not _____ of these little ones. (Matt. 18:10)
- Standing Room Only. (abbr.)
- Unknown writer. (abbr.)
- Ye shall be _____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
- _____ Francisco.
- Come from God, and went _____ God. (John 13:3)
- To hold onto something with your hands.
- Fathers. (Span.)
- Lower case. (abbr.)
- Missouri. (abbr.)
- Thus.
- For mine eyes have seen thy _____. (Luke 2:30)
- I will let down the _____. (Luke 5:5)
- A high standard.
- His raiment white as _____. (Matt. 28:3)
- There was _____ strength in him. (1 Sam. 28:20)
- Cleanest, best arranged,

Down

- Dad.
- coolest.
- With many other _____ did he testify. (Acts 2:40)
- Thou didst _____ upon thine horses. (Hab. 3:8)
- A group of singers or part of a song.
- _____ Domini.
- The multitude _____ him to Pilate. (Luke 23:1)
- In regard to. (abbr.)
- He cleaveth my _____(s) asunder. (Job 16:13)
- The angel rolled the stone from the _____. (Matt. 28:2)
- In between, in the midst of.
- 2,000 pounds.
- Let there _____ light. (Gen. 1:3)
- _____ order. (2 Chron. 29:35; 2 words)
- I _____ to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
- Fish eggs.
- The asses that were lost three days _____. (1 Sam. 9:20)
- Pilate wrote a title, and put it _____ the cross. (John 19:19)
- Ye know that summer is _____. (Mark 13:28)
- Jesus _____ the Savior.
- _____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
- _____ Abram departed. (Gen. 12:4)
- The fame of David went into all _____. (1 Chron. 14:17)
- Sent _____ angel. (Num. 20:16)
- To carry something.
- Seth called his son's name _____. (Gen. 4:26)
- Neither is there _____ in any other. (Acts 4:12)
- Knife, fork, _____. (1 Chron. 14:17)
- Support group for alcoholics.
- A level in school.
- Climbed.
- Ronald. (nickname)
- Went up a _____ from the earth. (Gen. 2:6)
- Lay not this _____ to their charge. (Acts 7:60)
- A wise man will hear and increase _____. (Prov. 1:5)

- In no specific place.
- The fear of the Lord is clean, _____ for ever. (Ps. 19:19)
- The ship was now _____ with waves. (Matt. 14:24)
- Abraham took the _____, ... and laid it upon Isaac. (Gen. 22:6)
- One who sends.
- Railroad. (abbr.)
- Near.
- _____ and crafts.
- New. (abbr.)
- Missing in Action. (abbr.)



RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Rick Sharp

MOSAIC

Teach Us

Mosaic Music/CLG Distribution

Mosaic, five musicians who originally met at Belmont College in Nashville and who recorded their first album as a Christmas gift to their parents, has certainly enjoyed a meteoric rise since that inauspicious beginning.

And why not? Their harmonies have been characterized as "sublime," and their first CD was being compared with the likes of Alison

Krauss and Selah even before its release.

They have been touring constantly since that first album of Christmas songs, the perfect vehicle to hone their signature harmonies and build their songwriting skills. It doesn't hurt that their lyrics draw heavily from God's Word. You're going to like these guys.

"One," the album's opening song, is a toe-tapping, harmony-rich joy of a song, taken directly from Ephesians 4:4-6. "Japheth Song," beautifully layered and country-flavored, literally brought me to my knees as it pointed out my own failure to forgive the real or imagined slights of my family members. "Love Will Never Fail" is a fresh look at 1 Corinthians 13. "Fear the

Lord" is a lush, jazz-infused admonition to truly understand the fear of God. I'd love to go on, but trust me — there's not a bad song on the CD.

RUSH OF FOOLS

We Once Were

Entertainment One Music

Alabama-band Rush of Fools has released its third album, "We Once Were," after a two-year hiatus brought about by business issues with its former label. With its debut album producing two No. 1 singles on the Adult Contemporary (AC) charts, four Dove Award nominations and an ASCAP Song of the Year Award, then its sophomore release producing an AC Top Ten and tons of media buzz, you might expect this third CD to soar. You'd

be right. With a stellar group of producers and engineers, and some of the most unprocessed recording I've heard in some time, this is music you can get your teeth into.

I'm not sure garage band sound is accurate, but this is music that would make

Weezer proud. Drums are uncompressed, guitars are edgy, bass is deliciously distorted and vocals are

out front and in your face and without digital artifact. For me, this is how rock is supposed to sound and the Christian themes only add to the depth of the record.

I won't pick apart the songs, but I'll tell you there's not a bad one on the CD.

This is music that should (and probably will) find lots of exposure in both the Christian music world as well as the secular rock world. This is driving, edgy, honest rock with a strong Christian message. Recommended.



Book Reviews

By Bob Terry and
Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Meditations of the Heart: Thoughts on the Christian Life

Donnie L. Martin. Charleston, S.C.: CreateSpace, 2011. 242 pp. (Paperback).

"Meditations of the Heart" is a collection of short writings from a pastor in Mississippi who described the book as "the culmination of God's dealing with my own heart, directly and indirectly, over my lifetime." The 32 chapters deal with a variety of subjects, with the theme of growing and developing a relationship with God running through them.

The book's writing style would have been familiar to readers a half-century ago. Once past that hurdle, the reader finds consistently sound biblical advice written from a conservative standpoint. (Sharp)

Bear Bryant on Leadership: Life Lessons From a Six-time National Championship Coach

Pat Williams and Tommy Ford. Charleston, S.C.: Advantage Media Group, 2011. 204 pp. (Paperback).

Basketball executive and motivational speaker Pat Williams teamed up with Tommy Ford, director of donor programs for the University of Alabama Athletic Department, to provide an anecdotal review of the legendary coach's leadership style. From more than 200 interviews with Bryant's former players and assistant coaches, Williams and Ford highlight how Bryant implemented seven key principles of leadership to

become the winningest coach in college football in his day.

Learning how Bryant used the seven leadership principles makes reading the book worthwhile. Reading the stories and recollections from former players and coaches makes the experience enjoyable. Some people may even be surprised that Bryant urged his players to get their priorities right — religion, family, education and then football — or how, after an embarrassing loss, he greeted them on the football field by singing "Jesus Loves Me."

The book has so many personal observations about Bryant it may take more than a single reading to digest them all. (Terry)

Reigning in His Power: A Study on How to Rein in the Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Daily Walk

Jane Boston. Bloomington, Ind.: WestBow Press, 2011. 136 pp. (Paperback).

The back-of-the-book blurb on "Reigning in His Power" is a little unsettling, touting the author as "a living example that God's ways lead to success, peace and results." The blurb goes on to say that Jane Boston has built a million-dollar company "by accessing the power of the Holy Spirit." Whoa, is this one of those prosperity gospel books?

No, actually. While some of the author's assertions may veer toward the edge of conservative theology, the blurb is, in a word, misleading. Instead, it is a compelling look at how God leads and guides those who seek Him.

The book is packaged as a study,

but the "study" portion is weak, somewhat lacking in lacking depth and scriptural emphasis.

As a personal testimony, however, the book is a powerful affirmation of the power available to Christians. (Sharp)

Passport Through Darkness: A True Story of Danger and Second Chances

Kimberly L. Smith. Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2011. 256 pp. (Paperback).

Any book about human suffering is hard to read. A book about human trafficking, particularly child trafficking, is especially hard to read. How much harder it must have been for author Kimberly Smith to put herself in harm's way to confront the atrocities she discovered.

Smith was serving with her husband as a missionary in Spain when she began to hear disturbing rumors about a local orphanage. Investigating, she soon learned that the rumors were true.

Thus began her journey into an ugliness that she never expected to see, resulting in an "international effort to save thousands from modern-day slavery, persecution, disease and genocide" through her missions organization, Make Way Partners.

This beautifully written book tells Smith's story, which began as a vague discontent of knowing God had a plan for her and continues in the ongoing fight against atrocities, particularly in Africa and Eastern Europe.

Smith lives in Sylacauga and Make Way Partners is based in Birmingham. (Sharp)

Christian Marketplace

Top Ten Best Sellers

Fiction

1. **The Tehran Initiative**, Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale)
2. **Courageous**, Randy Alcorn, Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick (Tyndale)
3. **The Mercy, Rose Trilogy Series #3**, Beverly Lewis (Baker)
4. **Longing, Bailey Flanigan Series #3**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
5. **The Wonder of Your Love, Land of Canaan Series #2**, Beth Wiseman (Thomas Nelson)
6. **Shadow in Serenity**, Terri Blackstock (Zondervan)
7. **A Log Cabin Christmas Collection**, Margaret Brownly, Wanda E. Brunstetter and Jane Kirkpatrick (Barbour)
8. **Valley of Dreams, Wild West Wind Series #1**, Lauraine Snelling (Baker)
9. **Learning, Bailey Flanigan Series #2**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
10. **Leaving, Bailey Flanigan Series #1**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)

Nonfiction

1. **Heaven Is for Real**, Todd Burpo and Lynn Vincent (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
3. **Nearing Home**, Billy Graham (Thomas Nelson)
4. **Every Day a Friday**, Joel Osteen (FaithWords)
5. **Heaven Is for Real for Kids**, Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
6. **Throw It Down**, Jud Wilhite (Zondervan)
7. **The Resolution for Men**, Stephen Kendrick, Alex Kendrick and Randy Alcorn (B&H)
8. **Jesus Calling, Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan (David C Cook)
10. **The Resolution for Women**, Priscilla Shirer (B&H)

All 'for glory of God'

Michael W. Smith consistently popular, focused on gospel

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For almost 30 years, Michael W. Smith has been taking listeners on a musical journey into the heart of worship while delivering powerful messages about grace, love and redemption through his songs.

As one of the most popular contemporary Christian musicians, Smith has amassed an impressive catalog of achievements. He has garnered multiple honors: an American Music Award, three Grammy Awards and 44 Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association. In addition, he boasts 33 No. 1 radio hits and holds 16 gold, seven platinum and two double-platinum albums for career sales of 15 million. In 2009, he was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

Smith also has scored several film projects and has been featured by a variety of media outlets including "FOX and Friends," "Hannity & Colmes," *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, NBC's "Today Show" and "Nightly News," "Larry King Live," "Good Morning America" and many others. But he has remained committed to shining the spotlight on God.

In addition to his music, Smith desires to create platforms that would reach out and help those in need.

He established Rocketown in his hometown of Nashville, which serves as a safe place for young people to enjoy music and artists to be discovered.

Smith also raises awareness for a variety of missions organizations, including Compassion International and Samaritan's Purse. Following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, he traveled to the country with Samaritan's Purse. He also co-wrote "Come Together Now" and gathered a community of artists to record the song to benefit Haiti relief efforts.

His latest album, "Glory," is an instrumental project and the 23rd album of his career.

"This is a very worshipful album for me," Smith said.

"I think we underestimate the power of instrumental music, but it can be very worshipful where it just washes over someone and enriches their life. Everything we do should be for the glory of God. It should all be an act of worship."

'There is hope'

His tours consistently rank among the best attended in the country, and he doesn't miss a beat sharing the gospel with audiences.

"More than anything, I want people to realize that the gospel really is true — there is hope and a promising future for those who have a relationship with Christ,"



Photo by Russ Harrington

MUSICAL JOURNEY — Michael W. Smith has been sharing messages of grace, love and redemption through songs for almost 30 years. His latest album, 'Glory,' is an instrumental project.

Smith said. "No matter what people are struggling with, they will get through it. When people leave the concert, I hope they are encouraged to press on. I pray the music just washes over people."

While dealing with the demands of a hectic touring schedule, Smith emphasizes the importance of limiting distractions so he can spend time in God's Word.

"There's so much going on these days and so many distractions, especially with cell phones, computers and the Internet," Smith said.

"God continues to teach me the importance of just being still and being in awe of His creation. When I look up at the sky, I can't help but think, 'God is so awesome.'"

"For me, the key to focusing on Christ and dwelling in His presence is removing all those distractions and finding a place where I can be alone and read His Word. Sometimes that means turning the cell phone off, going to a park or someplace quiet and just spending some time reflecting on His glory."

As the years pass by, he continues to be amazed and humbled by

God leading this musical journey.

"I'm still amazed that I get to be part of building the Kingdom through this gift that God has given me," Smith said.

"It's something that I love to do, and it's changing the world a little bit, which blows my mind. Someone recently came up to me out of the blue and said they accepted Christ at one of my concerts 20 years ago. I thought that was incredible."

'Lives are being changed'

"Another time, a man shared about a time when he was going to commit suicide and already had the gun loaded. By God's divine intervention, just as this man was about to pull the trigger, he happened to hear one of my songs, which addressed the issue of suicide, and realized he couldn't go through with taking his life. That man ended (up) giving his life to the Lord, and now he's married with a family. That story right there is worth my whole career — knowing that lives are being changed for God's glory."

For more information, visit www.michaelwsmith.com.

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

N.Y. court ruling threatens gay 'marriage' law

GENESEO, N.Y. — A New York judge has handed opponents of New York's gay "marriage" law a major victory, saying state law may have been broken prior to the bill passing the Legislature in June.

The decision by Judge Robert B. Wiggins to allow the lawsuit to go forward is noteworthy because the pro-family groups behind the suit are seeking to have the law declared invalid. New York's attorney general had asked the court to dismiss the suit but Wiggins declined.

At issue is whether legislators violated state open meetings laws when — during the days leading up to the frantic June 24 Senate vote — the Republican caucus met in a closed-door meeting with Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo. The meeting was significant because Republicans control the Senate, and the bill could pass only with some GOP support.

New York law allows some legislative meetings to be closed, such as meetings that include only Democratic members or Republican members. But the fact that the meeting included members of both parties could have made it illegal, Wiggins indicated.

"The court feels there is a justiciable issue presented whether there was a violation of the Open Meeting Law," wrote Wiggins, who added that he now wants more information from both sides. His ruling was dated Nov. 18.

Liberty Counsel filed the suit on behalf of the group New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms. Both are Christian organizations.

"This is a victory for the people of New York and a setback to the political arm-twisters who tried to thwart the open meetings process," Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, said in a statement. "Discovery will show that the arm-twisting and closed-room deals to force passage of this same-sex marriage law were defiant violations of the Open Meetings law."

Utah crosses modified in hopes of satisfying court

SALT LAKE CITY — With the goal of keeping roadside crosses in place in the face of a federal court order, the Utah Highway Patrol Association has removed the state's highway patrol logo from more than a dozen crosses statewide — and reiterated its stance that the crosses are not state-sponsored.

The move by the patrol association came after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to take up the case, disappointing social conservatives. The court's inaction Oct. 31 allowed a decision by the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals to stand that said the crosses amounted to an unconstitutional government establishment of religion. A reasonable observer, the 10th Circuit Court ruled, would believe the "state of Utah is endorsing Christianity."

The 12-foot-tall, 6-foot-wide crosses throughout Utah honor state troopers killed in action. They are placed as close as possible to the place of death, and they have the trooper's name, rank and badge number, along with a photo. It remains to be seen whether the association's move will appease the court.

The Utah Highway Patrol Association announced its action in late November, saying it "voluntarily" removed the Utah Highway Patrol logo. The association also added a sign stating that each of the crosses is a "private memorial" and is not a "state endorsement of any religion." Furthermore it said family members could choose "another appropriate symbol" instead of a cross.

35 percent seeking shelter are newly homeless

WASHINGTON — Thirty-five percent of homeless people in the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (AGRM) network reported that this is the first time they have ever been homeless before, according to a new study.

The Snapshot Survey, conducted annually by the AGRM network, polled nearly 19,000 individuals at 114 rescue missions. Seventeen percent of those surveyed were not currently homeless, but all had received services offered at the missions, such as food and medical care.

Bill Roscoe, director of Boise (Idaho) Rescue Mission, said his shelter housed more than 2,000 people in the past year who had never been homeless before. "We've seen quite a significant increase in numbers with women and children. In two years the average daily population in our women and children's shelter more than doubled," Roscoe said. "Unfortunately nothing in the report is a huge surprise," said John Ashmen, AGRM president. "Some public figures like to give the impression that government programs are curbing homelessness and hunger. We certainly aren't seeing it."