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MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM EDITOR BOB TERRY AND THE STAFF OF *THE ALABAMA BAPTIST*

WorldSong event shows Christmas traditions worldwide

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

A round loaf of bread called kolach sits on a Ukrainian Christmas table. The lit candle at its center represents Jesus, the Light of the World.

In Guatemala, a large bonfire outside a home burns brightly with leaves, sticks and a figurine of the devil, symbolizing the Virgin Mary's victory over him.

Christmas traditions can look dras-

tically different from one country to the next. And if you attended the sixth Christmas Around the World at WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs in mid-December, you experienced a taste of this.

The Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) camp, which emphasizes missions and ministry, created an entire Christmas experience representing the three Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions partnership countries: Guatemala, Ukraine and Haiti.

WMU brought back the popular event to culminate its yearlong celebration of the camp's 20th anniversary.

And while WMU leaders have received lots of positive feedback, executive director Candace McIntosh is quick to note the success comes because of partnership. WMU partnered with the SBOM, associational missions leadership, Campers on Mission and volunteers from Alabama Baptist churches across the state to pull off the event, which has been in the planning

stages for almost a year and a half, she said, noting a volunteer count of around 200 people.

"This was a major ordeal," McIntosh noted. "Volunteers started stringing lights in September."

It also meant bringing in retired or active Southern Baptist representatives to lead sessions on each country.

Allen and Laurelle Stoudenmire, who served in Guatemala from 2006 to 2008, shared fried bread and hot (See 'WorldSong,' page 8)

BEGINNING JAN. 5

Bible Basics

series

8 STEPS TO SERIOUS BIBLE STUDY



COMMENT

Christmas Carols of the Bible

Christians have sung Christmas carols for hundreds of years. It is said that Ambrose, bishop of Milan, wrote an early Christmas carol in the late 300s. The Spanish poet Prudentius penned the words to “O the Father’s Love Begotten” sometime before A.D. 417, the year of his death. In the 13th century, many believe the words to “O Come All Ye Faithful” first appeared.

Today who can imagine Christmas without the sounds of “Joy to the World” by the father of English hymnody, Isaac Watts; “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” written by Charles Wesley; or “Silent Night,” which was first performed Dec. 24, 1818?

Practically everyone loves Christmas carols, but many overlook the Christmas carols of the Bible. Specifically many regular readers of the Christmas story never notice the five Christmas carols recorded in the first two chapters of Luke. Remember a carol is a song that reflects a theme of Christmas and is sung during the Christmas season.

Elizabeth is the singer of the first carol appropriately called “The Beatitude of Elizabeth” and recorded in Luke 1:42–45. Elizabeth, the mother of John, was “filled with the Spirit” at the sound of her cousin Mary’s voice and sang what some call “the first Christian hymn.”

“Blessed are you among women,” she sang to Mary because “you” would be the human instrument through whom the Eternal came in human form. “Blessed is the child you will bear,” for He was the fulfillment of God’s promise. “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished,” a reference to the angel’s visitation and message to Mary in Nazareth.

Elizabeth, the daughter of a priest of the old order and wife of a priest of the old order, became the first to sing about the High Priest of the new order.

Zachariah, her husband, also sang a carol to celebrate the new thing God was about (Luke 1:68–79). The circumstances of his carol are almost miraculous in themselves. For months, he had been mute, unable to speak. But after he surprises the crowd gathered for the circumcision and naming of his new son by confirming that the boy will be named John, the mute priest became a singer.

Like his wife, Zachariah sang when he “was filled with the Spirit” (Luke 1:67). Scholars conclude that his words are structured like Old Testament prophecies and his is “the last prophecy of the Old Dispensation and the first of the new.”

The first part of Zachariah’s carol, called “The Benedictus” — Latin for the first word of his song, focuses on the role of Israel’s Deliverer. God has visited His people, the old priest sang, and this time, His purpose is redemption. The Deliverer is



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

a powerful deliverer, symbolized by the horn, the weapon of powerful animals. And the Deliverer comes from the house of David, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham.

Zachariah may have thought in terms of a political deliverer, like most people of his day. But the tone of his song changes in verse 75 with the emphasis moving from the political to the spiritual and universal purpose of God’s Deliverer. The Deliverer comes to make it possible for people to live before God in holiness and righteousness forever.

Forgiveness from the Deliverer

John would “go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him.” But it would be the Deliverer who provides forgiveness of sin and light to shatter the darkness and bring God’s peace to earth.

The best known of the five carols is “The Magnificat,” Mary’s song recorded in Luke 1:46–55. The title is the Latin word for the first word, magnifies or glorifies.

The opening verse gives voice to Mary’s personal emotions and experience. They reflect her personal devotion. Indeed God had done great things. He had allowed the bride of a peasant carpenter to be the mother of the Son of God. The child she would bear would reveal God’s truth and make His grace available to all.

The second stanza continues the theme of God’s greatness and grace. He has brought down rulers but lifted up the humble. He has sent the rich away empty but filled the hungry with good things. God has kept His promise to Israel just as He said He would.

The final carol belongs to Simeon, who had been promised that he would see the Messiah before his death (Luke 2:25–32). The song is titled “The Nunc Dimittis of Simeon,” Latin for “now depart” (Luke 2:29–32).

The writer does not say Simeon was filled with the Spirit but does affirm that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” and “moved by the Spirit, he went to the temple courts.” It was there he saw Jesus. By this time, the child was probably six weeks old. He had been circumcised on the eighth day, and now 33 more days had passed for Mary’s purification to be complete.

Mary and Joseph were there to make sacrifices

in accordance with the Old Covenant but Simeon saw something new. Simeon sang that he saw the One who would bring God’s salvation. This salvation was for all people. It was a “revelation to the Gentiles” and “glory to your people Israel.”

After such a wonderful sight, Simeon was ready to depart in peace. He could die knowing that the goal of his life had been fulfilled. He had seen the Savior.

His words seem to echo another Christmas carol — the one sung by the angels to the shepherds watching their flocks on a lonely Judean hillside (Luke 2:8–14). An angel announced a Savior had been born, an announcement Simeon repeated. The angel said the Savior’s birth was good news “for all people.” Simeon declared salvation had been “prepared in the sight of all people.”

The angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest.” Simeon said Jesus was for the glory of God’s people.

“Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests,” the angels sang. And Simeon demonstrated that peace as he walked into eternity confident that his life’s goal had been fulfilled because he had seen the Savior.

It is unlikely the angels sang the same notes or rhythm as Handel’s “Messiah,” which borrows the angels’ words for its text. But the celebration is unmistakable in both. Who can fail to sing “Glory to God in the highest” for the Son of Promise has come? Elizabeth could not. Zachariah could not. Mary could not. Simeon could not. And neither can anyone who believes that God came down and dwelt among us in Jesus, the One whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.



“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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DR. BOBBY S. TERRY, EDITOR

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**The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue Dec. 29.
The next issue will run Jan. 5.**

Sisters 'team within a team' on Judson soccer field

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The Dundore sisters were destined to become soccer players. Their mother grew up playing soccer in her native Honduras, and their father also played in his youth. Plus their older brother started the trend that they would follow.

But playing collegiate soccer together for the same school was something the three sisters didn't think was in the cards.

Grace said she never thought about playing soccer in college until her oldest sister, Lisa, got a soccer scholarship to Judson College in Marion. But this past season, Lisa, Emily and Grace shared the field

as players for the Judson soccer team, and all three said they enjoyed the unique experience.

"It makes me feel great, because I know I have two people who will always build me up or help me if I'm doing something wrong," said Grace, a freshman midfielder. "It's kind of a team within a team."

'A blessing'

Emily, a junior fullback, agreed. "It's definitely been a blessing to have both my sisters here at school with me," she said. "Not many people get the opportunity to go to school with their siblings. (When) I found out Lisa was going there, Judson was at the top of the list."

Lisa, a senior forward, was a member of Judson's first soccer

team. When she graduates this spring, she'll be part of the first class of four-year soccer players, something coach Ken Headley calls "a mark in school history." In fact, Lisa has set a number of school records that have really set the bar high, Headley said.

"The program has grown tremendously," Lisa said. "The first year I played we only won one game. The second year, we went to nationals. We've been kind of close getting to nationals since then. Skillwise we've grown, and that helps attract girls to the team."

Headley has been coaching at Judson for only a few months, but because of his background as a referee, he had the opportunity to see the Dundores play a few times prior to becoming their coach.

"It's amazing how different the girls are," Headley said. "There are some similarities between Lisa and Grace, but mostly they're kind of each individually different, and their personalities fit with the positions they play on the field."

As he sees it, Lisa is an assertive player but tends to be a little more laid back as a person. Emily is a "calm, cool and collected" player and doesn't let things get through the back line. Grace is a calculating player and the quietest of the three.

The Dundores have brought a wonderful dynamic to the team and made everyone feel more united, Headley said.

"It makes me feel great, because I know I have two people who will always build me up."

Grace Dundore
Judson College



Photo by Bill Matthews

SIBLINGS — Sisters (l to r) Lisa, Emily and Grace Dundore are members of Judson College's soccer team. They consider it a blessing to be able to play alongside one another.



Photo courtesy of Cary Hanks Jr.

HISPANIC BAPTIST BIBLE INSTITUTE HOLDS GRADUATION

The Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute celebrated its second graduation with 23 students Nov. 19 at Indian Springs Baptist Church, Eight Mile. The institute is a ministry of the Central Alabama Baptist Hispanic Ministry Coalition and the Kentucky Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute.

Central Assoc. centralizes 'helps' ministry

Central Baptist Association's approach to mercy ministry takes its call to empower local churches seriously.

Jerusalem Missions' vision statement has two primary elements: to meet the physical needs of the community and to enable "each congregation of believers" in the association to serve.

Since 2003, Central Association has kept a central food pantry and clothes closet to which its churches donate. Dawn Watkins of Hollins Baptist Church currently manages the supply.

A central location for storing goods is important because not ev-

ery church has room to store what it needs, Director of Missions Wayne Henderson said. Working together, the churches can meet more needs than any one could individually.

Churches make contact

When a needy family approaches a church, the church contacts Jerusalem Missions with the need. The ministry gives the supplies to the church to pass on to the family.

"We try to make sure the people understand that when they receive the help, it's not the association that's helping but the local church," Henderson said. "Neither myself nor Dawn give the goods to the

people, but the pastor or a representative [from the local church] gives the help."

Jerusalem Missions keeps a record of the families each church helps, he said. Families are allowed to seek help as often as they like, and no one has attempted to take advantage of the system.

Henderson pointed out that the Bible teaches that Christians must care for others' physical needs.

"[The Bible] says if someone is hungry, it's not enough for us to say, 'The Lord bless you,'" he said. "We need to try to meet a physical need and then possibly meet a spiritual need." (TAB)

Etowah County pastor Cecil Brown dies

Cecil O. Brown, former pastor of Keener Baptist Church, died Dec. 11. He was 83.

A Chapman native, Brown received his bachelor's degree in religion from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and master's and doctorate degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a U.S. Army veteran.

Some of Brown's pastorates included Calvary Baptist Church, Gadsden; Wagarville Baptist Church; and Cahaba Heights Baptist Church.

His most recent pastorate was

Keener Baptist. He also served as interim pastor for several churches and most recently as a supply preacher for Siberton Baptist Church, Attalla.

Brown also directed the Etowah Christian Institute for many years.

He was retired from his role as chaplain at Gadsden Regional Medical Center.

Gary Cardwell, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, said Brown was one of the finest men

he has ever known. "His love for ministry was evident through his involvement with [Etowah Association], Gadsden Regional Medical Center chaplaincy, as well as his pastoral ministry and work with Manna Ministries," Cardwell said. "He was loved by so many people because of his love for them."

Brown is survived by wife Ollie, one daughter, one son and two grandsons.

(TAB)



BROWN

LifeWay pulls Bible benefiting Susan G. Komen

LifeWay Christian Resources is pulling all copies of a special pink-covered Bible that partially benefited Susan G. Komen for the Cure because some of Komen's affiliates have given money to Planned Parenthood.

For each sale of the Here's Hope Breast Cancer Awareness Bible —

published by LifeWay's publishing arm, B&H, and sold in mass retail stores like Walmart — \$1 was donated to Susan G. Komen, a popular charity that works toward finding cures for and raising awareness of breast cancer.

Earlier this year the pro-life group American Life League reported that

18 of Komen's affiliates had given more than \$600,000 to Planned Parenthood during 2009–10.

Komen has tried to distance itself from Planned Parenthood's abortion practices, saying in a statement that "under no circumstances are Komen funds used to fund abortions or other nonbreast services." (BP)

'A godsend' to production

FBC North Mobile Pastor Ed Litton shares about his role in 'Courageous' movie

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Ed Litton joked that in his next film role, he's going to be the bad guy in a Western.

"I'll wear an eye patch and get shot off of a horse," he said.

For Litton, pastor of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland, that opportunity coming true would be only slightly more surprising than being cast in "Courageous," a film released in theaters nationwide Sept. 30.

Produced by Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga. — the same church that filmed "Fireproof" and "Facing the Giants" — the movie is aimed at challenging men to be strong, faithful fathers.

"I didn't have any intention of participating on screen, and I don't think they had any intention of me participating that way either," Litton said.

"I had spoken at a conference at Sherwood on the topic of fatherhood — my dissertation was on fatherlessness — and they asked me for some input several years ago when they were working on the concept of the film."

Later they asked him for input on the movie's intense grief scene, which takes place after a family

tragedy. Litton knows about that, too — he lost his wife, Tammy, in a car accident in 2007.

"They asked me to look at the script and give them some input on the grief scene because of my experiences," Litton said. "I told them I thought it was really well written. It's powerful — almost overwhelming."

They casually asked him to read it, and the next thing he knew, he'd been cast in the film.

"The genius of God is that a film like this can really connect with men and on a visceral level."

Pastor Ed Litton
FBC North Mobile

"I play a pastor who gets introduced into the film through a tragedy and grief process," Litton said. "I'm the pastor of the lead character, and I'm with him and his family as they go through the crisis."

Stephen Kendrick, co-writer and producer of "Courageous," said Litton was "a god-

send" to the production. With his background, training and personal experiences, "Ed was almost over-qualified" for the role, Kendrick said.

It's a minor role, Litton said, but it's more screen time than he ever thought he'd have.

"It was a blast. I told some of my friends that I could do this the rest of my life," Litton said.

His undergraduate degree is in religious studies and theater, but this is the first time since college



Photo courtesy of Sherwood Pictures

POWERFUL MESSAGE — Pastor Ed Litton (right) of FBC North Mobile plays the role of Pastor Rogers, who counsels Adam Mitchell, played by Alex Kendrick (left), in the movie 'Courageous.'

that he's gotten to stretch his legs on the latter part of his coursework. Both of his sons are award-winning documentary filmmakers.

'A church effort'

"I never imagined being able to get a part of a major production like this, especially with the Sherwood team," Litton said. "They really pray about what they do. The people pray over it — it's a church effort, these films."

It was encouraging to watch the whole Sherwood congregation get behind the film, he said.

"It's a great church with a great vision," Litton said. "Sunday School classes baby-sit, bring food to the cast and spend a lot of time in prayer. They know that there will be intense attack during production and afterward."

The spiritual attacks come because the films make a difference, he said.

"Lives are being touched by 'Courageous,'" Litton said. "Men are being impacted. It is a real call

at a time when people in our culture seem to be running from responsibility."

He said he has been encouraged to write a book on fatherhood and fatherlessness but has always hesitated because most men wouldn't purchase a book.

"But they will watch a film," Litton said. "The genius of God is that a film like this can really connect with men and on a visceral level."

And the film does not have an easy-to-work-out Christian plot, he said. "It doesn't resolve at the end with a crusade. It's gritty. It's hard. It's reality," Litton said. "And it begins a conversation about issues that all of us face."

He said the most exciting part has been seeing lives

impacted by the message. "The feedback from people I've talked to and from reviews has been very positive," Litton said.

"Hollywood really knows how to do sin on screen, but Sherwood does a good job of showing the gospel and the reality of grief and how we face it. I'm pleased to be a part of it."

And being in the film has made his face more familiar.

"Every once in awhile, I'll get stopped in an airport," he said. "It's resurrected some college friends and such who were shocked to see me on screen after years of being out of touch."

"Courageous" will be available on DVD on Jan. 17. For more information, visit courageousthemovie.com.

"Sherwood does a good job of showing the gospel and the reality of grief and how we face it."

Pastor Ed Litton
FBC North Mobile

'Courageous' movie event kit available to churches, ministries

Provident Films and Sherwood Pictures are offering a chance for churches to ring in the new year with a special screening of the film "Courageous."

"With New Year's Eve falling on Saturday this year, a family movie night is the perfect positive and inspiring way to begin 2012," said Ben Howard, senior vice president of Provident.

"Courageous," produced by the same company — Sherwood Pictures — as "Fireproof" and "Facing the Giants," follows four law enforcement officers who struggle in different ways with their roles as fathers.

When tragedy strikes, the men are forced to face their difficulties together and wrestle with their faith in honesty and community. The film aims to cultivate God's promise to

"turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers."

Provident is offering a movie event kit to churches that includes the movie on DVD, the license required for a year of unlimited public screenings and marketing support material. The package is an exclusive deal for churches and ministries. The company hopes that this will be an opportunity to show the film to encourage believers and foster conversations with non-Christians.

To help spread the word about a movie night event, Provident is also selling a package that includes invite tickets, movie posters and church bulletin inserts.

For more information, visit providentfilms.org/courageous or courageousresources.com.

(TAB)



"Courageous"
will be available on DVD on Jan. 17.

For more information, visit
courageousthemovie.com.

For resources, visit providentfilms.org/courageous or courageousresources.com.



Photo by Lindsey Robinson

WORSHIP — The congregation of Hueytown Baptist Church participates in the worship part of the service led by Pastor Daniel Simmons of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Albany, Ga.

Hueytown Baptist hosts 'Courageous' pastor

By Lindsey Robinson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When he was in the eighth grade, Daniel Simmons portrayed a preacher in his school's production of "Who Killed Aunt Caroline?"

This year, Simmons played Pastor William Barrett in the major motion picture "Courageous."

It was only his second acting gig, but the role was a natural fit for the senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Albany, Ga.

However, Simmons didn't talk about his role or preach on fatherhood, the movie's theme, when he led a service at Hueytown Baptist Church on Nov. 6. Instead he led church members and others on a journey through Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, which symbolized Israel's hopelessness.

"When a person loses hope, they've lost what it takes to keep going. ... Hope is like the air we breathe; it's what keeps us going," Simmons said.

Hueytown Baptist Pastor Jerry Watts met Simmons at a conference Sept. 21-23 in Albany.

"I heard [Simmons] speak four or five times that week, and there hasn't been a time I wasn't inspired by his words and his spirit," Watts said.

With "Courageous" now playing in four countries, Simmons feels as if he is preaching to the world even if his scene is only about a minute long. Still it took eight hours to film and it felt "real" and "bigger than the moment," he said.

Though Simmons has been preaching since 1984, he said he's "still nervous every time."

In the movie, his character serves as a mentor, something Simmons is no stranger to in his personal and professional life. In college, he worked with troubled teens at a detention center and saw the effects of growing up without a father's support and discipline.

"What I saw was a lot of struggling," Simmons said.

He watched as the quest for a father figure led many young men to gangs and gang violence.

As a young man, Simmons almost went down that road. One of his best friends was held down and shot at, while the other ended up in prison with a life sentence.

"It was my daddy that pulled me back," he said.

Simmons credits his father, a pastor who worked a full shift at a factory,

with his success.

"I glow with joy when I talk about my family. ... My father was my hero," he said.

Since his college days, Simmons has mentored many men and boys in his life and congregation.

In his church, he created a study group called Boys to Men.

"It takes a man to teach a boy how to be a man," Simmons said.

The creators of "Courageous" offer books and other tools to help men and women learn to be better parents and leaders. "Courageous" training tools can be found at LifeWay Christian Stores.



Photo by Lindsey Robinson

INSPIRED — Pastor Daniel Simmons of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Albany, Ga., speaks at Hueytown Baptist Church on Nov. 6.

Father-daughter pair serve as university, student body presidents at Samford

Qualities of leadership run deep in Samford University's Westmoreland family. And, in what is a national rarity, a father-daughter pair serve as university and student body presidents at the school.

The 4,758-student university is led by Andrew Westmoreland, who assumed the Samford presidency in 2006 after serving eight years at the helm of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas.

Riley Westmoreland, daughter of Westmoreland and his wife, Jeanna, serves as 2011-12 student government association president, a post she was elected to by the student body in the spring.

In her role, the senior political science and journalism/mass communication double major serves as the primary representative of the student body to the Samford administration. She also develops, coordinates and executes activities and services that benefit students, and oversees the executive, legislative, judicial, development and student activity branches of SGA.

The younger Westmoreland has a deep respect for the leadership skills and qualities exhibited by her father, who in his 2005 book, "Leading by Design," identifies ways Jesus related to and led 12 types of people.

It is her dad's emphasis on people and on relationships that Riley admires most about his leadership style.

"He really seeks to know people and to build partnerships and friendships everywhere he goes. The time he takes to talk to people, and more importantly, to listen, is something I try very hard to emulate," she said.

Even though her dad is busy, Riley said he realizes it is the people of Samford — the students, faculty staff, alumni, donors and others — who make the university great.

She seeks to adopt his listening skills. "It's not my SGA. It belongs to the students. My job is to listen to them, to know them and to fight for the issues they think are important," she said.

In addition to varied SGA posts, beginning with Freshman Forum, Riley has honed her leadership skills through Zeta Tau Alpha sorority and the Samford admission office, where her jobs have included campus tour guide and orientation leader for entering students and their families.

Lots of experience

Although she began her SGA work as a freshman, Riley didn't entertain the idea of running for president until she served on the executive board during her junior year. When asked during the campaign if she would be able to "stand up to" the Samford administration on behalf of students, she responded that she had lots of experience "stand-



Photo courtesy of Samford University

NATIONAL RARITY — Riley Westmoreland, Samford University's student body president for 2011-12, serves with her father, Andrew Westmoreland, who is the university's president.

ing up to" the Samford administration. Her father has enjoyed sharing that anecdote with others, adding his own response that the remark is "very true."

Riley found her work as SGA vice president of development broadened her view of what all SGA does and what else it could be doing to make the student experience at Samford the best it can be. "Once I could see the big picture, I realized that I had lots of ideas that could help change occur," she said.

Before the fall semester started, she and new student executive board members attended several days of leadership training. The result was a stated goal: To be for students, for a better Samford.

"I hope that SGA will be seen by the entire student body as the go-to group to represent any of their needs or concerns, and for us to program engaging events for all students," Riley said at the time.

As she ably delved into her many presidential duties during the fall term, she has often sought her dad's wisdom and counsel. "It has been very useful to be able to turn to my dad for advice across the semester," she said. "He has a great wealth of knowledge from all of his experience, and he's given me great advice and encouragement while working with people and working through difficult situations that might otherwise have been overwhelming."

Andrew Westmoreland is a graduate of Ouachita, where he received

a bachelor's degree in political science in 1979.

He earned a master's degree in the subject from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and a doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Genetic trait

Leadership is a genetic trait in the Westmoreland family. The household also includes a wife and mother who is blessed with an able leadership gene. Jeanna Westmoreland is a natural leader who serves as executive director of the Samford volunteer support group, Legacy League. She also teaches a freshman course in the Academic Success Center and is actively involved in Alabama Governor's School summer program for high school students. At Ouachita, she was dean of the school of education and is now active with Samford's Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education and Professional Studies.

As for Riley's future, the high-energy extrovert plans to attend graduate school after receiving her bachelor's degree in May and would like to work in Washington, D.C., at some point. For now, she happily serves the same student body as her father.

"I have all the respect in the world for my dad and for this university. This really is the honor of a lifetime to get to serve the Samford community in this capacity." (SU)

Tennessee newborn twins' deaths spotlight safe haven laws

A recent incident of double infanticide in Tennessee demonstrates the importance of mothers in crisis being aware of safe haven laws.

Lindsey Lowe, of Hendersonville, Tenn., admitted to killing her newborn twin boys on the night of Sept. 12 and has been charged with two counts of first-degree murder. She gave birth to them in the bathroom, covered their mouths one at a time until they stopped breathing and placed them in a laundry basket. According to a police affidavit, Lindsey feared her parents would hear the cries and find out about the pregnancy she had kept secret from family and friends.

Police said when the bodies of Mark Alvin Michael Lowe and Paul Duvoll Tate Lowe were found, they appeared to be full term, weighing 5 or 6 pounds each.

Dead or barely surviving babies have been discovered in trash chutes, garbage bins and even laundry baskets in the United States. The mothers who abandoned them apparently felt they had no other options. Increased awareness of safe haven laws could aid mothers in such crises and their babies, advocates say.

A safe haven law enables a moth-

er to leave an unharmed child at a local medical facility, police station, fire department, church or other designated site without fear of criminal prosecution. In 1999, Texas became the first state to implement what has been nicknamed the Baby Moses Law. Since then, the other 49 states and the District of Columbia have followed suit.

The conditions regarding when and where babies may be surrendered differ by state. The National Safe Haven Alliance website (nationalsafehavenalliance.org) documents each state's law, seven of which are mentioned below:

► Alabama: A child up to three days old can be left with a hospital employee at the emergency room of any licensed hospital.

► New York: A child as much as 30 days old can be left with any responsible adult.

► Tennessee: A child up to three days old can be left at a hospital, birthing center or health clinic.

► District of Columbia: A child as much as seven days old can be left at a hospital, fire department, police station or emergency medical service (EMS) provider.

► North Dakota: A child as old as one year can be left at a hospital.

► Arizona: A child up to three days old can be left at an adoption agency, child welfare agency, hospital, fire department, EMS provider or church.

► Texas: A child as much as 60 days old can be left at a hospital, EMS provider or child welfare agency.

The potential effectiveness of safe haven laws has been shown in Florida. Nick Silverio, founder of A Safe Haven for Newborns, says 160 babies have been safely relinquished into custody since the law went into effect more than 11 years ago.

Each child surrendered in Florida is placed on one of the 60 participating adoption agency lists after being medically cleared.

Mary Spaulding Balch of the National Right to Life Committee said, "Safe haven laws serve a specific function, and a positive one at that: to ensure a newborn is placed somewhere safely," Spaulding Balch said.

Lt. Scott Ryan of the Hendersonville Police Department encourages expectant mothers to consider their options before taking the lives of innocent babies.

"No matter how bleak the outlook may be for you, let someone who's not within these boundaries take a look at your issues and try to help you out," Ryan told *The Tennessee* newspaper in Nashville. "We beg you, when you have a difficult situation such as this, please come to us and let us help you before the mistakes are made." (BP, TAB)

"Safe haven laws serve a specific function, and a positive one at that: to ensure a newborn is placed somewhere safely."

Mary Spaulding Balch
National Right to Life Committee

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► **Jody Baker** will celebrate 30 years of ministry at **McElwain Church, Birmingham**. There will be a reception in her honor Jan. 8, 3 p.m., in the fellowship hall. Baker has served as minister of education and administrator since 1996. Her grandparents owned Baker's Dairy, which provided land for the church. R. Joseph Tricquet Jr. is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Church, Holly Pond**, will hold a watch night

service Dec. 31, 8 p.m., with The Singing Commodores, of Blountsville. There will be refreshments around 10 p.m. The old year will be prayed out and the new one prayed in. For information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

CONECUH

► **Larry Johnson** is the new pastor of **Lyeffion Church, Evergreen**. ► **New Hopewell Church, Castleberry**, was voted in unanimously as a member of Conecuh Association. Jim DeWitt is pastor of New Hopewell.

FRANKLIN

► **Kirk Cagle** is the new pastor of **Bear Creek No. One Church**. ► **Harley Hollingsworth** is the new pastor of **Duncan Creek Church, Russellville**.

WINSTON

► Winston Baptist Institute of **Winston Association** will begin a new session Jan. 3, 6:30 p.m., with Director of Missions Al Hood at the associational office. The course will be New Testament Survey. Bring a Bible, notebook and pen. To register call 205-489-5137. The association also will hold a ladies gathering called "It's a Jungle Out There" Jan. 7, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., at First Church, Double Springs. Kim Dunn will sing. The New Canaan Baptist drama team will provide skits. Duronda Hood will speak. Each church is asked to bring a dessert and a door prize. For reservations call 205-489-5137 by Dec. 27. T.B. Stringfellow is interim pastor of First, Double Springs.

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

FBC Sylacauga Pastor Tim Childers retiring

A journey. That's the way Tim Childers, pastor of First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, describes his 27 years in ministry. He will retire from his position at First, Sylacauga, on Dec. 31.

After he accepted Christ at age 27, Childers immediately felt called into some sort of ministry. At the time, he didn't know exactly how God would use him.

His pastor, Alf Kavli, at Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds, was "instrumental" in helping him understand that what he was feeling was a call from God, he said.

Childers attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and earned his masters in religious education. He went on to serve as a music/youth minister at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, and an education/youth minister at First Baptist Church, Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

Childers' first senior pastorate was at College Heights Baptist Church, Gadsden. He also served almost 11 years as pastor of First Baptist Church, Mableton, Ga., before coming to First, Sylacauga, in 2007.

Childers has served for three years on the board of trustees for Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. His book, "The Secret Place," was released in November. It features 31 devotionals from Psalm 91.

Randy Hagan, director of missions for Coosa River Baptist Association, said Childers and his wife, Debbie, will be missed.

"I appreciate Tim's friendship and his gifts and his teaching abilities," Hagan said. "He's done a great work at [First, Sylacauga]. ... He and his wife are a great team and have a great ability to make contact with people."

But Childers' retirement is only a "semiretirement," he said. He and his wife will serve full time through their ministry, The Reality Group, reaching churches and associations through Christian conferences.

Childers said it was a blessing to serve churches through the years. "[It was] the most amazing journey to see God's hand at work along the way in our lives," he said.

For more information, visit www.therealitygroup.org.

Three Conecuh Assoc. churches unify for missions

When membership numbers at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Bermuda Baptist Church and Repton Baptist Church, all in Conecuh Baptist Association, began to dwindle about a decade ago, the churches decided to begin a new tradition.

Each quarter, members of all three churches meet at one of the three buildings to have an event focused on missions.

"The program is to enlighten the churches about missions efforts, and we get together with a missionary, and we have a media presentation or something," said Dean Matthews, pastor of Bermuda Baptist for about 15 years.

Edward Robinson, pastor of Oak Grove Baptist since July, has heard only wonderful things about this event from his congregation. He has not yet been able to attend an event because of illness but knows it is a great fit for his church based on its goals and values.

"The church where I'm pastoring has a real heart for the gospel and for missions, both local and international," he said.

Matthews said the event has become something that members of all three churches look forward to. In addition to the missions program, the event includes a time of fellowship so members of different churches have a chance to get to know each other better.

"My hope is that, thanks to the success of this event, we can branch out and maybe have joint revivals, community revivals and VBS (Vacation Bible School)," Matthews said.

FBC Fairview's GAs wrap presents for LMCO

The Girls in Action (GAs) at First Baptist Church, Fairview, raised \$517 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering at their Wrapped in Love gift-wrapping fundraiser Dec. 10.

Debbie Keaton, Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) director for First, Fairview, said the 10 girls worked "tirelessly" wrapping gifts brought in by church and community members.

After a morning of measuring, cutting and taping wrapping paper, the GAs went to the home of Gethel Vickery, a 93-year-old church member. They decorated Vickery's Christmas tree, and she made "homemade goodies" for them to enjoy.

Keaton said she was proud to see that the girls have such a love for missions. "The future of the WMU at [First, Fairview] is definitely bright," she said.



VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

Remember to:

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

Bibb Assoc. church makes Operation Christmas Child yearlong project

By Julie Payne
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With an average of 30 people in Sunday morning worship, Mount Moriah Baptist Church, West Blocton, may be considered a small church, but it's making a big impact on children around the world.

Cynthia Cochran, wife of Pastor Shane Cochran, shared that the Bibb Baptist Association church has become increasingly involved in Operation Christmas Child (OCC) in the past three years. OCC, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse, offers joy and hope to hurting and needy children worldwide through its distribution of shoe boxes filled with toys and other items during the Christmas season.

Cochran became involved in the ministry through her home church, Rosedale Baptist, Tuscaloosa. Compelled by her passion for OCC, she desired to think of some ways Mount Moriah Baptist, which had never donated more than 12 shoe boxes a year, could increase its involvement.

"My home church ... would take up one item each week and have the youth pack the shoe boxes," she explained. "So I tried that with our church."

Some Mount Moriah members bring gifts for the shoe boxes throughout the year, and others opt to donate money so that additional gifts can be purchased. The Sunday before OCC's National Col-



Photo courtesy of Operation Christmas Child

CHRISTMAS 2010 IN SUDAN — Children in Sudan were some of those receiving shoe boxes in 2010. The Southeast region of the U.S. packed 608,246 shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child — a 3 percent increase from 2009.

lection Week, the church hosts an afternoon "packing party" and all ages participate.

"We pair a child with an adult, and they go around and pack the shoe boxes," Cochran said.

'So excited'

The children "just get so excited, knowing that [the boxes] go to some child who may not have a Christmas," she added.

Shane Cochran led a special devotional and prayer during the shoe box-packing event this year.

As a result of Mount Moriah's recent participation and dedication, its shoe boxes have multiplied exponentially.

"We went from 36 shoe boxes in 2009 to 95 in 2010," Cynthia Cochran reported. This year, the church donated 106 shoe boxes to OCC.

Other Bibb Association churches also contributed to OCC this year. Brent Baptist Church was the leader in donations with 199 shoe boxes. In all, the association's churches contributed 1,350 gift-filled shoe boxes.

After shoe boxes are donated, they are transported to a designated collection center.

There are 81 such centers in Alabama, and Baptist churches and associations house 55 of them.

Marcus Busenitz, OCC collections center coordinator for metro Birmingham, said Mountain Brook Community Church has served as a collection center for three years.

"We've seen decent growth every year," he said.

Time for prayer

One memorable moment for Busenitz, the singles and small group pastor of Mountain Brook Community, occurred when he noticed that a group of youth volunteers in the collection center had pulled aside a donor's children to pray with them.

"They were all holding hands together and praying," Busenitz said. "[Prayer] was something we tried to emphasize."

He said it is very rewarding to think of the number of lives being affected by OCC's efforts.

According to Joy Ugi, OCC media relations associate, the Atlanta Processing Center — where

Sample OCC schedule

Is your church looking to start a yearlong Operation Christmas Child (OCC) donation schedule? Here is an example of how Mount Moriah Baptist Church's monthly schedule is set. Be sure to check OCC's website for specifics on what gifts are recommended.

- ▶ January — Toothbrushes and toothpaste
- ▶ February — Small plush toys
- ▶ March — Hats, gloves and scarves
- ▶ April — Boys' toys
- ▶ May — Girls' toys
- ▶ June — Boys' clothing items
- ▶ July — Girls' clothing items
- ▶ August — School supplies
- ▶ September — Soap and hygiene products
- ▶ October — Hard candy (TAB)

all shoe boxes from Alabama are routed after National Collection Week — received, processed and sent above and beyond its goal of 1 million shoe box gifts. "Alabamians definitely contributed to that," she reported.

As for Cynthia Cochran, her participation in OCC is something she began a long time ago and plans to continue.

In fact, Mount Moriah is gearing up to restart its annual participation in January.

"We have a big ... box (set up) in the vestibule at church," Cynthia Cochran explained. "People bring their [gift donations] and set them down in it."

She said the impact of an OCC shoe box gift can be far-reaching.

"A lot of times, it's not just the children who get saved — it's the whole family," she said. "I would love for other churches to get involved in this ... so more children can get the gifts and [in the process] learn the Word of God."

For more information, visit www.samaritanaspurse.org/index.php/occ/.



By Julie Payne
Correspondent, TAB

Someone You Should Know

DANNY DEAN

Spring Creek Baptist Church, Honoraville
Butler Baptist Association



DEAN

FAVORITE VERSE: Romans 8:28

FAVORITE HYMN:

"How Great Thou Art"

HOBBY: Fishing

FAMILY STATUS: Married 32 years to Brenda; three children, Jennifer, Kimberly and Jake; and one grandson

Danny Dean serves as pastor of Spring Creek Baptist Church, Honoraville, and moderator for Butler Baptist Association. He surrendered to the ministry when he was 17 and later graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with a master of divinity. Dean started his ministry work as a youth pastor, and for 25 years, he was a bivocational pastor, working both at churches and several mental health centers as a master's level therapist. He is currently serving his second church in a full-time capacity.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: (My) mom and dad were very active in church — I grew

up in church. I learned about Jesus and all things about the Bible all my life. When I was 7, I came to realize I needed to make a profession of faith. ... I knew it was what I should do. I walked the aisle and my mom (the church pianist) was playing the piano.

Q: Can you share about your time as moderator?

A: As moderator, what I have tried to do is to help our association be trained to reach people. (I've) tried to encourage more pastors to be active in the association. The work inside the association is a nurturing kind of thing. ... We have to nurture churches to be invested in the association. ... We are autonomous yet working together.

Q: What difference has Christ made in your life?

A: Basically, for me, I don't understand life without Him. Before I was saved, I imagined that church was where you were supposed to be. My mom and dad opened the doors for all the activities (at our church). It was just part of who we were.

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

A: I cannot imagine a day I am not involved in ministry in some way. I love being in front of folks and delivering the gospel. I can't imagine retirement. ... I don't want to see a time in my life where I'm not able to step into the pulpit (and preach).

Operation Christmas Child 2011 Statistics

(at press time)

Alabama: 181,813 shoe boxes

United States: Expected to meet or exceed its goal of 5.8 million shoe boxes

WorldSong Christmas event makes missions 'personal'

(continued from page 1)
chocolate similar to what is served in the Central American country.

The Stoudenmires, members of Thomasville Baptist Church, told stories of how they shared the Christmas message in Guatemalan schools and villages.

Carol Bercion, the in-country missions team coordinator for Alabama Baptists going to Guatemala, also shared experiences with some of the groups.

Donna Akers and her 17-year-old daughter, Kaylee, led the session on Christmas in Ukraine.

The Akers family has served in the former Soviet republic since 1999 and is currently on stateside assignment in Florence.

Akers shared some special traditions from the mainly Orthodox and Catholic country, while Kaylee led a question-and-answer time.

Susan Bartholomew, Baldwin Baptist Association WMU director who was in charge of the Haiti feature, commissioned 13 volunteers from the association to help "transform the area into Haiti," forming several sections to create a five-senses experience.

A clean water "well," live chickens, a goat, a market, a chapel and a cooking hut all set up inside one of the camp's cabins created the "smell" of the Caribbean country, Bartholomew said.

Two live donkeys outside the cabin welcomed visitors as they entered. Mango juice and fried pork skins, a traditional Haitian Christmas treat, were served. There was even a large fire going in the fireplace to keep the area "feeling" like Haiti.

Don Reece, a member of First Baptist Church, Boaz, who served 35 years in Nigeria and has taken several trips to Haiti, was in the disaster relief section of the cabin. He shared about what Alabama Baptists did in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

After "visiting" the countries, a meal was served in the camp cafeteria, aka the American Embassy.

After the meal, Christmas Around the World project coordinator Hope Stevens invited visitors to explore the other parts of the event, including a self-guided journey to the chapel where more than 100 nativities from Nigeria to Nepal were displayed.

There also was an outdoor Christmas "market" simulating those found around the world and "The Areas of Darkness," a walk-through experience of a mosque with pictures, audio and text reflecting Islamic beliefs and practices. The experience was meant to inform visitors about the places where the gospel has not yet spread.



Photo by Neisha Fuson
CARVED, PAINTED — A Ukrainian nativity scene was displayed at Christmas Around the World.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

UNIQUE NATIVITIES — Christmas Around the World visitors enjoy more than 100 nativities from around the world. The 2011 Christmas Around the World featured Guatemala, Ukraine and Haiti.

This year, Christmas Around the World hosted two family days when church groups, adults and families had a mostly self-guided tour through Haiti, Ukraine and Guatemala. There were also four senior adult days with sit-down informative sessions for Ukraine and Guatemala.

More than 1,200 people attended the event this year, some for the first time like Randall Fells, of Gadsden.

Fells' wife, Sabrina, led Girls in Action for 21 years at Macedonia Baptist Church, Coates Bend. Christmas Around the World was her chance to show him why she kept leading the girls back to WorldSong year after year.

"[Christmas Around the World] is very educational," he said. "I learned about places I'll never get to go to. It's opened my eyes to see how blessed we really are."

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

A GLIMPSE OF GUATEMALA — Retired SBC representatives to Guatemala, Laurelle (left) and Allen (center) Stoudenmire share Christmas traditions in the country where they served for two years.



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Working the crowd

Churches find ways to reach inactive members, seekers during Advent, Christmas

Deck the halls and cue the pageant! Advent has arrived in American churches, which means the lapsed and the curious who seldom darken the door just might drop by for a taste of the season's spirit.

But if visitors briskly come and go without considering a commitment to join or get involved, then churches will have missed a golden opportunity with huge implications for the future.

Part of what's at stake, researchers say, is the survival of congregations. Unless they start engaging the types of people who visit only at the holidays, aging mainline churches will have virtually no one in them in 30 years, according to Scott Thumma, a sociologist of religion at Hartford Seminary.

"If you just have the Advent season without also calling people to a more significant, disciplined sense of what the Christian life is, then you run the risk of letting people come in once a year and feel that they've done their Christian duty," Thumma said.

The Christmas season is when Americans are most open to considering matters of faith, according to data from LifeWay Research, a Southern Baptist research firm. In a 2008 survey, 47 percent said they've been more open during the holidays. That's more than after a national crisis such as 9/11 (38 percent), after a natural disaster (34 percent) or the birth of a child (28 percent).

"When we get caught up in all the celebration and don't take time to think about com-



RNS photo

SYMBOL OF THE SEASON — In celebration of the Advent season, pastors across the state and nation lead ceremonial weekly lightings of the Advent candles.

munication, we miss a big point of the Christmas season," said LifeWay Research President Ed Stetzer.

New initiatives

This year, new initiatives are courting those who've wandered from the flock. Some call them the "Chreasters" — people who rarely show up beyond Christmas and Easter.

The Catholics Come Home project is for the first time running a \$3.5 million TV campaign nationwide. The Episcopal Church is running an online Advent greeting in which a young adult woman waxes nostalgic about

holidays spent in church and invites everyone to services.

"Special efforts (to engage inactive members and seekers) are not likely to occur during the Christmas season," said Alan Newton, executive minister for the American Baptist Churches in and around Rochester, N.Y. "It is a busy season with lots of charitable work, extra visiting of shut-ins and the like, (plus) extra services."

Despite the difficulties, churches are finding ways to turn holiday activities into forums where people with tenuous or nominal ties to a faith community can explore deeper ones.

Sometimes the focus is on a few individuals. At Our Saviour's Atonement Lutheran Church in New York, ministry associate Jacob Simpson said he struggles to get consistent participation from the six teenagers in his confirmation group.

But at Advent, he could ask a new question: how would you like to help your neediest neighbors? Their answer: with a winter clothing drive and volunteering at a soup kitchen.

"Kids don't understand why they should be coming to church, and churches often don't give kids enough to do," Simpson said.

At worship services and special events, churchgoers need to remember the welcoming and nonjudgmental father from the parable of the prodigal son, Thumma said. His tip: remind greeters to avoid comments like, "Where have you been? We haven't seen you in ages!" Stick instead with, "It's great to see you! How are things going? Come see what's happening here."

Another tip: create environments where newcomers and inactive members can see and hear what makes church life meaningful. This might be could be a hallway lined with photos from missions trips, boys and men shoveling out elders after snowstorms, and other highlights of the year.

"It seems like a perfect occasion for the pastor or some religious leader to say, 'It wasn't just the shepherds or the wise men back then'" who were giving, Thumma said. "'We have people who're giving all year round in this community.'" (RNS)

HOPE

The Christmas story is one of hope for all mankind. Making sure everyone hears that message of hope is the reason the Cooperative Program exists. When you give through the Cooperative Program, you play a part in telling a lost world that God loved the world so much that He gave His Son.

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



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



A Nativity display in front of Pike Road Baptist Church helps tell the story of Christ's birth to all who pass by.



RNS photo

WHERE JESUS WALKED — Pilgrims hike along the Gospel Trail in Israel, a 39-mile network of trails and paths that trace Jesus' steps from Mount Precipice to the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Gospel Trail inaugurated

Christian-oriented hiking trail in Israel follows Jesus' steps

Perched on Tel Kinrot, a hill above the Sea of Galilee, Winston Mah turned his face toward the warm sun and took in the tranquil view before him.

To his right, the Christian pilgrim from San Diego saw banana groves at the edge of the calm fresh-water lake; to his left, on the opposite hill, rose the majestic Mount of Beatitudes at Tabgha, where, according to Christian tradition, Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount.

"This is a unique experience," Mah said, gazing at a lone fisherman on the water's edge.

"This is the view Jesus must have seen, the path He might have walked, the water He walked on. It's a privilege to walk in His footsteps."

It's one thing to read about biblical sites while seated in a church pew back home, Mah said. But "it's another thing entirely to be in the actual place, just as it's described in the Bible,"

he said, his voice full of wonder.

Mah and his church group were among the first hikers on the newly inaugurated Gospel Trail, 39 miles of integrated paths leading from Mount Precipice on the southern outskirts of Nazareth to the site of ancient Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Hoping for tourists

Developed by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the Jewish National Fund, the project has the enthusiastic support of local Christian leaders, whose flocks depend on the tourist trade.

Roughly 150,000 Christian Arabs live in Israel, the vast majority of them in the Galilee region, in the north of the country. As elsewhere in the Middle East, many Holy Land Christians have emigrated in search of economic stability and peace.

Now that the political situation is relatively quiet, and a record number of tourists are flooding

into Israel and the Palestinian-ruled territories, local Christians are benefiting and emigration is slowing, according to government statistics.

Two out of three tourists who visit Israel are Christian, according to the tourism ministry. Leading a group of journalists down a section of the trail on horseback, Tourism Minister Stas Misezhnikov said the Gospel Trail "represents a major means for maximizing the tourist potential" of the Sea of Galilee region.

The Gospel Trail isn't the first Christian-oriented hiking/cycling trail in the region. The 40-mile Jesus Trail begins in the city of Nazareth, the home of Mary and Joseph, and ends at the Sea of Galilee.

Though the trails overlap in many areas, the Jesus Trail winds its way through more Christian, Muslim and Jewish population centers and already has an infrastructure. (RNS)

Letters to the Editor

CONTENT CONCERN

As a supporter of *The Alabama Baptist*, I am greatly troubled by an article on page 4 of the Dec. 8 edition of the paper. The subject matter of the article involves the heartbreaking matter of pastors struggling with pornography. The content of the article references The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon church) in such a way that one might be led to believe it should be seen as another Christian denomination.

Mormons are not Christians. They

do not believe in the God of the Bible. They have a very unorthodox view of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their "sacred" writings include much more than the revealed word of God found in the Bible. Mormons are lost people who need to know the Truth.

The people at *The Alabama Baptist* are aware of the facts about Mormons and have in the past faithfully shared this with readers. I know everyone at the paper desires to honor God in all they do as they inform and educate Alabamians. Please be care-

ful with the responsibility you have to influence people's lives.

Wesley Price
Cottonton, Ala.

SBC NAME CHANGE

The name "Southern Baptist Convention" has served us well since it was adopted in 1845. I believe it can and will continue to serve us well in the future. My vote is: "Let us move on and continue to share the gospel."

Bill Garner
Birmingham, Ala.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Pakistani Christian rejected by family, pursued by police

KARACHI, Pakistan — When Malik Pauloos of Bhakkar district, Punjab province finally decided to trust a close relative with the secret that he had left Islam for Christianity, there was no question in his relative's mind that Pauloos' relationship with the family was over. The family had been custodians of an Islamic shrine, the Pir Syed Karamat Shah in Kot Islam, for three generations.

Though Pauloos had moved to Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, 20 years ago to start a scrap business, he had continued fulfilling his duty to prepare the shrine for annual pilgrimages — but after he withdrew from it over time upon his conversion, shrine leaders were asking pointed questions about his adherence to Islam.

"I told him (the relative) to get the shrine people off my back, because I did not want to keep any point of contact with my past life," Pauloos, 36, said. "Although shocked, my relative said that he would first try and make my family understand the situation, and then they could figure out a way of letting me walk away peacefully."

Pauloos did not realize that, beyond disowning him, his family would file a police complaint against him because, as an apostate deserving death, he was said to have committed "blasphemy." With authorities' help, family members are trying to track him down, he said.

Baptized in September after spending more than 10 years learning about the Christian faith, Pauloos said he does not regret trusting in Christ as Savior even though he has lost a comfortable life and a successful business and his Muslim family and friends are in hot pursuit to "kill the apostate."

Pro-Islamic party attacks Assyrian Christian businesses

ZAKHO, Iraq — Attacks against Christian Assyrian businesses in northern Iraq in early December, which local sources said were organized by a pro-Islamic political party, marked the first such destruction of Christian establishments in the Kurdish region. The rampage threatens the frail security of Iraq's dwindling Christian population, sources said.

After Mullah Mala Ismail Osman Sindi's Dec. 2 sermon claiming there was moral corruption in massage parlors in the northern town of Zakho, a group of young men attacked and burned shops in the town, most of them Christian-owned.

The businesses included liquor stores, hotels, a beauty salon and a massage parlor. "The interesting thing with this incident is the place where it happened," Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana of the Assyrian Church of the East said. "The Kurdish regional government is, for the most part, safe and secure, and all inhabitants enjoy prosperity and security, until now at least. The future is, by all means, bleak for the Christians and other minorities living there." Sindi denied accusations that he provoked the violence against northern Iraq's Christian community.

After Sindi's sermon, a man reportedly stood up in the mosque and said that since there were un-Islamic massage parlors in Zakho, Muslims should go destroy them.

Burmese government troops attack Christians

MYITKYINA, Myanmar — As U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrived in Burma's capital, Naypyidaw, in a show of support for authorities' ostensible reforms and to discuss minority rights, government troops killed civilians and burned houses in a Christian-majority state about 450 miles away.

On Nov. 30, the day Clinton arrived, Burmese soldiers killed a woman and injured six other villagers as they fired four rounds of mortar shells at civilians in the Tarlawgyi area of Kachin state's Waingmaw Township, Kachin News Group reported.

Another battalion burned down 10 homes in Nam Wai village and five more in neighboring Hpa Ke village, both in Dawhpumyang subtownship in Bhamo district, the Thailand-based news agency added.

The killing and arson followed two explosions that killed a student and injured another the previous night, Nov. 29, in the state's capital, Myitkyina. The twin blasts rocked the state capital days after a powerful explosion killed seven children and three internally displaced Kachin people and injured 16 other children at an orphanage Nov. 13 in Myitkyina's Thida Ward. The attacks left civilians in Kachin, where an estimated 90 percent of the 1.2 million people are Christians, "terrified," the journalist said.

Attempting to buy happiness

Are Americans returning to undisciplined spending habits of the past?

Why do we spend money on happiness we can't afford?

James A. Roberts was watching an "ABC News Nightline" episode on basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal recently when he heard about the size of the retired player's Florida home: 70,000 square feet.

Even for a man who spends his time studying consumer behavior as a marketing professor at Baylor University, Roberts was stunned.

His latest book, "Shiny Objects: Why We Spend Money We Don't Have in Search of Happiness We Can't Buy," tells the story of the American Dream gone awry by profligate materialism. The size of O'Neal's home offered further proof.

To Roberts' mind, what began as "Keeping up with the Joneses" has morphed into "Keeping up with the Gateses" (or, perhaps, the O'Neals).

"With the Internet, we don't have to compare ourselves with people living next door, we compare ourselves with the richest people in the world, and people aren't going to be happy," he said in a phone interview.

Writing about people's extravagant spending habits is all the rage, with multiple experts on consumer behavior publishing

accounts on the addictive — and often ruinous — nature of America's favorite pastime. Roberts' "Shiny Objects" is not particularly novel. The statistics quoted are well known: Seventy percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck; baby boomers are retir-

ing with only \$50,000 in savings.

Roberts' book may be different in one respect. A deacon at Calvary Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, Roberts offers a critique of the church, too.

As might be expected, he bashes celebrity preachers Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer and Creflo Dollar for a prosperity gospel theology that promises a hundredfold return on any donation to their ministry. But Roberts also indicts megachurches for accepting corporate financial support.

"Megachurches," he writes, "have become a prime distribution and marketing channel with companies including McDonald's, Ford, Chrysler, Target and Coca-Cola, lining up to sponsor conferences and outreach efforts, as well as offering free samples and test drives directly to worshippers."

Scholars who study megachurches say that's a gross overstatement. At most, 10 percent of mega-

churches have collaborated with corporate companies, said Scott Thumma, sociologist of religion at Hartford Seminary.

"Corporations and religious leaders have always been intertwined," said Thumma, a leading expert on large congregations. "Any long-established mainline congregation with an endowment has a vested interest in the health of the stock market."

Dave Travis, CEO of the Leadership Network, a Dallas-based think tank for large churches, added that while some church-based confer-



commons.wikimedia.org

'CONSUMER SHORT-TERM AMNESIA' — Black Friday shoppers wait in line at a Target store. Despite the past recession, Black Friday sales topped 9 percent over last year.

ences accept sponsorships, those are mostly for book and software publishers of materials aimed at church employees.

Roberts takes a more sanguine view of smaller churches, including his own, that offer classes to help churchgoers get a grip on debt.

A fan of radio personality Dave Ramsey and his Financial Peace University, Roberts leads a church discussion group based on Ramsey's 13-week class. The class teaches people how to keep a monthly budget, pay cash for groceries and draw down on debt.

"The Bible is pretty clear, in my reading, that we need to keep money in proper perspective," he said.

"It can't be the driving force in our lives."

But while many middle-class churchgoers are wising up and realizing they need more discipline in managing their money, Roberts doesn't hold out hope for society at large, which he claims is quickly dispensing with the financial sobriety that accompanied the 2008 recession.

'We're back'

Case in point: Black Friday sales topped 9 percent over last year, proof of what he calls "consumer short-term amnesia."

"Sad to say, I don't think we've learned our lesson from the past

recession," Roberts said. "We tightened our belts and hunkered down for a while, but as soon as we see blue skies we're back to our profligate ways."

If he has any advice for budget-conscious holiday shoppers, Roberts said he would encourage people to try "experiential materialism," in which people spend money on an experience such as a ball game, a good meal at a restaurant or an upcoming vacation.

"It gives us a chance to look forward and create a memory that will last a lifetime," he said. "Anything else I might give my wife, she'll appreciate the thought, but the gift will be long forgotten." (RNS)

"The Bible is pretty clear. ... We need to keep money in proper perspective."

James A. Roberts
Baylor University

New Dawson ministry to assist Birmingham-area kids, families

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, has long prioritized children in its ministry efforts. Early next year, a family resource center called Kids Connection will expand the Birmingham Baptist Association church's ministry even further into the community.

In a press release announcing the new ministry, Senior Pastor Gary Fenton cited the expense of raising a child, especially in difficult economic times.

"Unfortunately many families simply do not have the financial resources to take care of all of those needs," he said.

Kids Connection will help meet those needs, according to Tom Thompson, the church's minister of stewardship. The center will provide clothes, shoes, coats, diapers and other necessities for children up to 16. Thompson hopes other expensive items such as strollers, sports equipment and school uniforms will be available to families as well.

"It is so costly to raise a child," he said, "and children outgrow things so quickly. Parents with limited financial ability can't do it alone and the children go lacking. Our goal is to meet the needs of children who otherwise wouldn't have what they need."

The center is a natural extension of the church's mission, Thompson said.

"We had an ad hoc committee years ago that prioritized ministry to children, and ... as we looked for ministry opportunities, we realized God was calling us to meet the needs of children in our city," he said.

Kids Connection will open in March 2012 in a rented storefront on Green Springs Highway, a few miles from the church's Oxmoor Road campus. Though Kids Connection will look like a retail store, it is not a thrift store. Families served by the center will receive items free of charge, but they must be referred by other churches and assistance agencies. From conversations with other organizations during the planning phase for the center, Thompson knows the needs are great.

"There is no question that we have seen a dramatic increase in the needs in our community. The number of people who just cannot afford to meet the basic needs of their families has increased, and people who never dreamed they would have to ask for assistance are now having to ask for help," he said.

Generous gift

"Volunteers will pray with individuals, and we will provide age-appropriate Christian books for each child," he said.

Currently eight volunteer teams are responsible for various aspects of the project. Once Kids Connection opens, volunteers will staff the center two days a week for four hours each day initially for appointments. Two other volunteer shifts will be available on alternate days to accept donations of new and gently used items that can be distributed to families who receive assistance.

Thompson said church members have given generously to support the project and Kids Connection has been included in the church's

annual budget as a permanent ministry.

"Our church has been very blessed that our members are generous and people have given generously to Kids Connection," he said.

That includes the youngest members of Dawson Memorial Baptist.

Thompson said during the church's annual fall stewardship emphasis, children are encouraged to collect money for a specific ministry. This year, the children's offering was designated for Kids Connection, and the children alone gave about \$4,000, mostly in change. Donations also have come in from children's groups at Dawson, including blankets made by one group of Girls in Action. Thompson said once the center is open, it will provide an opportunity for children and youth to volunteer and participate in ministry alongside adults from the church.

"Kids love helping other kids, and this is a great opportunity for people of all ages to minister to the community," he said.

For more information, visit www.dawson-church.org.

Historical Highlights

from previous issues of *The Alabama Baptist*

Compiled by Kathleen Prude

50 Years Ago December 1961

77-Year Attendee: William F. Lee has attended Montgomery Second Baptist Church for 77 consecutive years this month. Lee, who celebrated his 80th birthday last month, was first carried to the church as a babe in arms by his mother.

He joined the church in 1895, when he was 14 years old. During his lifetime of service to the church, Lee has been a deacon, chairman of the trustees, Sunday School superintendent and Training Union director and teacher. He is now secretary in the Sunday School nursery department and an auditor for the church. A retired state employee, Lee was examiner of public accounts for 21 years.

40 Years Ago December 1971

Missionary Honeymooners: Lucy Wright, 76, and Lineville-native Earl Parker, 83, both retired

Southern Baptist missionaries, were recently married in Greenville, S.C. They left soon after the wedding ceremony for a trip to the Middle East and will live in Greenville after their return. The Parkers first met years ago when they sailed for Asia on the same ship. He and his first wife served in China for 32 years and Korea for four years before retiring in 1958. His wife died in 1969. Wright, a missionary nurse for 42 years, worked in China with Bill Wallace and then served in Korea for 11 years before retiring in 1964.

30 Years Ago December 1981

Ordination Anniversary: The faculty of Equatorial Baptist Theological Seminary in Belem, Para, Brazil, recently invited all Baptists in the area to celebrate the 40th anniversary of missionary Loyd Moon's ordination as pastor. Moon is president of the seminary.

Born and reared in rural Madison County, Moon preached his first sermon in 1940 at Dubose Point. He was ordained at Collier's Chapel Church when he was 18 and served as pastor of Pleasant Grove Church in Madison County and Union Church in Jackson County. A missionary in Brazil for 30 years, Moon has served as pastor of 20 churches in the states of Sao Paulo, Amazonas and Pares. He was elected president of the seminary in 1971.

20 Years Ago December 1991

'Poet of the Century': Family and friends of Fronia Connell Barnard gathered recently at Fair Haven, a Methodist retirement home in Birmingham, to celebrate two novel occasions: her 100th birthday and the publication of her first book. Barnard is a lifelong resident of Alabama and longtime member — since 1928 — of Ruhama Baptist

Church, Birmingham, which she still attends faithfully. In October, the Alabama State Poetry Society named her as its first "Poet of the Century." Born Nov. 28, 1891, the oldest of 10 children, Barnard is the daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Alabama Baptist ministers. She has been winning awards for her writing since she was a sophomore in high school.

10 Years Ago December 2001

Historic Move: One Alabama Baptist church made a historic move recently by naming an African-American as interim pastor of its predominantly white congregation. Chris Hamlin, who works as an assistant to the provost at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, delivered his first sermon to the Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, on Dec. 2. He follows Interim Pastor Sarah Shelton, who served one year.

Baptist Health System names COO, new Princeton head

Keith Parrott has been promoted to the newly created position of executive vice president and chief operating officer of Baptist Health System (BHS), according to Shane Spees, BHS president and chief executive officer. Additionally, Betsy Postlethwait will succeed Parrott as president of Princeton Baptist Medical Center. Both Parrott and Postlethwait will assume their new roles Jan. 1.

Parrott will be responsible for overseeing and administering the daily operations of BHS' four hospitals, two free-standing surgery centers, two free-standing imaging centers, other patient care operations including home health (in Talladega) and home infusion services. Additionally, he will lead the BHS' business development and marketing functions.

"Keith has done a tremendous job at Princeton and in providing leadership for Walker and Citizens Baptist Medical Centers," Spees said.



PARROTT

Parrott joined BHS in 2008 as president of Princeton Baptist. During his tenure in that role, Princeton launched a \$57 million expansion and renovation of the hospital. In 2009, he also assumed oversight of Walker and Citizens Baptist Medical Centers resulting in both hospitals realizing significant performance improvements.

Prior to joining BHS, Parrott was chief executive officer of Memorial Hermann Northwest Hospital in Houston, Texas. He holds a bachelor's degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and a master's in health

care administration from the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

Postlethwait joined Princeton Baptist in 2004 as chief operating officer, Spees said. "Betsy has served Princeton well during her



POSTLETHWAIT

tenure as the hospital's chief operating officer and as interim president in 2007. Her continued presence at Princeton as president will keep the expansion project on course and will ensure that Princeton continues as a market leader," Spees said.

Postlethwait earned her bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, N.C. She previously served as chief operating officer/chief financial officer of CHRISTUS St. John Hospital in Nassau Bay, Texas, and has held various health care leadership posts throughout her career. (BHS)

MARKET PLACE

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Fairview Baptist Church of Gadsden, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Mail resumes to: Search Committee, Fairview Baptist Church, 5295 Fairview Road, Gadsden, AL 35904.

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.

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

OTHER POSITIONS

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER DIRECTOR: McElwain Baptist Church is looking for a full-time director of their child development center. This person must have administrative skills, a heart for this ministry and experience in child care. If interested, please send your resume to: jbakermc@mcElwain.org.

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MISCELLANEOUS

SALVATION STORY: ATHEIST FIRE-FIGHTER FINDS CHRIST: Action packed. Perfect gift for unsaved friends, sons, grandsons. Free shipping. \$16.95 4L Press, Box 5975, Marysville, CA 95901. www.outofthefirebook.com.

PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES: Huntsville Achievement School — private school that is a resource to middle class families having students with learning differences such as Autism, Aspergers, ADD/ADHD, ODD, Dyslexia and those that need a smaller more individualized educational environment. www.huntsvilleachievement.com. 256-539-1772.

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.

Turkish al-Qaida cell accused of planning church bombings

A large-scale al-Qaida plot to bomb “all the churches in Ankara,” as well as the Turkish Parliament and U.S. Embassy in the Turkish capital, was made public Dec. 9.

In an exclusive splashed across the front page of the daily *Taraf* newspaper, contents of an official indictment against 11 alleged al-Qaida militants arrested in July revealed the homegrown terrorist cell’s alleged plans to attack Ankara’s churches as well as its Christian clergy.

Prepared and filed by the special prosecutor’s office in Ankara, the 50-page indictment outlined the militants’ revised “jihad” strategy to begin focusing their attacks against Turkey before waging war against the United States and other countries.

“It is more advantageous to wage jihad against Turkey than the United States,” documents seized in the July 14 raid near Ankara reportedly declared. “Let’s blow the Parliament into the sky!”

Quoting from deciphered CDs and other materials, the indictment noted that the extremists reportedly referred to Turkey as a “war zone,” labeling the Turkish government as “apostates” and calling the Turkish state “Satan.”

Among the CDs, detailed maps, sketches and building diagrams, police also discovered lists of the names and home addresses of Christian clergy and other church workers residing in Ankara.

The news took Christian leaders in Ankara by total surprise, according to one Turkish Christian leader in Ankara.

“No one has had any news about this until now,” he said.

International churches

In addition to chapels on Ankara’s British, French, Vatican, Italian and Greek embassy grounds, the capital city has several international churches as well as a handful of Turkish Protestant congregations.

According to *Taraf*, police investigators were tipped off to the militant cell’s activities by citizens living outside Ankara who filed a claim that their son had been kidnapped by al-Qaida. Police reportedly tracked one of the suspects for six months before nabbing him a week before the others.

Starting from the city of Bursa, a branch of Turkey’s anti-terror police began investigations in various municipalities that resulted in the arrest of suspects last July in a duplex apartment in Sincan, a town on the outskirts of Ankara. Video footage found at the scene indicated the men had undergone training in the use of Kalashnikov rifles.

Police seized 1,500 pounds of explosives, along with assault rifles, ammunition, bomb-making instructions and detailed maps of Ankara.

According to documents summarized in the indictment, al-Qaida leaders strictly forbade the members of the cell to enroll in Turkey’s required military service, recognize the authority of Turkish courts, send their children to public schools, perform Muslim prayers under the leadership of state-salaried prayer leaders or vote in



Photo by T.C. Büyük Millet Meclisi

BOMB PLOT — Al-Qaida militants had planned to bomb the Turkish Parliament in Ankara, Turkey, as well as area churches.

national elections. Those who disobeyed were warned they would be punished.

Further guidelines noted in the suspects’ diaries came from their leaders in Afghanistan, instructing them how to conduct themselves if arrested: “Stay relaxed under interrogation, refuse to accept charges by giving reasonable answers and do not provide any information regarding the community.”

Although al-Qaida’s violent interpretation of Islam receives little public backing in officially secular Turkey, Ankara leaders admit that “dozens” of Turks have received training in Afghanistan.

The 2003 bombings of the British Consulate, a British bank and two synagogues in Istanbul that killed 58 people were attributed to al-Qaida-affiliated operatives. A 2008 attack also blamed on al-Qaida left three assailants and three Turkish policemen dead outside the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul.

In 2010 Turkish authorities made several mass arrests of suspected al-Qaida members and sympathizers, indicating a significant support network for its cause within Turkey. But terrorism experts have maintained that the local group focused mainly on fundraising and recruitment in Turkey for jihad activities overseas.

‘Fiscal terrorism’

In a related development, Istanbul authorities confirmed Dec. 9 that police were searching for three identified al-Qaida extremists and five other individuals involved in a \$3.5 million heist from a Turkish businessman’s bank account.

According to *Aksam* newspaper, the militants used false identities and bribed bank employees to steal the funds, designated to support the al-Qaida cause. Four bank employees have been arrested in what police said was one of the first “fiscal terrorism” operations in Turkey.

(CDN)

FBC Vernon holds free yard sale for families at Christmas

By Darla Brantley
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Christmas can be a tough time for families on a tight budget. So First Baptist Church, Vernon, has found a way to help ease that burden.

The Lamar Baptist Association church hosted its second free yard sale Dec. 10 in its fellowship hall and invited the community to shop for clothes, books, toys, home décor and other household items.

Nearly 200 shoppers attended the yard sale, which saw its offerings nearly wiped out only 30 minutes after the doors were opened.

The yard sale was suggested by Pastor Clyde Stevens. “Years ago, I read about a church up North holding a similar event and thought it was a great idea,” he said. “I let it be known to the church members and they ran with it.”

Pat Davis organized the event, enlisting donations from church members and recruiting volunteers to work and cleanup.

“It’s a great way to reach out to the community,” she said. “In a lot of areas, it is a needed ministry, and it’s very simple and easy to do. There are a lot of people without work, and this is a way to give back to the community and a way for people to get Christmas presents.”

The event was purposefully scheduled to coincide with the Christmas season, and many shoppers were grateful for the opportunity to find presents and other needed items without having to stretch their already thin budgets.

“We are in a rough patch right now,” shopper Misty Stockman said. “Being able to find some clothes has been a blessing.”

Sharon Hudson understood.

“I have five kids from little children to

teenagers, and I get a check once a month,” she said while holding a cardboard box full of clothes. “I’ve been able to find clothes for the kids.”

Volunteers shared several stories about particularly moving moments when shoppers found the perfect presents for loved ones.

Trina Sudduth, wife of Student Minister Kevin Sudduth, managed the gift-wrapping station, which was an added attraction to the yard sale this year. A little girl asked Sud-

duth to wrap a pantsuit. She told Sudduth how good the outfit would look on her mother.

Church secretary Sue Allen shared about a little girl who found a devotional book. She asked how to use the book. Allen explained it is a tool to help a person read the Bible each day. The little girl smiled and told Allen that her mother would love it.

Davis shared about a young woman who got a set of dinner plates for her grandmother and how a woman gathered nearly all the stuffed animals available to give to residents of the local nursing home.

Stevens couldn’t be more pleased with the yard sale’s outcome, noting that

all church members help with the event by donating items to be “sold” as well as gift-wrapping supplies.

“I think this sale is our best local mission,” he said.

Stevens also uses the event as an outreach tool by passing out tracts and befriending shoppers.

“We’re just getting to know the people,” he said, noting that some of the shoppers do not attend church at all. “We’re getting them familiar with us and letting them know our church is here for them.”



Photo by Darla Brantley

‘LOCAL MISSION’ — Volunteer Trina Sudduth wraps a present for a customer during FBC Vernon’s free yard sale Dec. 10.



Photo by Pat Davis

GIVING BACK — FBC Vernon saw nearly 200 people at its second free yard sale Dec. 10. Almost every donated item was ‘sold.’ Many shoppers were able to find Christmas gifts such as clothes, books, household items and toys for family and friends.

Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

[illegible]

World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

England, Wales to allow same-sex unions in religious places

LONDON — New laws that allow same-sex civil unions to be performed on religious premises took effect in England and Wales Dec. 5, but the Church of England says it won't permit them without approval from its top body.

Civil partnerships have been legal since 2005, but until now the ceremonies had to be held in secular venues. Civil partnerships, which cannot be called marriages, give same-sex couples the same legal rights as heterosexual couples who are married in a church.

The church said in a letter to its governing body that "the position under the new arrangements is that no Church of England religious premises may become 'approved premises' for the registration of civil partnerships" unless its General Synod approves.

The Synod is the Church's general assembly, and it is considered highly unlikely to permit same-sex "marriage" ceremonies on church property.

The British government itself has said it has no intention of forcing religious institutions to conduct gay union rites, regardless of the new laws. The Church of England's legal office said in a statement that it is not guilty of unlawful discrimination because standard marriages and civil partnerships are legally distinct.

Cloning scientist pulling away from embryonic research

LA JOLLA, Calif. — The scientist who led the team that cloned Dolly the sheep has urged fellow researchers to forego embryonic stem cell research — which he says is fraught with practical problems — and pursue more promising types of research.

That's because he believes other research likely will overtake embryonic stem cell research. Ian Wilmut spoke to a crowd of stem cell researchers Nov. 29 in La Jolla, Calif., telling them that because embryonic stem cells tend to lead to tumors, scientists should spend their time on non-embryonic forms of research, particularly on a new method called direct reprogramming. In direct reprogramming, scientists avoid stem cells altogether and, for instance, reprogram a skin cell directly into a nerve cell. Researchers have had success doing just that with lab mice. It has the support of ethicists who have opposed embryonic research.

New Orleans Seminary set to add new student apartments

The executive committee of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's (NOBTS) trustees has unanimously approved the location of a new student apartment building.

The new building, which will include eight two-bedroom apartments for student families, will be built on Providence Place in an open space near the intersection of Mirabeau Avenue. The location is near many of the other family housing units and the main seminary recreational areas. In October, the full board approved the construction of a new \$1.7 million building but did not settle on a location.

Building debt-free

Seminary officials identified two potential locations for the new housing — a site near the back of campus and the Providence Place site. The site at the back of campus had long been a part of the seminary master plan; however, administrators believed the Providence Place site could be a better location. A study con-

firmed the site's feasibility and was submitted to the trustees for approval. Grace Apartments, will be built debt-free thanks to a donation from a private family foundation based in Louisiana. NOBTS has received approximately \$1 million in advance. The foundation will send the remaining funds in early 2012.

NOBTS President Chuck Kelley said the new apartments represent a significant milestone for the seminary. The school lost 92 two-bedroom apartments in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The Oaks Apartments, which were under construction during the storm, added 48 new two-bedroom apartments in 2006 — one year after the storm. Since the completion of The Oaks, the seminary has added 16 additional apartments. The Grace Apartments project will bring the total post-Katrina construction total to 72 new two-bedroom apartments.

Construction will begin Feb. 1 of next year and is scheduled to be complete by Aug. 1 in time for the 2012 fall semester. (BP)

Book Reviews

by Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Wobbly Legs on a Firm Foundation: Finding Stability through Life's Circumstances

Nia Stivers. *Bloomington, Ind.: WestBow Press, 2011. 188 pp. (Paperback).*

When Nia Stivers was 11 years old, she was diagnosed with a form of muscular dystrophy (MD), a progressive, muscle-wasting disease that was passed down by her mother, who was diagnosed at age 30. The disease would rob her of the ability to have children and would require her to have several painful surgeries. Most of all, though, MD robbed her of the chance to feel normal as she grew up.

In spite of the sadness of Stivers' diagnosis, her story is an uplifting one, dwelling on God's greatness and His control of events in her life. Stivers reveals her positive outlook as she recalls the events in her life with humor, often poking fun at herself.

The story is well-written and engaging from beginning to end — the kind of book that you pick up and stick in your purse as you leave the house, just in case you catch a few minutes to read a little more.

Stivers is a member of First Baptist Church, Bridgeport, Ala.

Touched With Instructions

Eyana Adah McMillan. *Bloomington, Ind.: WestBow Press, 2011. 220 pp. (Paperback).*

"Don't waste God's touch," cautions writer Eyana McMillan. Instead of just emotional experiences during a worship service or a devotional time, the author explains, God's touch comes with "creation, healing, freedom — and instruction." Looking beyond the fact of the touch to the reason behind it and what we should do about it will deepen our relationship with the Lord.

Good counsel — sound teaching. But the author falls short of the promise of the book.

The book is full of snippets of wise teaching backed up with Scripture but is largely unfocused and difficult to follow. A stronger organizational structure would have helped the author get her message across more clearly; instead, the reader is left to go back and re-read, circle around and thumb back to the Table of Contents to try to understand where the narrative is heading.

Catastrophic Crisis: Ministry Leadership in the Midst of Trial and Tragedy

Steve F. Echols & Allen England. *Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011. 192 pp. (Paperback).*

According to co-author Steve Echols, not all seminary students are excited about studying leadership, preferring instead to concentrate on classical seminary courses. While it is hard to blame them — we certainly want our leaders to be interested in doctrine — Echols contends that leadership studies are important, too. He wrote, "Leadership problems are the leading cause of forced termination in Southern Baptist churches, and the fallout has devastating effects on both the minister and the church."

Taking the stance that nothing tests leadership like a crisis, the authors present a series of case studies of churches undergoing crises, including such events as New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and a church whose pastor was shot and killed during a service.

Each case study includes a narrative outlining the crisis and the leadership's response to it, followed by an analysis of the outcome and aftermath and a set of questions for further study.

The final section focuses "on hope and help for leaders." Drawing from scholarly literature on leadership theory, the authors offer valuable leadership crisis principles viewed through spiritual lenses.

Although "Catastrophic Crisis" is primarily a scholarly work, well-researched and thoroughly documented, it is far from the pedantic work that one might expect. Put simply, it's a good read.

God and Football: Faith and Fanaticism in the SEC

Chad Gibbs. *Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010. 240 pp. (Paperback).*

How long since you read a book that compelled you to stop reading every few minutes and say, "Hey! Listen to this!"?

How long since you read a book on Southeastern Conference (SEC) football that had that effect?

OK, you die-hard SEC fans. Maybe it hasn't been that long for you, but for those of us who are more casual fans, this book is an unexpected treat — entertaining, convicting and hilariously funny at the same time.

Author Chad Gibbs "found football at the age of eight, found God one year later and spent the rest of his life worshipping one of the two."

I'll give you a hint: while a rabid football fan, Gibbs has his priorities straight.

"God and Football" grew out of Gibbs' desire to find balance in his life between loving football and making God the focus of his life.

He spent the 2009 season traveling to SEC games and interviewing Christians who professed to be serious fans — or serious fans who professed to be Christians. The book is the result of that season. Whether you are a football fan or not, the book is a great read.

AFA rates 'naughty and nice' Christmas retailers

Don't let the strains of "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas" over the store's audio system fool you. Barnes & Noble is "against" Christmas.

So says the conservative Christian group, American Family Association, in its message to supporters in its annual "Naughty and Nice" Christmas list, which rates retailers' marketing campaigns on whether they properly recognize the holiday that celebrates Jesus' birth.

The big box bookstore chain is on the naughty list compiled by the Tupelo, Miss.-based group, along with 14 retailers from Banana Re-

public to Victoria's Secret to Old Navy.

AFA reviews the websites, media advertising and in-store signage of national retailers to determine the list.

The litmus test is whether retailers use "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" in their ads. The latter is considered offensive because it takes away the focus on Jesus, according to the organization, which urges supporters to send a message to retailers by shopping elsewhere.

"If a company has items associated with Christmas but did not use the word 'Christmas,' then the

company is considered as censoring 'Christmas,'" according to the organization's website.

"Most national retailers are now using 'Christmas,' but there are some that are still clinging to a losing strategy of political correctness," the group said in an October press release.

Most retailers now make AFA's nice list, from Amazon.com to Walmart to Ace Hardware and Target.

AFA contends that its campaign against the "War on Christmas" has paid off because its nice list has grown, but the group's efforts may be lost on some shoppers. (RNS)



BP photo

ORNAMENT DESIGN — Ponpit Sayom's grandson (left) spends his after-school hours at Thai Country Trim, where Sayom (right) cuts out Christmas ornament designs and stitches them together.

Ornaments tell story of Jesus

Thai Country Trim provides income, hope to Thai women

She uses a silver pen to sketch miniature figures of the wise men from the Christmas story and then cuts out the velvet ornaments that will hang on trees in countless American homes during the holidays.

Christmas, however, isn't celebrated in Ponpit Sayom's home in Thailand. To her unbelieving family, Jesus is just another man.

Food must still be earned and her grandchildren need tending to. Sayom is the main breadwinner for her family of eight, especially since her husband's work has suffered setbacks from heavy rain and flooding. She prays one day her family will listen to the story represented in the ornaments she makes.

Sayom earns her wages by making hand-stitched Christmas ornaments for Thai Country Trim, a 25-year-old ministry that provides livelihood for rural Thai women.

Thai Country Trim employs 22 full-time workers at the ministry center — all believers who lead Bible studies and small groups.

The ministry also employs dozens of women who work from home.

Thai Country Trim was the first artisan group in Woman's Missionary Union's (WMU) WorldCrafts program that began in 1996 and now has national artisans in 33 countries.

WMU's support and promotion allows Thai Country Trim to employ more workers, director Cheryl Derbyshire said.

Derbyshire finds great joy in watching lives change as the 22 full-time workers share the gospel with the women who work from home who aren't believers. Sayom, who has worked for Thai Country Trim for 20 years,

is one of the full-time workers. Sayom seems like the type of woman who'd spend her time in a rocking chair, sipping tea while rocking a grandchild to sleep.

But Sayom rarely has an idle moment. She spends her days and nights meticulously checking the stitching on Christmas ornaments.

She rises at 5 a.m. to get her grandchildren ready for school. Then she heads to the Thai Country Trim center.

Caring for others

After working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., she returns home to cook for her family, feed and bathe her grandchildren and tend to her aging father who has Alzheimer's.

After others are in bed, she sits cross-legged on her linoleum floor and sews angel ornaments by the light of a fluorescent bulb until midnight to earn extra income.

To pass the time as she sews and decorates ornaments, Sayom sings praise songs and whispers prayers for her family. She's caring for three generations, her father, her children and her grandchildren.

A friend introduced Sayom to Thai Country Trim and helped her get a position making ornaments. She never had love before, she explains as tears form behind her silver glasses — tears of hurt, heartache and healing. Her father was always mean to her, she said, and her mom died when she was 7. Sayom said she grew up lonely and longing for love.

"When he's old, I don't want to take care of him," Sayom once told her brother.

But things changed when Sayom started working at Thai Country

Trim. She learned she had value. She received praise for her handiwork and began taking pride in her work.

In weekly Bible studies that are a part of the workday at the ministry center, Sayom heard God is like a father and loves her unconditionally. She saw His love in her coworkers' lives.

"My Christian friends loved me," Sayom said. The love the Christian workers showed her stirred her to believe in Christ.

Because of Christ's love, she said she's able to love her father. After a major surgery, her father needed to live with one of his children. He asked if he could live with her.

"I didn't want to," she admitted. "But thanks to God, because when I came to know God, God changed my mind to love my dad."

God is changing her father's heart too. Though still not a believer, he treats Sayom with more respect now.

Derbyshire has watched Sayom's transformation. As her self-esteem rose, she began to reach out to others. Sayom started working at home and has now moved to a full-time position working at the center. She helps lead weekly Bible studies with women who haven't believed yet.

Because of Thai Country Trim, Sayom is able to support herself and her family. She has a Christian community who supports her and nurtures her.

Life is still hard for Sayom. Her family has yet to believe. As mother to both her children and to her four grandchildren, she must continue to provide for them financially.

But, "God's greater," Sayom said, smiling. (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Prescription required for 'morning-after' pill for minors

WASHINGTON — The head of the federal health department has rebuffed a plan by a subsidiary to permit the sale on store shelves of a "morning-after" pill that can cause abortions.

Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, rejected Dec. 7 a recommendation by the Food and Drug Administration that would have enabled even young teenagers and preteens to buy a drug with abortion-producing potential as easily as hair spray and cough drops.

Her action means the "morning-after" pill known as Plan B One-Step will continue to require a prescription for girls less than 17 years of age. Women 17 and older still will not need a prescription, but they also will continue to need to request the drug from pharmacists, who stock it behind their counters.

The same restrictions apply to Plan B, which is a drug requiring a two-step process.

Both versions of Plan B are referred to as "emergency contraception," a term used interchangeably with the "morning-after" pill. While both work to restrict ovulation in a woman or prevent fertilization, it is their back-up mechanism that draws particular opposition from pro-lifers. Acting after fertilization, the drug can block implantation of a tiny embryo in the uterine wall, thereby causing an abortion, pro-life advocates point out.

California Christians reimbursed for fines

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Calif. — A California court case that drew national attention was settled in mid-November, with the city of San Juan Capistrano paying back \$300 it had fined a couple hosting a popular Bible study in their home and amending a city ordinance that they get a permit, World News Service has reported.

Chuck and Stephanie Fromm's weekly Bible study has been known to draw up to 50 people, which prompted an atheist neighbor to complain to the city this summer. The city, citing an ordinance requiring churches to obtain conditional use permits, fined the Fromms twice for refusing to get one.

"It was always a question of whether they were a church or not, and they were not," city attorney Omar Sandoval told *The Orange County Register* when the settlement was announced.

In exchange for the refunded money and changes to the ordinance the Fromms dropped their religious freedom lawsuit against the city.

"The city has now rescinded those fines, completely reversed its direction and made a commitment to no longer be oppressive toward families having Bible studies in their homes," Brad Dacus, president of Pacific Justice Institute, said.

New baseball agreement restricts tobacco use

WASHINGTON — Baseball's new labor agreement does not include the prohibition on smokeless tobacco they wanted, but its new policy still marks an important step, said Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land and other advocates of a ban.

The agreement between Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association included the following stipulations regarding smokeless tobacco:

► Players, managers and coaches may not have tobacco tins or packages in their uniforms during games or any other time spectators are in the stadium.

► They may not use tobacco during televised interviews or at appearances on behalf of their team.

Baseball and the players union agreed to establish an education and outreach campaign regarding the dangers of smokeless tobacco.

The Knock Tobacco Out of the Park Coalition said it continues to back "a complete prohibition on tobacco use at games and on camera."

Rhode Island Gov. Chafee insists on 'holiday tree'

PROVIDENCE, RI — A Rhode Island lawmaker is calling Gov. Lincoln Chafee "Governor Grinch" after he defied lawmakers and decided that the state would have a "holiday tree" instead of a "Christmas tree."

The governor defended his decision by arguing that it is in keeping with the state's founding in 1636 by religious dissident Roger Williams as a haven for tolerance — where government and religion were kept separate.

But Rep. Doreen Costa called the governor a "Grinch."

Costa sponsored a resolution last January declaring the tree customarily erected in December be referred to as a "Christmas tree and not as a 'holiday tree' or other non-traditional terms."