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'Prevention is the key'

Cullman County schools prep for intense bully awareness training

By Sondra Washington
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A teenager committing suicide because of bullying made headlines in Alabama more than once in 2011. Each time, community members would cry out that something needed to be done.

The Cullman County Board of Education heard that cry and decided not to be another statistic. With the help of American Character Builders (ACB) material, it plans to stop bullying before it starts.

Hoping to avoid the extreme bullying incidents occurring in schools across the state and country, the north Alabama school system recently bought 15 The Bully Issue training kits and more than 1,500 additional student books from ACB, formerly known as Alabama Citizens Action Program's (ALCAP) school program. This information will provide at least 2,000 students with information on how to deal with bullies properly and change the bullying climate in their classrooms and schools.

The purchase occurred after the school system's fall community meetings during which ALCAP Executive Director Joe Godfrey presented anti-bullying information to school leaders and parents.

Superintendent Billy Coleman began organizing community meetings after he was hired last January. Each semester, meetings are held in the system's seven school districts and focus on topics affecting the 29 schools and more than 9,700 students. This fall's topic was bully prevention.

"We wanted to do more than just talk about bullying," Coleman said. "We wanted to initiate some bully awareness in our school system. ... I think too often, we wait until something gets really bad or a tragedy hits before we react to it. ... I think prevention is the key to everything."

Although he said Cullman County leaders are struggling to keep their schools in "the black" like most other school systems, they were able to utilize at-risk program funding to purchase the kits and additional book-



Photo by Neisha Fuson

RESOURCES — American Character Builders works to prevent bullying with self-contained educational kits that schools and churches can use. Other kits dealing with alcohol, drugs and tobacco are also available.

lets. Coleman added that they didn't have enough money to purchase a kit for each school but many can share the information since some schools are on the same campus. Each kit contains a teacher's guide, 30 student booklets and a CD with a PowerPoint presentation and pretests and post-tests to measure the program's effectiveness.

Godfrey plans to deliver the kits and booklets to Coleman on Jan. 10.

"We are very excited to provide quality resource material to help

with the bullying issue in Cullman County, and we would welcome the opportunity to any school system or individual schools looking for this kind of material," Godfrey said. "We also would like to see churches take a leading role in addressing this issue."

Churches wanted

He encourages congregations to order the kits and use them to partner with nearby schools.

"The church could own it and [offer to] teach it in the school or pay

to send [it] into the school," Godfrey said. "We are hoping to have a Bible study to go along with the bullying kit by the first (part) of January. It's in production right now. The whole thing will be contained on a CD with suggested learning activities."

Other ACB kits include Alcohol — It's a Killer; Saying NO to Meth, Marijuana and Cocaine; and Tobacco Awareness.

For more information, call ACB at 205-985-9529.

SBC, BWA leaders meet for 1st time since 2004

Leaders of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) traveled to Nashville on Dec. 19 to meet with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), a founding member of the BWA that withdrew in 2004 over theological differences.

Initiated by BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, the joint meeting was part of a commitment made in 2004 for continued dialogue between the two groups.

Joining Callam in the BWA delegation were John Upton, current BWA president and executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virgin-

ia; George Bullard, general secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship; and Sam Chaise, general secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries.

Representing Southern Baptists were SBC President Bryant Wright; Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee; Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; and Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Patterson was one of nine members of a BWA study committee that in 2004 recommended withdrawal from

an organization that "no longer efficiently communicates to the unsaved a crystal clear gospel message that our Lord Jesus Christ is solely sufficient for salvation."

A BWA press release described the Dec. 19 meeting as cordial, frank and respectful. Participants agreed the discussion was needed not just because of the pledge in 2004 but also "because of the vocation of Christians to live at peace with everyone."

Bullard said the commitment was made in 2004 for annual meetings between the groups but it was not in (See 'SBC-BWA,' page 9)

COMMENT

Resolution: I Will Encourage My Pastor

T rue or false — the general health of ministers is worse than the general health of the American population. If you said true, then you are correct, according to a joint study done by Duke University in Durham, N.C., and Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

The report on the study, which appeared in *Enrichment Journal*, noted that the general public practices a lifestyle that is not as healthy as the lifestyle of most pastors. Yet pastors have poorer health.

The reason? Stress, pressures and conflict.

There is more. The average percentage of depression among American males is 10 percent, the article continued. For pastors, it is 40 percent.

The reason? Stress, pressures and conflict.

One counselor described pastors as “incredible people [who] are killing themselves” with their heavy load of stress, pressures and conflict. Denial and late detection of depression only contribute to the lethal impact of this problem.

An oft-quoted study by Focus on the Family reported a more drastic picture. According to that study, 80 percent of pastors and 84 percent of pastors’ wives were discouraged or depressed.

The reason? Stress, pressures and conflict.

Consider the pastor’s schedule. Forty-two percent of full-time senior pastors reported working 60 hours a week or more, according to a 2010 LifeWay Christian Resources study. The average was 56 hours a week. Bivocational pastors, more than half of Alabama Baptist pastors, reported spending 30 hours a week on church-related activities. That was on top of their regular jobs.

Most pastors set their own schedules. They are driven to long hours by their calling to invest themselves in their ministries and the people they serve. At the same time, many do not feel they have been given permission to ever say “no.” If they do, then many are haunted by feelings of failure to their members. In addition, they are often accused of being unavailable or unapproachable when they say “no.”

Pastor’s vision

Consider the pastor’s vision. Most pastors enter the ministry expecting to be used of God to grow a church numerically and build up the body of Christ spiritually. Reality is sometimes different. Out of the 300,000 estimated Protestant churches in the United States, about 50 percent of churchgoers attend the largest 10 percent of congregations — those running 350 or more in attendance. That shocking fact was reported by the National Congregations Study.

The median Protestant church in the United States has 75 regular participants in worship on Sunday morning, the study found. That means half the churches have more and half the churches have fewer.

With that information, it is not surprising that



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

about 85 percent of all churches are either plateaued or declining numerically, according to *Leadership Magazine*.

The recent economic recession also has changed growth patterns. For many churches, the issue has changed from managing the growth around them as new homes are constructed or people move in to church survival as families lose their jobs and homes. Many communities are smaller today than they were formerly.

Some pastors reconcile themselves to their reality by deciding to concentrate on spiritual growth and developing a spiritually healthy congregation while still taking every opportunity to work on evangelism and church growth. When the pastor’s decision does not reflect the church members’ decision, trouble can result. Occasionally some members may recall “the good old days” and still expect a numerically growing congregation in every way.

Sometimes these members leave, choosing to go to a “growing church.” That is one reason the bigger get bigger and the smaller get smaller. For the latter congregation, leadership suffers, financial stability suffers, ministry suffers. And the pastor is left with more stress and pressures.

Consider the conflict in the church. It does not have to be open conflict. It can be the sniping emails. It can be the grudge holders, who pout for decades about a decision that did not go their way. It can be the questions and innuendos made through the various members’ informal communication patterns.

Sometimes all the blame for church problems is laid at the pastor’s feet, and people begin to whisper it is time for him to leave. Occasionally those whispers grow louder.

As the toll mounts, the pastor finally gives up. “I just can’t do this anymore,” he one day declares and joins the 1,500 other ministers who exit ministry each month. It is not surprising that the most often stated reason for leaving ministry is church conflict — “I just can’t do this anymore.”

Consider the pressures of ministry. Only the privileged few serve large growing churches, but their programs impact members of many congregations. Members ask, “Why can’t we do that?” as if they were oblivious to the amount of resources

required for whatever “that” is. Members sometimes look at what noted churches are doing and conclude that their church’s ministries and pastor are not as good.

Pressures come from not only the growing churches but also media-based ministries. They come from conferences and seminars. The message is usually about what the church is not doing, what the church needs to change, rather than celebrating what the church and its pastor do right.

Discouragement and depression are not new problems for religious leaders. Elijah went into hiding after winning a showdown with the priests of Baal. Read Psalms and note David’s mood swings. The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8–10 was so depressed he could not preach when the opportunity was before him. Paul even despaired of life itself.

Share one another’s burdens

Great preachers like Charles Spurgeon have been hounded by discouragement and depression. These maladies are not signs of spiritual weakness. They are signs of physical problems, relational problems and other issues. They are signs that one may need medical intervention. One in five Americans will experience significant depression requiring medication sometime in their lives, statistics say.

Pastors need an encourager. Pastors need trusted allies. Pastors need friends with whom to share their deepest feelings without fear of betrayal. Pastors need church members who fulfill the command of Galatians 6:2 to share one another’s burdens.

The pastor may not be the best at every ministry task. He may even make mistakes from time to time. But the pastor is the one called by the congregation to be God’s undershepherd for the church.

A wonderful resolution for the coming year would be to determine to be an encourager to your pastor and help him carry the burdens of stress, pressures and conflict.



“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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North Korea mourns, Christians pray following Kim Jong Il's death

Christians around the world have taken to social media to mobilize in prayer after the death of North Korea's Kim Jong Il, the "Dear Leader" of one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

Kim died Dec. 17 of a heart attack while riding a train, according to North Korea's official KCNA news agency.

A period of national mourning was declared through Dec. 29; the funeral was set for Dec. 28 at press time, according to KCNA.

As the capital city of Pyongyang pronounces an increase in "military capability" — and South Korea moves to full military alert in fear of instability in the poor and isolated nuclear-armed nation — many wonder what will happen next.

Within minutes of the official announcement of Kim's death Dec. 19, Christians around the globe began posting prayer requests on Twitter and Facebook on behalf of the region.

"Praying for North and South Korea," Jeana Lim, a Korean American living in Saratoga, Calif., wrote on her Facebook page. "God, let your will be done."

Although prayer for the impoverished North Korea is nothing new among evangelical Christians, the death of the 69-year-old leader and the many

unknowns surrounding his successor, youngest son Kim Jong Un, have increased anxiety throughout the region, especially as the North test-fired a missile Dec. 19 over the East Sea.

"Wow! Kim Jong Il is dead," wrote Dale Brown, a former resident of Seoul who now lives in the Middle East. "This could be a big game-changer. Let us all be praying for North Korea! For such a time as this!"

As questions about the future loom, Luke In, a Korean-American Christian worker based in Southeast Asia, prays that this Advent season will bring God's peace to the region.

"Praying for North Korea," wrote In. "May the true Son warm the hearts of North Koreans this season. He is our hope."

Among the ways to pray for North Korea:

- for peace and stability within North Korea and the region during the transition of political power to Kim Jong Un.

- that the transition will result in greater freedoms for all North Korean citizens.

- for greater openness and religious freedom within the exclusive nation.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names changed for security reasons. (BP)



KIM

Highlights from the World of Religion 2011



By Sondra Washington
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama's April 27 tornadoes left behind what has been called an "unprecedented path of destruction," killing nearly 250 people and leaving thousands more homeless. Yet recovery efforts — many led by Alabama Baptists and other Christians across the state and country — brought a bit of welcomed relief to countless suffering families.

Southern Baptists had responded en masse one month earlier after Japan experienced a much more deadly natural disaster when a magnitude-9.0 earthquake caused a tsunami, which killed almost 20,000 people and caused \$218 billion in damages to the country. The tsunami destroyed a portion of one of Japan's nuclear plants, leading to a radiation spill that displaced about 100,000 living nearby.

And Southern Baptist disaster relief workers didn't catch a break all year. Moving from one disaster to another, they even ended the year working to help the Philippines after it was hit by a deadly typhoon Dec. 17.

While other top religious news stories in 2011 may not be Baptist in nature, their effects resonated throughout the Baptist world.

The death of terrorist Osama bin Laden was ranked the No. 1 religion news story of 2011 by Religion Newswriters Association because it sparked so much discussion on "forgiveness, peace, justice and retribution" among people of faith. American soldiers tried for years to locate bin Laden hoping to bring him to justice for his leading role in the 9/11 World Trade Center bombings that killed nearly 3,000 people. In May, Navy SEALs found him in Pakistan where he was killed and buried at sea hours later.

Televangelist Harold Camping was wrong again when he predicted the return of Christ twice in



Photo by Doug Rogers

TUSCALOOSA CHURCHES — Alberta Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association was heavily damaged by the April 27 tornadoes that ripped through the area.

2011, first on May 21 and again on Oct. 21. These were his third and fourth attempts at forecasting the end of the world.

Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Finn and Father Shawn Ratigan in Kansas City joined the increasing number of priests involved in inappropriate behavior toward children after a computer repairman found pornographic pictures of girls as young as 6 years old on Ratigan's computer. According to *Time*, Finn was told about the photos, but he did not report the incident to police. Ratigan has been indicted on child pornography charges while Finn was indicted for withholding information about potential child abuse.

In March 2011, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader who has been living in exile since 1959,

announced he would resign from his role as political leader of the country.

According to Reuters, this move would give the Tibetan prime minister more power in seeking independence from China.

Some American Muslims were challenged in a congressional hearing when some Republicans accused the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) of supporting terrorism. Leaders of the group presented dozens of statements made by CAIR spokesmen condemning terrorist attacks around the world.

In May, the Presbyterian Church USA voted to allow gay and lesbian ministers and lay leaders to be ordained with the consent of regional church bodies. The vote makes the church the fourth Protestant body to allow this practice after Episcopal and Evangelical Lutheran churches and the United Church of Christ.



BIN LADEN

SBC focus in 2011: funding

In Southern Baptist life in 2011, state convention leaders found themselves making various ministry and funding decisions following the previous year's Great Commission Resurgence push.

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) transitioned to a church-planting focus and began outlining partnership changes with state conventions. State convention leaders struggled to understand how the resulting NAMB relationship would look. And while re-evaluating ministry efforts and dollar figures, many conventions also made steps to increase the percentage of Cooperative Program (CP) receipts forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

"I think 27 of the 42 state conventions have either approved or are in the process of considering moving toward a 50-50 split in their CP giving," said SBC President Bryant Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga.

Messengers in many of the state conventions adopted budgets that will send the SBC a greater portion of CP receipts that will then be used to fund the International Mission Board (IMB) and NAMB, as well as six SBC seminaries, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and SBC operations by the Executive Committee.

Alabama Baptists voted to increase CP giving to the SBC by a half-percent and will split any funding coming in above the base budget 50-50 between the state convention and the SBC.

The state convention's annual meeting theme of "Great Commission Ministries Together" underscored a partnership strategy that begins in 2013 to connect IMB and NAMB missionaries from Alabama with other Alabama Baptists. (TAB, BP)

A full report reflecting on the past year following the April 27 tornadoes and subsequent recovery efforts in Alabama is being developed for the one-year anniversary of the tornadoes.

This coverage will appear in one of the April issues.

If your church is holding a special event for the one-year anniversary, then alert us at news@thealabamabaptist.org or on Facebook.



Photo by Lindsey Robinson

STRATEGIC LOGISTICAL RELOCATION — Children and adults await the beginning of the service at Jesús El Buen Pastor Iglesia Bautista on Dec. 11 at FBC Pelham. The congregation of about 60 now worships rent-free at FBC Pelham.

‘Missional’ partnership

FBC Pelham opens its doors, arms to Hispanic congregation

By Lindsey Robinson
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A few months ago, Pastor Jorge Camacho was leading Jesús El Buen Pastor Iglesia Bautista (Jesus the Good Shepherd Baptist Church) in a strip mall in Hoover. The church was facing a rent increase and an uncertain future. But thanks to a few devoted members of Jesús El Buen Pastor and First Baptist Church, Pelham, the congregation of about 60 now has a place to worship rent-free. Every Friday night and Sunday morning, the choir room of First, Pelham, is alive with Spanish music. Children from the two churches attend Sunday School together.

And though the language spoken by each church’s adult members is different, their devotion to Christ is the same. “This church opened its doors, opened its arms to us,” Camacho said. **‘[Removed] the burden’** Cary Hanks Jr., the Central Alabama Baptist Hispanic Ministry Coalition catalytic missionary and a member of First, Pelham, facilitated discussions in late June about Jesús El Buen Pastor’s relocation. “All said and done, they started meeting at [First, Pelham] on the first Sunday in November,” Hanks said. For First, Pelham, Pastor Mike Shaw, of-

fering the space rent-free was a no-brainer and an opportunity to expand his church’s witness. “We were glad to let them use our building. We thought we could take the burden off them,” he said. The move was convenient for Jesús El Buen Pastor, but it was also a strategic logistical relocation, said Osvaldo Padilla, an assistant professor of New Testament divinity at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham who is a member of and regular preacher at the church. “The partnership is more of a ‘missional’ partnership. [First, Pelham] wants to have an impact on the Hispanic community in that area, and, of course, we want that, too,” he said.

By moving to Pelham — where there is a high concentration of Hispanic residents — Jesús El Buen Pastor, along with First, Pelham, has a golden opportunity to reach a new community. “I’m glad to see the witness expanding to Hispanics in Pelham,” Shaw said. “It’s a blessing really,” Camacho said of the move to First, Pelham. “We really give thanks for this church, this pastor and this congregation.” And for him, it is a blessing that couldn’t have come at a better time. The rent on his church’s location in Hoover was going up to \$2,000, and he lost sleep over how he would cover the cost. “We knew we couldn’t go on anymore,” Camacho said. “I think God came in on time, exactly when we needed Him.” Since the move, church member Joyce McKay has noticed a lighter spirit at Jesús El Buen Pastor. “I sense more enthusiasm. I sense a feeling of being supported here,” she said.



Photo by Lindsey Robinson

DEVOTION TO CHRIST — Men attending Jesús El Buen Pastor Iglesia Bautista worship during the Dec. 11 service at FBC Pelham.

Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, Correspondent, TAB

Lillian Harbuck

New Home Baptist Church, Enterprise
Coffee Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES: Lamentations 3:22-23
FAVORITE HYMN: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”
HOBBIES: Visiting with hospice patients and church activities
FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 24 years of marriage to Waylon; two sons, Jim Wayne and Tommy; three granddaughters; and three great-grandchildren



HARBUCK

Lillian Harbuck has spent more than 10 years visiting with nursing home residents and hospice patients. The visits have given her opportunities to share her testimony with others.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: Just before I was 12, I had this tugging in my heart. It got so strong. One day, when I was 12 years old, I accepted the Lord. He gave me a joy, a peace ... and assurance.

Q: How has the Lord worked in your life?

A: Everything I need, I just ask the Lord. Before my husband died, he had a bad heart attack. My children were still in school. (I said,) “Lord, I don’t know how I can make it by myself.” And the Lord spared him seven more years. I just talk to the Lord like I’m talking to you.

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

A: He’s just my everything — I just totally depend on the Lord. He said I could talk to Him ... so that’s what I do. The Lord has never failed me yet. I’ve never had trouble[s] that I just didn’t ask the Lord (about) and things [got better].

Q: How do you see yourself involved in visiting hospice patients as a ministry in the future?

A: Maybe sometime I should stop but I can’t. They enjoy the company so [much]. I just enjoy visiting with folks. I love people, my church and the Lord. He makes it all possible.

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

'A God thing'

Judson Association thrift store ministry helps meet physical, spiritual needs

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Looking at Judson Baptist Association's thrift store ministry, it may be difficult to believe that it began in one woman's carport.

But it did.

Now it consists of two thrift stores that generate funds to provide food assistance for nearly 450 Henry County families who fall within certain income brackets. Food is purchased from food companies and comes from Wiregrass Food Bank in Dothan and food drives through churches, schools, the U.S. Postal Service and other entities.

"This is a God thing," Director of Missions George Thompson observed.

Nell Price agreed. "God has blessed this ministry from Day 1," said Price, whose carport was the starting point for the thrift stores.

In 2006, the first store — Love in Action — opened in Abbeville in northern Henry County. The second store — Overflowing Ministries — followed in April 2011 in Headland to the south.

The stores were given different names in order to differentiate. However, Thompson said it is interesting to see how each has taken on the characteristics of its name.

In fact, Overflowing Ministries is "overflowing," he said. Already it is experiencing about half the business and donations of Love in Action.

Love in Action, which is open Monday through Friday and half a day on Saturday, is manned by two paid cashiers and approximately 55 volunteers. Overflowing Ministries operates Tuesday through Friday, solely through the work of about 45

volunteers, Thompson and his wife, Barbara.

The chain of events that led to the first store actually began in 2002 as a ministry to Hispanics, he explained.

Price was working with a Hispanic ministry that met in the youth house of First Baptist Church, Abbeville. She hosted yard sales to get funds for activities related to the ministry. Some of the donated goods were distributed to Hispanics who needed them.

In 2005, Price approached Judson Association about assuming the yard sale ministry.

A food assistance ministry of her church — Calvary Baptist, Abbeville — also was being run from her carport.

Both ministries subsequently came to be housed at the association in two mobile units it had already procured from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Price said.

A thrift store was set up in one mobile unit and a food distribution ministry in the other.

Very quickly, "the [thrift store] contributions were overwhelming, and we had nowhere to go" to expand, Price said.

Outgrowing space

In 2006, Judson Association constructed a 30-by-60-foot building for the thrift store. That left a mobile unit for food distribution and the other for sorting thrift store donations.

In about a year, the association's churches paid off the construction, Price noted.

Still "our distribution was outgrowing our space," she continued.

For that reason, the thrift store



Photo courtesy of Judson Baptist Association

BLESSED MINISTRY — Volunteers work in the food distribution area at Judson Baptist Association's Overflowing Ministries thrift store in Headland. The store opened in April 2011.

building was connected in 2009 to a 40-by-100-foot expansion, large enough even to accommodate the food storage, Price said.

The expansion also created an interview room where volunteers can talk to people in private to tell them about Jesus. As a result, there have been at least 40 professions of faith at the Abbeville location, Price said.

Taking on the thrift store and food ministries was a way to fulfill a need in the community, Thompson said.

"And the need has expanded," he noted. "As the need has expanded, so has the ministry. It's just amazing to me."

The growth facilitated the opening of the second store.

It is in a 40-by-75-foot space, said Thompson, who is serving as its director for now.

The Headland location also has an interview room where volunteers tell clients about Jesus' love.

"That's what it's all about," Price said.

At least nine people have accepted Christ as Savior since the store opened, Thompson noted.

When she heard that Judson As-



Photo courtesy of Judson Baptist Association

DONATED GOODS — A Judson Baptist Association volunteer stocks the Love in Action thrift store in Abbeville.

sociation planned to establish the second store, Price was "excited and knew it was a good thing."

To help, Love in Action shared some of its donated goods, equipment and other items with Overflowing Ministries. It also committed to give some funds on a monthly basis, as needed for a year.

The intent is for the Headland

ministry to be more than a thrift store and food distribution site, Thompson said, noting the goal is to offer classes on financial management, counseling and other services.

Already both stores are an outreach to people in need.

"We're meeting the needs of people both physically and spiritually," Price noted.



Photo courtesy of Judson Baptist Association

TAKING ON CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS NAME — Overflowing Ministries is one of two thrift stores that generate funds to provide food assistance for nearly 450 Henry County families.



Photo courtesy of Judson Baptist Association

AN OUTREACH TO PEOPLE IN NEED — Love in Action volunteers work in the food distribution room at the thrift store.

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► The senior adult ministry of **Lakeside Church, Birmingham**, will host Bill King (Brother Billy Bob Bohannon) Jan. 10. Lunch will be at 11:30 a.m. The program will follow. Breck Ladd is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Dennis R. Jones** is the new pastor of **First Church, Talladega**, effective Jan. 22. He has served in Tennessee for the past three years. He and his wife, Cindy, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa for three years.

MADISON

► **Brownsboro Church** will hold a Body 4 Believers class Thursday nights in February at 6:30 in the fellowship hall. The four-week program teaches how to eat real foods in a way that targets and removes unwanted fat from the body. For information call 256-776-3646. Joseph Cooper is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Haney's Chapel Church, Guntersville**, will celebrate home-

coming Jan. 8, 11 a.m., with Bill King (Brother Billy Bob Bohannon). A covered-dish lunch will follow. Michael Crowe is pastor.

PICKENS

► **Carrollton Church** will host The Talleys in concert Jan. 8, 6 p.m. For information call 205-367-8577. Tommy Winders is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **St. Clair Association** will hold a ladies retreat called Walking Worthy Jan. 20-21 at the Chula Vista Conference Center. Featured guests will be Debbie Childers, Laurie Brasher, Susan Bartholomew and Amy Brown. For information call 205-594-5173. Ben Chandler is director of missions.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Calvary Heights Church, Alexander City**, will host The Diplomats quartet Jan. 29, 11 a.m. Jeff Freeman is pastor. ► **Lake Martin Church, Dadeville**, will host the Highway 280 bluegrass band Jan. 29, 7 p.m. The band

plays regularly at Good Ol' Boys Restaurant in Auburn. Steve Poteat is pastor.

TENNESSEE RIVER

► **First Church, Scottsboro**, will host Dennis Swanberg Jan. 29, 6 p.m. For information call 256-574-3308. Kevin C. Wilburn is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Winston Association** will hold an executive team meeting for pastors, paid ministerial staff and two representatives from each church Jan. 16, 7 p.m., at the associational office. The association also will hold a discipleship training rally Jan. 29, 5 p.m., at Corinth Heights Church, Haleyville, with Sammy Taylor. Awards will be given to the church with the most people in attendance and the church with the highest percentage of discipleship training members present. Lance Hogan is pastor of Corinth Heights. Al Hood is director of missions for Winston Association.

Troy's Southside 'connects' with homeless

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The last Thursday of the month is Connection night at Southside Baptist Church, Troy. The fellowship hall fills with community members as they gather for dinner, conversation and laughter.

"The idea for Connection started [in late 2010] when I started to feel burdened to serve the homeless, lonely and needy," Anna Morgan said. "In Troy, there's no shelter or Jimmie Hale Mission or anything like that, and I felt like our church needed to start some sort of program to reach this population."

And the Salem-Troy Baptist Association church is in a prime loca-

tion for such an outreach, positioned in a neighborhood full of community members in need.

When Connection kicked off in March 2011, church members began going door to door and handing out fliers to publicize the event. Pastor Andrew Knick and Youth Minister Jacob Morgan (Anna's husband) have reached out to families through the local Boys & Girls Club, where they serve on the board of directors. They've also invited international students at Troy University, who often find it difficult to get plugged into the community.

"It's become a wonderful event and is much more than just eating dinner," Anna Morgan said.

Several families have attended each and every dinner, and the program's volunteers have enjoyed building relationships with those people, who have quickly become friends. "It's been great to learn ... their stories, and learn about their families," she noted. "It gives everyone a sense of belonging."

Now nearing its one-year anniversary, Connection is going strong, and its creators have high hopes for its future.

"My goal would be to take it to the next level, to let it be something where we begin to bring them into the church and get them plugged in," Knick said. "We want it to be more than just a meal, but we realize we have to take it a step at a time."

Anna Morgan is planning for a financial mentorship program as a way to offer lasting benefits to those in need. As for church members, many have had the opportunity to become involved in Connection, and the youth have been particularly engaged in the outreach.

"It's been really neat because we have a good group of kids who are good at serving, and so it's been something they've wanted for a long time," Jacob Morgan said. "They have the chance to put into action what they believe. I've seen great things happen because they've seen how very blessed they are."

Knick added, "I think it's something our town has needed for a long time, and so we're enjoying it and loving the opportunity to use our facility, to take the talents and gifts from our church and to take what we preach and put it into practice."

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Baker celebrates 30 years on staff at McElwain Baptist

In 1981, McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, was in need of an interim staffer to run its activity center, complete with a gym and game room. Church member Jody Baker stepped up to the task Jan. 1, 1982, and has been serving ever since.

"That's how I ended up here (on the McElwain Baptist staff), and I believe it was God's hand, getting me to where He wanted me to be," Baker explained.

For the past 30 years, she has had many responsibilities at the Birmingham Baptist Association church. She served as minister of youth and recreation for 15 years and currently holds the title of minister of education and administration.

In her role, Baker oversees all educational elements — from Sunday School to Discipleship Training to the child development center.

In addition, she oversees the Celebrate Recovery ministry. "It's a tremendous ministry ... showing [people] how they can find healing through Christ," she said.

Baker said one of her greatest mentors is Earl Potts, pastor emeritus of McElwain. "He has been a tremendous encouragement to me and supporter of me and my ministry," she said.

Personnel committee member Merrillyn "Cookie" Cook is helping plan the special Jan. 8 reception to commemorate Baker's 30th anniversary. She divulged that many church members also are helping with the plans, and she estimated that upward of 250 people might attend.

"I honestly know of no one person [who] could have impacted a single church through their ministry as much as [Baker] has our church," Cook said. "She's a phenomenal Christian teacher as well."

Baker said she has been fortunate to serve in one place. "God has really blessed me and I'm very grateful," she said.

Springhill Pastor Kenneth Henson retires from ministry

For 62 years, Kenneth Henson led churches from the pulpit. And Dec. 25, Henson retired from Springhill Baptist Church, Millry, where he served for the past 12 years.

After working in the logging business for three years, 21-year-old Henson and his wife, Lorie, "sensed the call into something in ministry" but were not sure what.

Members of Wagarville Baptist Church, the Hensons surrendered their lives to whatever the Lord had for them, and soon after that, Kenneth Henson felt called to be a pastor.

He graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. While in seminary, he served as pastor of a small Mississippi church.

He also served as pastor of several Alabama churches, including First Baptist Church, Ashland; Round Hill Baptist Church, Thomasville; Westview Baptist Church, Enterprise; and Marble City Baptist Church, Sylacauga.

And through the years, he felt his role was to "bring churches together."

"God just blessed [Lorie and me] in that particular way," he said.

Michael Olewski, Washington Baptist Association director of missions, said Kenneth Henson will be missed.

"[Kenneth] has had involvement off and on in [Washington] Association for years," Olewski said. "He's served very well and leaves a strong legacy."

In retirement, Kenneth Henson plans to spend time in his garden, turkey hunt and fish, all things he really enjoys doing, he said. But he also said he enjoyed the work he dedicated his life to in Alabama Baptist churches.

"[Lorie and I] served some fine churches and wonderful people," he said. "It's been a real blessing."

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Patton Hill Church destroyed by fire

The morning of Dec. 20, members of Patton Hill Baptist Church near Oakman woke to a dismayed sight.

Their church building had burned to the ground.

"The building's a total, complete loss," said Lucky Teague, director of missions for Walker Baptist Association.

The fire marshal determined the fire was due to faulty electrical wiring, said Edgar Pendley, the church's sole deacon. Patton Hill Baptist currently is without a pastor. Randy Brand, who had served as pastor since March, resigned at the end of November.

No one was hurt in the fire.

"We've already had folks calling to come help [the church] out," Teague said at press time. "[Associational leaders] have met with them, prayed with them, and we're pledged to be involved with them."

On Dec. 21, the 15-member congregation met in Pendley's house. Mark Ottis, whom Patton Hill is considering calling as its next pastor, led the service. The congregation will continue to meet in Pendley's house or nearby Key Hill Church while it sees what it will take to rebuild.

The insurance report had not been finalized at press time.

(TAB)

Bible Basics

series

8 STEPS TO SERIOUS BIBLE STUDY

Understand, live out the Bible's message — be transformed

By Ken Roxburgh
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Baptists are rooted in history and the Scriptures. When the early Anabaptists (spiritual ancestors of modern Baptists, Mennonites and Quakers) met in Zurich, Conrad Grebel wrote, "After we took Scripture in hand, too, and consulted it on many points, we have been instructed somewhat." This typifies the Baptist way of giving Scripture authority whereby we understand it as revealing matters relating to "faith and practice" and seek to live according to its teachings. We also recognize that the study of Scripture is never final but involves us in an exciting adventure of fresh discovery every day of our lives.

The 400th anniversary of the Authorized Version (King James Version) of the Bible took place in 2011. King James was no lover of early Baptists, and his religious views led to the early Puritans (more spiritual ancestors of Baptists) leaving England to settle in New England in 1620. However, the new translation affirmed these early dissenters' belief in having freedom of access to Scripture, as well as freedom of interpretation of Scripture. As English minister John Robinson told them, "God has yet more light and truth to break forth out of His Holy Word."

Not reading it thoroughly

The Bible has shaped the cultures of Western Europe and the Americas. Without knowledge of the Bible, our contemporary culture and church are impoverished. Although it is the most translated and widely circulated book of all time, fewer and fewer Christians read it thoroughly. Unless we read, understand and live out the Bible's message, it fails to transform our lives. Richard Hays, dean and professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., commented, "Right reading of the [Bible] occurs only where the word is embodied. We learn what the text means only if we submit ourselves to its power in such a way that we are changed by it."

As Baptists, we need to recover a vision of the Bible as a deeply subversive text that corrects and reproves, builds up and encourages, enabling believers to be equipped for service within society.

I first read through the Bible from beginning to end when I was a teenager. I heard somebody say if you read 12 chapters a day and 13 on a Sunday, then you would cover the whole Bible in three months. I then went on to use the Robert Murray McChesney reading plan, which takes readers through the New Testament and Psalms twice a year and the rest of the Bible once each year. Along with the InterVarsity three-year Bible study book, I was better prepared for theological study when I went to the London School of Theology in 1977. My early experiences instilled in my mind and heart an

Ken Roxburgh

is chair of the religion department and S. Louis and Ann W. Armstrong professor of religion at Samford University in Birmingham. He earned his bachelor's degree from the London School of Theology, master's degree from Aberdeen University in Scotland and doctorate from Edinburgh University in Scotland. He has written numerous articles for scholarly journals and books, as well as a book, "Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th-century Scotland."



intense desire to take the Bible seriously and approach it with humility and excitement. I determined to spare no effort in discovering its meaning "there and then" as well as "here and now."

Alan Cole, an evangelical Anglican of Sydney, once made the comment that God sometimes blesses "a poor exegesis of a bad translation of a doubtful reading of an obscure verse of a minor prophet." How can we approach the Bible, understand its meaning and grasp its essential message?

We often begin by seeking to understand the Bible in its original context, discerning what it meant in the "there and then" of Israel's history and the early church. We recognize that the Bible, in part at least, is a book from the past about the past. We study the contexts in which it was written, seeking to appreciate what the original writers were seeking to convey to their first readers.

Although we declare, without any hesitation, that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we also acknowledge that human writers were the means through which God's revelation came to us. They bore a clear and consistent witness to Jesus Christ and God's involvement in the world for the sake of our salvation. This means that we take care in knowing how best to translate the Bible and understanding the history, geography and social context of books such as Jeremiah, Luke's Gospel and 1 Corinthians. We want to understand what the first readers would have understood when they heard it read in synagogue and church meetings.

We also recognize that the Bible tells a single basic story and has an internal unity. Despite containing works from different contexts and centuries, the Bible has a united message of God's purposes as Creator and Redeemer. It speaks of the God of grace, who calls people to trust Him and live according to His direction. It is a book that points forward to the promised coming of Christ in the Old Testament and shows us

how His Incarnation, death and resurrection impacts our lives in our contemporary contexts. It may seem that speaking of the Bible having a diversity of voices is a weakness, but it turns out to be a strength because it demonstrates the way in which the Bible can speak into the various situations in which we find ourselves in the 21st century. As readers who live in different settings, we each seek the word of the Lord for our lives today.

Two insights of the Protestant Reformation that brought about a return to Scripture were the emphasis on sola scriptura, "Scripture alone," and the priesthood of all believers. The first principle emphasized Scripture's authority over and above any church tradition. The latter stressed the importance not only of the individual who reads and tries to understand the Bible but also the community of faith as one of the best places where the text of Scripture was to be interpreted. In that community, each believer had something to contribute, out of his or her own experience, in discerning the mind of Christ.

One of the first things I discovered in reading the Bible from cover to cover was that it contained a variety of literary genres. More than half the Bible consists of historical narrative: stories of individuals such as Abraham, Joseph, David, Jesus and Paul. This is not unusual, because other cultures of the ancient world kept annals and wrote down their stories. However, nothing like the details of the narratives we have in Scripture is to be found in other cultures of that time. Even when we find creation stories in Babylon, we discover that their understanding of God is different from that of the God of the Bible, who is seen as Creator and Redeemer. God is not distant from humanity but loves His world and draws close to meet us in all our need.

Variety of genres

Then we discover that the revelation of God's grace toward humanity also is found in the poetry of the Psalms and prophetic and apocalyptic books, each of which has to be approached in its own terms in order to understand the original message it was seeking to convey. The Bible also contains various laws and regulations such as the Ten Commandments, as well as the Gospels' directions and the epistles concerning the life of discipleship.

Studying the Bible is not something we do in our own strength. The same Holy Spirit who inspired David, Luke and Paul is still active in our lives through the gift of preachers, teachers and the conscientious use of our minds to understand its meaning. When I was ordained to Christian ministry in 1978, my father gave me a new Bible in which he inscribed 2 Timothy 2:14: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by Him, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Living in the 21st century, we have a plethora of resources to help us understand Scripture that former generations did not. We should not ignore the means by which God has helped people in the past and present to interpret the Bible correctly.

Discovering for ourselves

What we often lack, however, is a desire to discover and explore for ourselves the Bible's riches, which are a source of endless delight.

As Thomas Oden, professor of theology and ethics at Drew University in Madison, N.J., suggested, we are "invited to the quiet joy of the study of God," which, "over the centuries, has been the course not only of contemplative happiness but also of unparalleled intellectual fascination, spiritual sustenance and moral guidance."

There is clarity within Scripture that encourages us to believe that it is not beyond our ability as Christians to both read and understand its content. That is why Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin believed that we should look for the biblical text's natural and obvious meaning when we read it and not be diverted by seeking to spiritualize or allegorize the Bible.

As Charles Simeon, the evangelical Anglican preacher in Cambridge, England, once said, "My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there and not to thrust in what I think might be there." Even the Book of Revelation is not meant to be viewed as a complicated jigsaw puzzle of which only a few possess the key to unlock its mysteries.

At one level, we approach the Bible as we would any other book, paying attention to rules of vocabulary and grammar and understanding the different genres of literature it contains because God used human beings to convey the message in the language and literature of the times.

Yet we also approach it in humility and a prayerful attitude, seeking to open not only our minds but also our hearts to meditate on its meaning.

If we approach the Bible in such a manner, then we realize that we have not truly understood its meaning until we have applied it to our lives in the "here and now."

Next week's topic ...

The stories of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament



Iranian pastor to remain in prison, still faces possible death sentence

An Iranian pastor who potentially faces a death sentence for being a Christian will remain in prison at least four more months and perhaps up to a year, according to conflicting reports.

The American Center for Law and Justice reported Dec. 16 that an Iranian court had ordered any decision on pastor Yousef (also spelled Youcef) Nadarkhani to be delayed at least four months, meaning he will be in prison there during Christmas and well into the new year.

Misleading news reports

Meanwhile, a second organization that monitors religious freedom in the Middle East, known as Present Truth Ministries, reported that the delay would last a year.

At press time it was being reported that the year option was the most likely scenario.

The head of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, has reportedly ordered the presiding judge over the trial in Rasht to do nothing for one year.

"The news we have about Yousef is not official, but that's what the lawyers are saying," a member of the Church of Iran said.

The goal of keeping him in prison, Present Truth Ministries said, is to "use whatever means necessary to cause him to recant and return to Islam."

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a statement Dec. 9 calling for Nadarkhani and several other prisoners of conscience worldwide to be released "immediately and unconditionally."

Nadarkhani was sentenced to death a year ago after a court of appeals found him guilty of leaving Islam.

The case dates back to 2009 when Nadarkhani was arrested after complaining that his son was being taught Islam in school. He eventually was sentenced to death by the court of appeals.

Earlier this year the Iranian Supreme Court upheld the death

sentence but ordered a lower court to examine whether Nadarkhani was ever a Muslim — a fact essential to determine whether he left Islam for Christianity. But that

lower court in Rasht, Iran, found that although Nadarkhani was never a practicing Muslim he remained guilty of apostasy because he had Muslim ancestry.

In late September of this year, he was given four chances to recant his faith in court and refused each time. His case then was referred to the

ayatollah. The American Center for Law and Justice reported one of his court exchanges.

"Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?" Nadarkhani asked.

"To the religion of your ancestors, Islam," the judge reportedly replied.

"I cannot," the pastor responded. (BP)



NADARKHANI

Kyle Matthews to perform at M-POWER concert

Christian recording artist and songwriter Kyle Matthews will be featured in a Jan. 28 benefit concert for Birmingham's M-POWER Ministries at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham.

According to its website, www.mpowerministries.org, M-POWER "provides opportunities for people to break the cycle of poverty through education and health services."

The concert is sponsored by the WMU (Woman's Missionary Union) Foundation.

A special offering taken at the

concert will benefit the M-POWER Education Center, a certified Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC) and Christian Men's Job Corps (CMJC) site.

CWJC and CMJC are WMU ministries.

Youth choirs

Joining Matthews onstage will be youth choirs representing three Birmingham-area churches: Lakeside Baptist, Shades Crest Baptist Church and Trinity United Methodist Church.

The concert will follow a Youth

Ministry Day, where youth choir members and their chaperones will assist with service projects at M-POWER. During the afternoon, there will be a prayer walk around the ministry's building.

"I hope that this concert is another opportunity for people who don't know about M-POWER and the work we do with people in the city ... to become familiar with [it]," said Bethany Rushing, M-POWER's marketing director.

To get involved, contact Terry Taylor at 205-601-8778 or ttaylor@shadescrest.org. (TAB)

MTV reality shows 'demean' women

Only 24 percent of what women said about themselves on four of MTV's most popular reality shows was positive, according to an analysis by the Parents Television Council.

"Jersey Shore," "Real World," "Teen Mom 2" and "16 and Pregnant" constitute the most popular primetime MTV shows among ages 12 to 17, and researchers said the study suggests "a disturbingly unrealistic portrayal of 'reality' with ... demeaning ... and sexualized dialogue."

Studies show a connection between children's media consumption and their behavior, said Tim Winter, the council's president.

For more information, visit parentstv.org. (BP)

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Alleged peeping evangelist charged in third town

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A traveling Southern Baptist evangelist and former camp pastor for LifeWay Christian Resources faces new charges of video voyeurism in a third mid-South community.

WMC-TV in Memphis, Tenn., reported Dec. 15 that an arrest warrant was issued in Waldron, Ark., charging Sam Allen "Sammy" Nuckolls with using a camera hidden in a writing pen to spy on an unsuspecting woman while they were together in a room at a church.

"He stuck it in something at her feet in an attempt to view up her skirt," Waldron Police Department detective Jeremy Hunt told the station.

The video came from a file labeled "Waldron" on a computer confiscated after a woman in Gosnell, Ark., told police that Nuckolls tried to secretly record her in a bathroom of her home where he was staying as a guest while preaching at a church revival.

Additional charges followed in Olive Branch, Miss., stemming from other clandestine videos reportedly taken inside Nuckolls' home.

According to initial news reports, Nuckolls admitted when police in Gosnell picked him up that he secretly shot the video and had done the same thing to other women, but he pleaded not guilty in court Nov. 1 in Olive Branch.

Prior to his arrest, Nuckolls, 33, was a popular youth speaker known for his humor and use of magic tricks to gain and hold attention.

A graduate of Williams Baptist College and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, he served on staff at several churches before entering full-time itinerant ministry.

LifeWay hired him as a summer staffer to serve in the role of camp pastor for FUGE camps in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. In 2007 his role changed to a contract position, where he served several weeks during the summer preaching at general assemblies and large gatherings. He served in that capacity through the summer of 2011.

After his arrest LifeWay Christian Resources released a statement saying they would no longer use Nuckolls and that all his current speaking commitments were canceled. LifeWay said there was no evidence of any victims being filmed at FUGE-related events but provided police contact information for anyone who suspects she might be a victim.

Former youth minister focus of abuse investigation

CYPRESS, Texas — A Texas youth minister already charged with statutory rape of a 16-year-old was arrested Dec. 14 for allegedly sending inappropriate text messages and videos to a 14-year-old girl he met while serving at a Southern Baptist megachurch.

Authorities said phone records show more than 15,000 text messages over a period of 11 months between Chad Foster, 33, and the young girl he met more than a year ago while he was a youth pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston. Second Baptist's executive pastor did not immediately respond to an email asking how long Foster worked at the church.

In a blog last updated in March 2010, Foster said he worked with students at Second Baptist's Cypress campus, one of five locations of the multisite congregation led by former Southern Baptist Convention President Ed Young. Authorities say Foster and the 14-year-old exchanged phone numbers and began sending each other text messages.

After the girl got a computer, their conversations expanded to Facebook and video on Skype.

The communication continued after he left Second Baptist to become youth pastor of Community of Faith Church in Hockley, a community northwest of Houston, in January. That's where authorities say Foster met a 16-year-old girl, and their friendship quickly grew sexual. Local media quoted court documents alleging Foster had sexual relations with the girl on six occasions from July through October.

Foster reportedly told the girl not to tell anyone about their relationship, because it would get him in legal trouble, but she began to feel bad about it and told a teacher and an associate pastor about it. They contacted legal authorities, according to Fox affiliate KRIV Channel 26.

Houston television station KPRC said people have come forward with the names of at least seven other young girls, and that so far all of the tips were tied to Second Baptist Church. The KRIV report said Foster resigned his job at Community of Faith about a month before his first arrest, saying he was burned out. ☐



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Last evangelical church in Gaza in danger of dying

The last remaining evangelical church in Gaza is functioning but in danger of dying, famed Bible smuggler Brother Andrew said after a recent visit to Gaza Baptist Church.

"Christians in the west are surprised to learn that there is a church [in Gaza], a functioning church, a suffering church, a restricted church, but there is a church in Gaza ... and I think it's dying," the founder of Open Doors, an organization dedicated to support of Christian minorities who are persecuted because of their faith, said in a video clip.

"Today only one active evangelical church remains, Gaza Baptist Church," the video says, "a church that has suffered the effects of perpetual war, the

murder of a prominent member and a devastating drop in attendance from 100-plus to less than 12."

An unidentified pastor says Christians number fewer than 2,000 in a tiny strip of land populated by 1.6 million Muslims, and evangelicals are a small minority even among Christians. Oppressed

by both Israel's economic blockade and Islamic militancy, many Christians have opted to leave.

Hanna Massad, the pastor of Gaza Baptist Church who fled to Jordan after a church member who managed Gaza's only Christian bookstore was murdered

execution-style in 2007, recently traveled to Gaza from Amman through Egypt.

"You cannot imagine the relentless stress suffered by church leaders in a small, crowded area like Gaza (140 square miles)," Massad wrote supporters in a letter Nov. 9.

"They are isolated from the rest of the world, surrounded by [non-Christians], ruled by Hamas and oppressed by the extremists and the even more radical Salafists. Every day, they battle depression and hopelessness."

Massad said his visit Dec. 15 was with a couple of his former students at Bethlehem Bible College, who lead a home Bible study. "For hours, we talked about the unique ministry challenges they face and sought God together to find ways to serve better and to reach out to the territory's tiny Christian community," he said.

He then counseled a pastor and other discouraged church leaders and visited a family that recently lost its father to cancer.

"There is much sickness in

Gaza," he said, "a lot of it caused by the stress of daily life in addition to the diseases and infirmities that we all face."

But Massad said the "number one disease" in the Gaza Strip is worry, so that was his main topic when he led home Bible studies, spoke to school teachers and preached and taught two Sundays in church.

"One day, I walked into a pharmacy and my heart nearly broke as the owner, who is a good friend, broke down crying uncontrollably the moment she saw me," Massad said. "She could not believe that I was actually there. She was able to share the oppression and pain she is suffering and later told me how the Lord used my visit

to comfort and strengthen her."

Massad said poverty is great in Gaza and unemployment high, but through his Christian Mission to Gaza he managed to help 27 fami-

lies — Christian and non-Christian — with food and medicine. Most live in the Deir El Balah refugee camp, where nearly 20,000 people are packed into 39 acres.

Food packages included olive oil, corn oil, different kinds of beans, rice, sugar and other supplies, worth about \$60, with food purchased locally.

Massad said he hopes to visit Gaza again in January and while there to teach a course on the Gospel of John through the Gaza extension of Bethlehem Bible College. (ABP)

"Every day, [church leaders] battle depression and hopelessness."

Pastor Hanna Massad
Gaza Baptist Church

"There is much sickness in Gaza, a lot of it caused by the stress of daily life."

Pastor Hanna Massad
Gaza Baptist Church

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SBC-BWA meeting mainly a dialogue

(continued from page 1)
dicated when they would begin. In an effort to follow up, the BWA executive committee authorized Calam to request a meeting, and the first meeting was set.

Bullard said the meeting was primarily intended to begin a dialogue without strategic or organizational goals and was planned as fellowship and relationship.

"The two teams needed to get to know one another," Bullard said.

"My impression is that we accomplished that goal. It was a very congenial meeting. People were able to talk openly. We did not generate conclusions other than that relating to one another is a positive thing."

Bullard acknowledged there would be speculation about whether at some point in the future the two organizations might reunite, but that was not the reason for the meeting.

Ironically Dec. 19 marked the eighth anniversary of a prelimi-

nary report of the SBC/BWA Study Committee that found the BWA guilty of having an anti-American tone, encouraging women as pastors and refusing to discuss abortion. After voting to withdraw from the BWA, the SBC — at the time the BWA's largest financial supporter — reallocated those funds to establish a Global Evangelical Relations office led since 2007 by former SBC President Bobby Welch. In May Welch joined the staff of the Tennessee Baptist Convention while continuing to assist the SBC Executive Committee "in a reduced role."

BWA leaders also met with Pentecostal World Fellowship leaders Dec. 13-15 to lay groundwork for ecumenical dialogue between Baptists and Pentecostals around the world. During the meeting, they set guidelines for anticipated multiyear meetings to pursue closer ties between two groups.

"The purpose of the dialogue is to examine what it may mean for Baptists and Pentecostals to walk together in step with the Holy Spirit," representatives of the two groups said in a statement issued at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. "Our intention is for the dialogue to be holistic in its evaluation of faith and practice."

Future talks are tentatively scheduled annually from 2012 through 2014.

A separate BWA dialogue team held exploratory talks Oct. 30-Nov. 2 with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, "first among equals" in the Eastern Orthodox communion and regarded as the representative and spiritual leader of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians.

(Compiled from ABP stories)

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Caring enough to share

You laugh too much, Jen Jen, and it's really annoying."

"Jen Jen, you are really loud."

Yes, I have officially moved to the not-so-cool aunt stage with my 7-year-old nephew, Jared.

Sure he still loves me, makes me sweet cards and gives me sweet hugs, but he is no longer bashful about telling me like it is.

What really irritates him though is when I laugh loudly after he reminds me how annoying I can be. And Christmas really tried his patience with me as we enjoyed a couple days of family time together.

Still I have to hand it to the little guy for being honest and sharing his suggestions on ways I can improve myself. And when you really think about it, I am loud and do have an annoying laugh!

Toning it down

He's not the first to point out my laugh and how often it appears. Sometimes I think it is my all-encompassing reaction — not only do I laugh when I'm happy or tickled but I also laugh when I'm nervous, angry, sad or tired. You know, the laugh instead of cry mentality.

Laughing truly has been a positive and negative for me through the years. It has been an action that built relationships in some cases and needed taming at other points.

But along the way, I've always had people who cared enough about me and my personal growth (like Jared) to point out

when my laughter is just too much.

And, yes, too much laughter is my sole weakness. There's really nothing else I need to improve.

Right! If you know me at all and/or have read any of my columns, then you are the one laughing hysterically at the moment. My weaknesses and areas needing growth are so numerous that I could fill this entire week's paper detailing them for you.

And as we enter a new year, I'm spending time evaluating myself and determining which areas need the most attention. It's a great time to

start fresh, refocus and determine (through God's guidance and strength) where to make improvements.

We shouldn't be scared of evaluating ourselves and working toward a better us. It's a great opportunity to sharpen skills, shift schedules, improve attitudes and realign priorities.

Even if you don't necessarily want to do this yourself, you may have recently been forced to do some evaluating through your place of work and/or ministry. It's not always easy to be shown areas needing improvement. It's always more fun to be told how wonderful we are and what a great job we are doing. I agree. I'd much rather hear those words than to be told that this area is not good enough, that skill needs improvement or this situation must move to a new level.

But I also know that if no one ever cares enough to tell me the truth, push me to a new level or challenge me to do better, then it would be all too easy to sit back, get comfortable and just coast through life. I wouldn't have the opportunity to serve the Lord at the fullest level that I am capable if there weren't moments of evaluation that lead to improvement.

We all need a Jared in our lives to help us in these evaluations, so instead of being upset with the Jared in your life, be thankful he or she cares enough to share.



JARED



Rashional EXTRAS ...

What topics are on your mind?

E-mail jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

Ways to exercise without going to the gym

By Richard Murphy
Church Health Center

For most of us, it is no secret that we need to move more to be healthy. Getting more exercise helps us physically, lowering our blood pressure, increasing our heart health and helping us to manage weight. But exercising also helps us in other areas of our lives. When we exercise, we feel better. We are happier, less stressed and more positive. Finally exercise can help us to connect with God in unexpected ways. Getting regular exercise helps us to feel more connected to our bodies — the very bodies that God created. We are reminded when we move that God is working in our lives.

For many of us, however, getting enough exercise (or even a little exercise) is a challenge simply because it is difficult to find the time to get to the gym. The good news is that there are many ways to get moving without buying a gym membership:

1. Use a pedometer.

A pedometer is a device that measures how far you walk and will help you to keep track of how many steps you are taking each day. Once you know how many steps you take each day, you can try to "add steps" by taking the stairs instead of the elevator, doing a couple of laps around your house or taking a walk around the block. Ideally, you can build up to about 10,000 steps each day.

2. Make the most of running errands.

When you drive to the store, park as far away from the entrance as you can. Even better, try walking to the store. Once you get to the store and have loaded up your cart, take an extra "lap" around the store. That lap will add around 100

steps to your day (depending on the size of your store).

3. Walk around your neighborhood.

Four to five times a week, try to block out 30 minutes to an hour to go for a walk around your neighborhood. This can be a great activity before you have dinner. As a bonus, walking around the neighborhood is a great way to enjoy the company of friends and family as well as the changing seasons.

4. Work out while you work.

If you work at an office, try replacing your office chair with a large exercise ball. This will keep you moving throughout the day, as well as give you better posture. You can also bring some small hand weights and do bicep curls when you have a bit of down time.

5. Have fun.

Find ways to enjoy yourself as you exercise. Turn on music and dance around your living room. Find a place where you like to walk or find friends to join you in a walking group. The more you enjoy your exercise, the more likely you are to stick with it.

God created us to move, and exercise is one important aspect of the model of healthy living, which includes faith life, medical concerns, work, emotional health, family and friends, nutrition and movement. But exercise need not always include going to the gym. Instead getting regular exercise can be built into our lives, just as good nutrition and an active spiritual life can be built into our days.

To find out more about the model of healthy living and living a wellness-oriented life, check out 40 Days to Better Living at <http://www.healthcareyoucanlivewith.com/40DaysSeries>.

Do you have too much stress?

You might if you are skipping meals or eating on the run, feeling run-down, having frequent headaches, having trouble sleeping or feeling out of control.

Start the new year committed to resolving the negative stress in your life.

Some ways to relax:

▶ Throughout the day, take a few minutes to breathe deeply.

▶ Do some stretches at your desk or at the kitchen counter.

▶ Maintain a regular exercise routine.

▶ Eat a healthy snack rather than something with sugar or caffeine.

▶ Take a break — go for a walk, listen to some music or close your eyes for a few minutes.

▶ Share your feelings with someone or keep a journal.

▶ Write out a to-do list each morning and prioritize the items.

Source: Pathways Professional Counseling
www.pathwaysprofessional.com

From Terry Newberry Birmingham, Ala. —

I was talking to a friend not long ago, and he talked about how many Mickey Mantle baseball cards he had thrown away as a kid, because he was so interested in getting to the gum inside the package. That set me to thinking about how many times I missed an opportunity because I was in a hurry. I began to wonder about value and how our values affect our decisions.

I asked myself: What do I value?

Our values extend into every area of our life. Relationships, moral views, work ethic, faith, family — the list is long and varied. Our values are just that — things that have value to us. A value is a belief, a philosophy, a viewpoint — something that has meaning to us. A value influences our decisions and guides how we spend our time and resources. Values provide a foundation upon which we build our business, our relationships and our life.

Do your decisions reflect your values?

To read more, visit Terry's blog at Terrynewberry.com.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

— Colossians 3:23



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He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Psalms 40:3

USCIRF reauthorized for 3 more years as US watchdog for worldwide religious freedom

The United States' watchdog for worldwide religious freedom gained reauthorization from Congress on Dec. 16 on what could have been its final day of existence.

The House of Representatives approved by voice vote a bill to reauthorize the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for three more years. The House action came three days after the Senate approved the same legislation Dec. 13 by unanimous consent.

New restriction

The good news for religious liberty advocates did not come without some disappointments for many of their number. The bill limits commissioners to two, two-year terms. That restriction will require seven of the nine current commissioners to leave the panel in 90 days. In addition, USCIRF's yearly budget will drop from more than \$4 million to \$3 million.

Richard Land — one of USCIRF's commissioners and a Southern Baptist religious freedom advocate — said he was "delighted and relieved" that Congress had reauthorized the panel.

USCIRF's closure "would have been tragic for the cause of religious freedom and human rights around the world," said Land, president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "USCIRF has been so successful in highlighting these issues that other countries have imi-

tated the United States and started similar commissions of their own. How ironic would it have been for the United States to allow its commission to lapse?

"My only regret is the legislation does not allow for at least one or two of the current commissioners who have years of experience to continue to serve for at least one more term to provide institutional memory to the commission," he said.

In a written statement, Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., did not criticize the term-limit measure added to the House bill he sponsored. Instead, he applauded Congress' reauthorization of a panel whose work he described as "of the utmost importance."

USCIRF "speaks plainly about religious freedom abuses wherever they occur in ways that the State Department can rarely muster, during Republican and Democrat administrations alike," Wolf said in a written statement.

"[T]oday's reauthorization sends a clear message to repressive regimes around the globe that international religious freedom is a U.S. foreign policy priority."

'Honor and privilege'

Land — who has served on USCIRF for more than a decade, minus a nearly one-year absence — is one of the seven commissioners who will have to leave the panel within 90 days.

"The commission's survival is far

more important than my service," Land said. "The continuation of institutional memory is more important than my personal service."

"It has been an honor and a privilege to serve, and I know others will be similarly blessed by their terms of service in the future," he said.

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

The House voted 391-21 in mid-September for Wolf's bill reauthorizing USCIRF for two more years, but the bill met a roadblock in the Senate. Using one of the chamber's rules, a single senator reportedly put a hold on the reauthorization legislation. A senator who takes such action is not required to disclose his identity, but Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., was widely reported to be the member who held up the bill.

When Durbin finally acted to release the legislation Dec. 13, he attached the term-limit requirement

among amendments to Wolf's bill. The amendments approved by the Senate as part of the reauthorization bill included one forcing USCIRF members to abide by State Department travel regulations and another extending the reauthorization to 2014.

Bill amendments

During the hold by the senator, Congress approved three times in fall budget battles measures that kept USCIRF operating temporarily. Legislators beat a Sept. 30 deadline by extending federal spending through Oct. 4. Then, the Senate and House passed a resolution to maintain funds through Nov. 18. On Nov. 17, Congress adopted another funding extension, this time to Dec. 16.

When it became uncertain if Congress would extend USCIRF's life, the commissioners released a resolution Dec. 6 outlining preparations for its closure in case of congressional or presidential inaction. The panel said it was required by federal law to make such preparations.

Another Durbin amendment approved by senators restored the number of commissioners to nine. The House-approved version had reduced the panel to five members. Under the newly passed legislation, the president will continue to appoint three USCIRF members. The Senate leadership will name three commissioners, and the House leadership will select the other three. (BP)

Barbour Association starts men's missions group

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

I'm for all missions around the world, but I think we need to start here at home," said Curtis Rich, director of missions for Barbour Baptist Association. "So I wanted to get men together to start a missions program in the association to help anyone who had a need."

First up: Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Eu-
faula, which needed work done on its exterior. Though the work wasn't major, the congregation wasn't able to handle it on its own.

The Beginning

"Our church has a small congregation and it's mainly elderly women. We have men at the church but most are older, too," Pastor Terry Birdsong said. "We don't have the resources here to do it."

So Rich gathered young men from other churches to help out — a group that began calling itself The Beginning. The group went to Pleasant Hill Baptist on Nov. 19 and was able to complete the necessary repairs by 1 p.m.

Micah Price, a 23-year-old senior at Troy University, was one of the men who lent a hand with the project, and he said the experience is one he hopes to repeat.

"The members were enthusiastic about us being there and excited about the work being done," said Price, a member of Clayton Baptist Church.

"They were encouraging and supportive the whole time we were there."

And Pleasant Hill members were able to contribute to the repairs as well, footing the bill for the materials and lunch for the men via funds from their Woman's Missionary Union group and brotherhood organization. With those materials, the men repainted awnings above entrances, cleaned out gutters, replaced rotting wood behind gutters and pressure washed the patio areas.

"It was a wonderful morning, full of fellowship," Birdsong said. "The church was ecstatic about the work that was done."

He said the idea of this local missions outreach first came to him when Barbour Association churches were traveling to Tuscaloosa to help with tornado cleanup projects.

He realized the association could use similar volunteer work within its communities and, with Rich, helped jump-start The Beginning. The plan is for the group to con-



Photo courtesy of Barbour Baptist Association

'A NEED IS A NEED' — Men from Barbour Baptist Association churches volunteer to help meet needs 'at home' through a newly formed missions group called The Beginning.

tinue helping with local projects as needed. "We've talked about how these don't have to be grand projects to be a real need," Birdsong said. "It might involve building a wheelchair ramp at a church or a church member's home, for example. A need is a need, and we're here to serve needs — both physical and spiritual ones."

Be consistent when interacting with others

My first job out of seminary was ... interesting. I was the coordinator of a homeless prevention program, supervising six case managers.

It would be an understatement to say I didn't know what I was doing!

While I had my education, I did not know the issues that contributed to homelessness in that community. I did not know the partners we worked with. I did not know the agency I now worked for and the six women I was supervising. I sat down in my office that first day and thought, "Now what?"

I remember very clearly the first team meeting I held with the case managers.

They were nice but they looked at me with as much uncertainty as I looked at them.

They did not know who I was or if I had anything to offer them. Plus they were all considerably older and more experienced than I was!

So what do you do when you are new to something and not sure where to start?

Look to Scripture

What is the first thing you do when overwhelmed by people and tasks? What do you do when you doubt your own ability?

I think one step can be found in Scripture.

Malachi 3:6 states, "I, the Lord, do not change." And Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

When we read those Scriptures, there is some measure of peace that comes. There is some comfort

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



in knowing that God is consistent.

Perhaps that is because so much around us changes. Perhaps it is because people in our lives are inconsistent.

Something comforting

Regardless there is something comforting about consistency and knowing God is always the same.

Have you ever had a teacher or supervisor who was inconsistent?

One day, something you said would please her, but the next day, the same statement would anger her.

My reaction to this was to clam up and keep my distance.

However, a teacher or boss who was pretty consistent in manner and expectations helped me be more proactive and willing to be honest about my thoughts and feelings. So what do you do when

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.

you are overwhelmed and not sure what to do first?

What do you do when you doubt your own ability? Try being consistent in how you interact with people. I did not know those six case managers, but I could be consistent in my support of them, my honesty about what I did and did not know and my expectations of them.

The funny thing I discovered was that they were much more interested in my attitude toward them and my consistency in how I related to them than they were in my lack of knowledge.

So what new thing are you tackling? What is overwhelming you?

Are you being consistent with people or are you being short-tempered?

A Takeaway Value ...

When you are trying to work your way through new things, be consistent in how you interact with people. It will get you farther than you think!

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jean Roberson, MSW, LCSW, is a ministry consultant for national Woman's Missionary Union. She serves as team leader for the adult team and director of Christian Women's Job Corps/Christian Men's Job Corps and International Initiatives.

Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

Most of my customers this past year have used the reverse mortgage to eliminate their monthly mortgage payments, but I see a growing number of customers who see the advantage of the creditline growth plan. If you don't have a lot of debt on your property, it makes sense to do the reverse mortgage and leave as much in your account as possible. Why? Because it's currently growing at over 4.5%. Now where can you get that kind of return these days?

The foundation of this rate is LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) and when LIBOR increases, so will your rate. The lifetime cap on this rate is 13.28%. Wow! Wouldn't it be great to have a line of credit growing at that rate? It will happen if rates go up like they did in the late '70s and early

'80s, but for now, you could be seeing growth that is twice or more the growth of your CD or savings.

The beauty of the creditline growth account is interest is only charged on the amount of money you take out, (plus fees rolled in) and as indicated, any money left in your line of credit grows! For example, if you left \$40,000 in your line of credit at 4.527% (today's rate), in 36 months you'd have \$45,806.86. In 5 years, you'd have \$50,139.22.

There are several ways to make a reverse mortgage work for your benefit. For a free brochure or more information, call 205-567-4800 or email: jdixon@mccgowinking.net.

Jimmy is Bible study director and a deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.



Jimmy Dixon



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Want to know God?

By Pastor Greg Hyche
Brent Baptist Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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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: 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.

MINISTER OF MUSIC/EDUCATION: Calvary Baptist of Scottsboro, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister of music/education. Send resumes to: Kenneth Wells, 1003 Byron Road, Scottsboro, AL 35769 or calvary2012@gmail.com.

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

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER: Eldridge Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational youth minister to work with grades 7-12. Send resume to: Eldridge Baptist Church, 85 Maxwell Lane, Eldridge, AL 35554, or email: courington-bk@att.net.

YOUTH & CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church is searching for a full-time youth and children's minister. Send your resume to: RABC Search Committee, 309 Raleigh Avenue, Homewood, AL 35209. For more information, call the church office at 205-942-8060.

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: jbaker@mcelwain.org.

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Family Matters

Foster Parents needed in Montgomery, Elmore and Autauga Counties

By Erin Tunnell
ABCH Communications Manager

As a child, Mark* came into the care of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH). He and his brother went to live in one of our foster homes outside of Birmingham. Although scared, and a bit defensive at first, Mark began to grow and heal due to the one-on-one care he received. Mark and his brother were nurtured and taught about God's love, missions and serving others. And then end with the same last two sentences of the paragraph that talk about him being an Eagle Scout, etc His dream is to one day serve others, possibly through the mission field.

Mark is just one of the many children whose lives have been changed through our foster care program. Integral to that success is the Christian foster family who took Mark and his brother in, and loved and cared for them as if they were their own.

But there are more children who need help. According to the 2011 National Kids Count Data Book, Alabama ranks 48th among the 50 states in the terms of the wellbeing of children. And Montgomery County ranks 56th out of Alabama's 67 counties in terms of the wellbeing of children.

Montgomery County also has the fourth-largest number of children needing foster care among Alabama Counties, with 259 in care as of October 2011. Elmore County was 35th, with 32 children in foster care, and Autauga County was 37th, with 27 children in care.

The needs are so great that the existing resources can be overwhelmed at times. That's why Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) is excited to partner with Montgomery Baptists in actively seeking foster parents to serve in Montgomery, Elmore and Autauga Counties. A foster parent training class will begin in February, if enough parents sign up.

"Scripture calls us to the care of orphans and widows," said Bobbi Olson, ABCH social worker serving the three counties. "In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you have done it unto Me.' As Christians, we have a responsibility

and a calling to care for those children whose families cannot care for them, whatever the reason."

The Children's Homes began offering foster care services in the three counties in October of last year, after Montgomery Baptists broached the idea of a partnership.

Tanya Birchfield of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, said she contacted ABCH about offering foster care services in the area because of the church's existing relationship with ABCH.

"I felt our members would feel more secure going through the foster care training and foster parenting with someone they respected and trusted," she said. "Secondly, I really wanted our members to have a Christian social worker who would pray with them, someone they would have a spiritual connection with to guide them through the foster parenting process."

Birchfield also said the training, counseling and other services available to ABCH foster parents and foster children meant that the foster parents would be well-supported as they opened their homes to protect, nurture and restore the area's children in need.

If you are interested in serving as a foster parent, please contact Olson at 334-430-7569 or bolson@abchome.org. *Name changed for privacy reasons.

If you are interested in serving as a foster parent in Montgomery, Elmore or Autauga County, contact Bobbi Olson, 334-430-7569 or bolson@abchome.org.

Open Houses a Success!

Thank you to all who visited our Open Houses in December. We enjoyed visiting with our "family" of supporters. We were also thankful for all who baked goodies, served and volunteered to help make Open House a success. You can see a slideshow of photos on our homepage at www.alabamachild.org.



2011 ANNUAL OFFERING



Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

The 2011 goal for the Annual Children's Homes Offering is \$2.55 million. Please encourage your church to give.

* Graphic represents giving totals as of press time.

Because You Gave "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:38

When you give to the Children's Homes, you're helping to protect, nurture and restore children and families. But you may not always hear the individual stories of those who were helped.

Our Annual Emphasis for 2012 is **Because You Gave**. In the materials, you will read about and see the stories of those who have been helped through the generosity of individuals and churches who gave through their direct gifts and through the Annual Children's Homes Offering. The materials packet includes inserts that can be handed out or placed in a bulletin, and a DVD showcasing the stories made possible because you gave.

If you'd like to order these materials for your church or group meeting, contact Kay Taylor by calling 1-888-720-8805 or emailing ktaylor@abchome.org. Please include your name, contact

phone number and email, shipping address (no P.O. Boxes please), your church and association, number of inserts needed and date you either plan to hold the offering or have your meeting.



VBS nametags Order your complimentary 2012 VBS nametags today! We are currently taking orders through March 10 for the Amazing Wonders Aviation and Space Quest. To order, contact Kay Taylor by calling 1-888-720-8805 or emailing ktaylor@abchome.org. Please include your name, contact phone number and email, your church and association, VBS theme and number needed. Nametags will be available for pickup at your local associational office by the second week in April.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 8

Explore the Bible

By Dale Younce

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

STAY FOCUSED ON THE GOAL

Numbers 32:1, 5–8, 16–18, 20–24; 33:51–53

Looking out for No. 1 is, too often, the motto of today's adults. Even today's churches can lag behind in meaningful fellowship because members lose their focus on what God wants them to be and do collectively. Personal goals and plans are not necessarily wrong, but believers need to avoid losing their primary focus on fulfilling God's purposes.

This week's lesson spotlights, on one hand, two Israelite tribes' request that they settle east of the Jordan River (the territory known as Transjordan) and, on the other, Moses' demand that they first join the other tribes in taking possession of the promised land.

It's Not About Just Me and Mine

(32:1, 5–8)

The tribes of Reuben and Gad were herdsmen who were especially blessed with large herds of livestock. When they saw that the territory in Transjordan was good for grazing livestock, they requested from Moses permission to settle there. Later half the tribe of Manasseh would join them (Num. 32:33). The territory requested, however, lay outside the borders of the land God expected Israel to conquer (Num. 34:1–12).

Moses feared that the proposal of the Reubenites and Gadites would have a negative effect on the other tribes so that they would not proceed to conquer the land west of the Jordan. This would destroy the 12 tribes' unity and result in the kind of debacle they had experienced at Kadesh (Num. 14:1–10): failure. Moses warned against discouraging others from following the Lord.

This is an excellent example for God's people today. We can stay aligned with God's purposes by resisting the temptation to do only what's good for ourselves, especially when such actions contribute to discouraging others from following the Lord.

It's About Helping Others, Too

(32:16–18)

The tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad assured Moses that they would be at the fore-

front of helping all the tribes take possession of their allotted lands. They carefully explained that they were willing and ready to enter the land and fight alongside their fellow Israelites until the entire promised land was conquered. Their fighting men would lead the invasion force and not return to Transjordan until the promised land was won. Only after the other tribes had gained their territory would these two tribes (and the half tribe of Manasseh) return to Transjordan to settle down. They wanted it clearly understood that they would join with the other tribes in crossing the Jordan and conquering the Canaanites.

We demonstrate that our focus is on fulfilling God's purposes when we thoughtfully and wisely take steps to help others know and follow His purposes, too.

It's About Fulfilling an Obligation

(32:20–24)

Moses acknowledged their promise and added a warning. If the Reubenites and the Gadites failed to keep their promise of participating in possessing the promised land, then they would be sinning against God. That sin would be the failure to keep their vow and their unwillingness to assist in the task that God had called them to do. If they did what they promised, then they would fulfill their obligation to the Lord. Moses' words "Your sins will find you out" mean that God always knows if His people are faithful or not.

Under our heavenly Father's watchful eye, we show a deep sense of spiritual obligation when we commit to fulfilling God's purposes above our own wants and plans.

It's About Living As God's People

(33:51–53)

These verses are the Lord's words to Moses, a summary of their journey from Egypt to Canaan. The Lord instructed the Israelites to enter and take possession of the land, driving out the current inhabitants and destroying all their shrines and idols with a view to settling down in the land.

We can stay focused on fulfilling God's purposes by worshiping only Him and working to make Him known wherever we live. 🏠

Bible Studies for Life

By Joseph Scrivner

Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

SEEKING PURITY IN A SENSUAL CULTURE

Ephesians 5:1–5, 8–12, 15–16

Paul repeatedly emphasizes what God has done for believers through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He also calls believers to respond in a way appropriate to God's grace. This order in Paul's presentation is sometimes called "the indicative and the imperative." The indicative refers to one's status in Christ, while the imperative points to the lifestyle fitting this position.

Ephesians has this pattern, with three indicative chapters and then three imperative ones. In the first half, one finds, "By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). This salvation entails the Holy Spirit's power so that believers can experience "the length and width, height and depth" of God's love, which surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:14–21).

Walk in Love (1–5)

The second half of Ephesians begins with "therefore" to signal the transition from the indicative to the imperative. Believers are urged "to walk worthy of the calling" they have received in Christ, accepting fellow believers in loving humility (Eph. 4:1–2). This walk also recognizes the importance of unity and mutual edification in the church (Eph. 4:3–16). In addition, a worthy walk as members of Christ's new community requires a rejection of old habits, such as lying, anger and insults (Eph. 4:17–32). This includes using one's mouth for good, duly avoiding "rotten talk" (Eph. 4:29).

Ephesians 5 starts with "therefore" again, calling believers to imitate God in sacrificial love (1–2). The presence of love should naturally lead to the absence of sexual immorality in word and deed (3–4). In fact, imitating God's grace and love means that the believer cannot indulge in selfish sexual activity. Selfish sexuality seeks pleasure without an appropriate personal commitment. This is why a life characterized by sexual impurity has no place in God's Kingdom (5).

Walk in Light (8–12)

Despite contentions to the contrary, believers should recognize that sexual sin ultimately proceeds from spiritual darkness (Eph. 5:6–7). Participation in it represents an inability to see that God's design is based in love and thus for the good of His children (8–10). Unfortunately believers struggle to articulate this vision of God's goodness in a convincing manner. Too often, they refer to sex in largely negative terms. This is somewhat understandable since the stakes are so high for illicit sexual activity, with consequences ranging from disease to unplanned parenthood. Still, believers should present sexual activity within proper parameters as God's precious gift. Then, as a valuable present, it can be rightly treasured, protected from the decay of fornication or adultery.

Believers must consistently present strong, loving relationships as positive alternatives to the cheap thrills of contemporary culture. They must develop appetites for finer food, so to speak, so that young people and adults will prefer it to prevalent fast-food options. We might say only when one fully appreciates the light can one understand the true depth of darkness. This is how the works of darkness are exposed (11–14).

Walk in Wisdom (15–16)

When believers strive to walk in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ, their lives are characterized by wisdom. This means choices that reflect a proper expression of gratitude for God's grace (Eph. 5:17). Wisdom comes by the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and the mutual encouragement of fellow believers (Eph. 5:19–20). Wisdom consists in sacrificial support in relationships on many levels (Eph. 5:21), including marriage (Eph. 5:22–32), parenting (Eph. 6:1–4) and the workplace (Eph. 6:5–9). The light of wisdom on the path of these relationships enables one to avoid the pitfalls of darkness. We witness troubles all around us, among believers and unbelievers alike. Accordingly we must prepare for spiritual warfare by donning God's full armor (Eph. 6:10–18). Then we are able to stand and resist temptation (Eph. 6:13). 🏠

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Belonging to a minor prophet.

7. Belonging to the son of Issachar. (Gen. 46:13)

9. I'm ____ the end of my rope.

10. Each. (abbr.)

11. The beloved disciple.

13. Spoken of by ____ the prophet. (Matt. 24:15)

16. Abbreviation meaning "all right."

17. Though they have ____ chariots. (Josh. 17:18)

20. Woodworking tool.

21. Cupbearer to the king. (Neh. 1:1,11)

23. Styling ____ for the hair.

24. ____ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)

26. Negative.

27. They set the ark ... upon a new _____. (2 Sam. 6:3)

30. ____ lamented for Josiah. (2 Chron. 35:25)

34. ____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)

35. And ____ shall rule over thee. (Gen. 3:16)

36. Type of armament.

37. "I ____ that test!"

40. ____ have and to hold.

41. 28th book of the Bible.

43. Belonging to a man of mount Ephraim. (Judg. 17:1)

45. Compass direction.

46. He dwelleth in _____. (John 6:56)

48. Tyrone. (abbr.)

50. "____ top of old Smokey."

51. Pharaoh's daughter called his name _____. (Ex. 2:10)

52. Before the Israelites had kings, they had ____.

Down

2. Written in the ____ of the prophets. (Acts 7:42)

3. He had the gift of interpreting dreams.

4. A word ... in due season, how good is ____! (Prov. 15:23)

5. Where is ____ that is born King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2)

6. Why is thy countenance ____? (Neh. 2:2)

7. Prophet to Nineveh.

8. Part of a shoe.

11. The patience of ____.

12. The name of Samuel's firstborn was _____. (1 Sam. 8:2)

14. ____, ego, superego.

15. Seraiah, Jeremiah, _____. (Neh. 12:1)

18. Blood factor.

19. Southwestern state. (abbr.)

21. Compass direction.

22. As my servant ____ hath walked naked. (Isa. 20:3)

23. ____ in peace. (Luke 7:50)

25. Barnabas took ____, and sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 15:39)

26. 34th book of the Bible.

27. 900 in Roman numerals.

28. Radar beacon.

29. Solomon was not arrayed like one of _____. (Matt. 6:29)

31. For example.

32. Boaz begat Obed of _____. (Matt. 1:5)

33. Seth called his son's name _____. (Gen. 4:26)

38. Defensive End. (abbr.)

39. ____ of the Apostles.

42. Prophet who was a herdsman of Tekoa.

44. Yes. (nautical)

47. Printer's measure.

49. Middle Atlantic state. (abbr.)



Christians in India in fear after youth baptisms

SRINAGAR, India — A fact-finding mission to India's Kashmir Valley found that Muslim leaders' increasingly shrill opposition to conversions has instilled fear among the Christian minority, who was threatened as Christmas neared.

"Christian men, women and children are in a state of panic, fearful of their security, uncertain of the future, uncertain of their jobs," said John Dayal, a member of the National Integration Council and part of the fact-finding team.

Chander Mani Khanna, pastor of All Saints Church in Srinagar, was arrested Nov. 19 on charges of hurting religious sentiments of Muslims after several youths were baptized; he was released on bail Dec. 1.

At the same time, a Shariah court has reportedly summoned Pastor Jim Borst, a Dutch Catholic missionary, to appear on charges of proselytizing and "forced conversions." Muslim leaders in the Kashmir Valley, which is 97 percent Muslim, began to rally against Christians after a video recording of Muslim youth being baptized at the All Saints Church was posted on YouTube in late October.

Kashmir Grand Mufti Bashir-ud-din Ahmad told the fact-finding team that the Shariah court he heads will soon come out with its "judgment."

The Shariah court has no legal authority for non-Muslims in India, but the mufti hinted that the "judgment" could include demands such as a halt to further baptisms and morning prayers in schools run by Christians.

He issued a warning, saying, "We will do what we have to do and others will have to do what they have to do." The report said it was clear that the mufti was "contemplating a denunciation of the church, if not actually calling for mass action," though he had asserted there would be no violence.

Kazakhstan's new religion law broadens 'offenses'

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — In Kazakhstan, Baptist leader Nikolai Popov was imprisoned for 48 hours in early December for refusing to pay fines imposed for leading meetings for religious worship.

Another Baptist, Aleksey Buka from the village of Kievka in Karaganda region, was separately fined for attending a meeting for worship, with a third facing a fine for the same "offense." In one of the Baptist cases, police extorted statements from church members but a fine was still imposed.

A Muslim was fined and ordered deported back to his home country elsewhere in Central Asia. His "offense" was occasionally leading prayers in his local mosque without being personally registered as a "missionary." The new religion law along with an amending law considerably broadened the range of "offenses" for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief, as well as increasing punishments for this.

The punishments come as Kazakhstan's Secretary of State Kanat Saudabayev insisted in a closed Oct. 27 meeting of senior ministers and other officials that the "progressiveness" of the harsh new religion law must be promoted at home and abroad and that "positive acceptance" of its demands by Kazakhstan's religious communities must be achieved.

No 'missionary activity,' Uzbek authorities say

ANGREN, Uzbekistan — The authorities in Uzbekistan's city of Angren have warned local religious communities not to be involved in unspecified "proselytism" and "missionary activity," as well as not to allow children to take part in meetings for worship. Saidibrahim Saynazirov, deputy head of the administration, made these demands at a meeting of representatives of a variety of religious communities. He also demanded that the communities provide him with lists of their members.

Many at the meeting do not want to do this for fear of pressure by the authorities against individual members. When asked what legal basis he had for his demand for membership lists, Saynazirov told the meeting, "It's not in the law but we recommend that you do it."

He adamantly denied to Forum 18 News Service that he had demanded that communities provide lists of their members. "I did not demand such lists," he insisted. But he admitted that he "only asked" for them.

Christianity noted for going global in last century by Pew Forum

Christianity has grown into a global faith in the last century, moving from a predominantly European and North and South American religion to one that is now practiced in large numbers on every continent, particularly Africa and Asia.

That 100-year view is one of the major findings of a new report from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, which compares the worldwide Christian population of 2010 to that of 1910.

"Clearly Christianity has spread far from its historical origins," the 130-page report says. The report used a broad definition for Christianity and was based on census reports and population surveys.

In 1910, Europe had 66.3 percent of the world's Christian population and North and South America had 27.1 percent. Today, Europe's share of the Christian population is only 25.9 percent and the Americas is 36.8 percent.

During that century, Sub-Saharan Africa's share of the world's Christian population has grown from 1.4 percent to 23.6 percent, while the Asia-Pacific region has grown from 4.5 percent to 13.1 percent. At the same time, the Middle East-North Africa region has seen a slight decline in its worldwide share (0.7 to 0.6 percent).

Jim Haney, director of global research for the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board (IMB), says the Pew numbers are "consistent with IMB's global research effort," although the IMB's global research is "more focused on evangelical Christianity" as reported by missionaries and evangelical partners.

Christianity, Pew says, remains the world's largest religion "by far" and has seen the number of adherents nearly quadruple in the last century, yet its growth — as a portion of the population — has not kept pace with worldwide population. In 1910, there were about 611 million Christians, making up 35 percent of the world's population of 1.75 billion. Today, there are 2.2 billion Christians, which comprise 32 percent of the world's 7 billion people.

Broad definition

Pew's broad definition of Christianity includes Catholics and Protestants. Pew says Catholics comprise 50.1 percent of the world's Christian population, Protestants 36.7 percent and Orthodox 11.9 percent.

Protestantism, too, is worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest share of Protestantism (36.9 percent), followed by the Americas (32.9 percent), Asia-Pacific (17.4

percent), Europe (12.6 percent) and the Middle East-North Africa (0.2 percent).

China — a country where religious freedom is limited and the underground church has thrived — has the world's third-largest Protestant population at 58 million, trailing only the United States (159 million) and Nigeria (59 million), Pew says.

Good news, bad news

Haney said much work needs to be done to spread the gospel. At the end of 2010, he said, 5,776 of the world's 11,642 people groups "were engaged in church planting efforts by evangelicals around the world," with 741 of those "engaged by teams including IMB missionaries." There is bad and good news when examining data on the growth of Christianity, he said.

"We are disturbed by the kind of Christianity practiced today and heavily influenced by secularism, post-modernism and atheism, even among those counted as Christians because of baptism or affiliation," he said. "On the other hand, field research is showing that unreached people groups, thought to be resistant to the gospel in times past, are seeing amazing church planting movements where God is working mightily." (BP)



Vivian Myers woke up this morning with the face of a little Ugandan girl swimming in her mind. She wrote on Facebook, "May God get great glory from the life of Patricia. Overwhelmed this morning with His healing power."

She might be back in Birmingham, but Myers won't soon forget the tiny 1-year-old girl she met at Serving His Children (SHC), a nonprofit organization in Jinja, Uganda.

Myers, a registered nurse at Children's Hospital of Alabama, recently traveled to the east African country with a missions team from The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.

"I worked with SHC for the week in really whatever way I could," she said. "They ended up having two really sick kids while I was there, so I basically helped with their care the majority of the trip."

One was Patricia, who had a severe abscess on her face.

The other was Hatim, a 3-year-old boy with refeeding syndrome, a disorder that sometimes comes from getting nutrients again after being severely malnourished.

"Hatim went to be with the Lord

the Friday I was there," Myers said.

His death was a reminder that God can get glory in life and death, victory and tragedy, she said.

And there was a big difference between the need she saw there and the need she sees at her job in the States — she didn't have the resources or the manpower she normally has at her disposal.

"Prayer and support are a big need. They often find themselves, because of the dynamics of being in Africa and with limited supplies, in situations that possibly could have been prevented or handled differently if it were different circumstances," Myers said. "God has been so good to equip them with needed skills and abilities to take care of these kids. It is very evident that the Lord is at work among these families and little ones, as well as those who are working with them."

For more information, visit www.servinghischildren.org or <http://servinghischildreninuganda.blogspot.com>.

Stanley Kilgore, pastor of Center Grove Baptist Church,

Cullman, led a missions team to Belize Dec. 5-13. While primarily consisting of Center Grove Baptist members, the 12-member team also included members of North Gardendale Baptist Church; Mount Zion Baptist Church, Warrior; and First Baptist Church, Pinson.

For most of the trip, the team stayed in Pueblo Viejo, where Kilgore has been teaching at the Maya Missions pastors' training school for 20 years. While he taught at the school during the day, a construction team worked on a women's center for it.

In the evenings, the team attended worship services at village churches. Team members did everything from preaching to providing special music and drama.

The rest of the missions team prepared for a three-day Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Crique Sarco. During VBS, the construction team built a shelter for a van donated to the village churches by Center Grove and preached in evangelistic church meetings in Crique Sarco.

In all, Kilgore said, there were 46 professions of faith among adults, teenagers and children.

Receptive audience

Baptists in Bangladesh see results as nation marks 40 years

A Bangladeshi man picks up his microphone and begins to sing. He's a muezzin, a man appointed by the mosque to herald the call to prayer. Five times a day, devout Muslims unfurl their mats, face Mecca and pray to Allah.

As the call to prayer begins, it wafts around corners, over buildings and finally seeps into a nearby Baptist church building where men and women gather to worship God.

The pastor pauses at the podium, distracted momentarily by the call to prayer. He clasps the microphone and continues preaching from Psalms.

In the run-up to the 40th anniversary of their nation's independence on Dec. 16, Christians in Bangladesh said they have more to celebrate, like the inroads they are making into Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim communities in this predominantly Muslim nation.

December 16 is known as Liberation Day in this nation of more than 158 million people — the day when Bangladesh (then called East Pakistan) won its independence from Pakistan in 1971.

The first Southern Baptists came to Bangladesh in 1957 by boat. Burt Galvin, a Southern Baptist representative, has served in South Asia for the past 17 years.

Galvin said when the first Southern Baptists came to Bangladesh there were only 11 churches in a convention with doctrinal beliefs that aligned with Southern Baptists.

In the first 20 years of Southern Baptist work in Bangladesh, only five churches were added to their partner convention. In the 1970s, Galvin noted, a new strategy developed for sharing the gospel that led to a church planting movement among Hindus.

"Within 15 to 20 years, 200 churches were planted," he said.

In the 1980s, a church planting movement started among Bangladesh's tribal people groups, which grew to around 200 churches.

Today there are 475 churches in the Bangladeshi Baptists' convention that represent Hindu, Buddhist and some Muslim-background believers across the nation. This number continues to grow as Southern Baptist representatives and national believers continue to share the gospel with an increasingly receptive audience.

"It gives me the goosebumps," said Jaci Aurora, who serves with her husband among Bangladesh's tribal people groups. "We're seeing the results from those who served in the past."



BP photo

INDEPENDENCE — Meena Alom sells flowers to visitors at the national memorial of Bangladeshi independence outside Dhaka. The nation celebrated its 40th anniversary Dec. 16.

Though significant strides have been made, Christians in Bangladesh account for well under 1 percent of the total population.

Most of the churches planted in the past 40 years are comprised of believers from Hindu or Buddhist backgrounds, Galvin said.

With Muslims accounting for around 85 percent of Bangladesh's population, making it the fourth-largest Muslim country in the world, ministry among Muslims has begun to take off in the past 15 years.

Darryl Pogue, a Southern Baptist representative, estimates that since 1997 more than 10,000 baptisms have been recorded and 1,500 house churches started among Muslims in Bangladesh. Currently, there are six church planting movements among Muslims related to Southern Baptist representatives.

Bangladeshi believers come from various religious backgrounds: In the 40 years since independence, Muslim imams have become church planters, Buddhist tribal leaders discovered heaven is for real and Hindu priests set aside their gods for the one true God.

Taking the risk

Jibril Zaman, a former imam, risked everything by sharing his testimony over a loudspeaker in his mosque. Thirty imams now call Jesus Lord because of Zaman. He's received discipleship training from Southern Baptist representatives and is putting it into practice.

Suraj Chakma partners with Southern Baptist representatives to share the gospel among the Chakmas, a Buddhist people group in Bangladesh. Suraj continues to share despite persecution from Buddhist monks in his area.

Mathura Boren Tripura was the first person in his community of Tripura tribal people to believe. There are now 100 churches in his area. Among these tribes, there are second- and third-generation believers who are now sending out their own evangelists to share with other people groups.

Guarav Dutta, a former Brahmin priest, has seen hundreds accept Christ through his witness. His vision is for 10 percent of Bangladesh's population to be saved before he dies. He's 58 years old.

Travis and Madison Strauder are praying for a church planting movement among Muslims in Dhaka. The Strauders are Southern Baptist representatives based in Dhaka.

Travis Strauder said historically many believers from the minority Hindu and Buddhist have been afraid to share with Muslims.

But they are overcoming their fear and sharing, he said.

The Strauders are setting an example to follow in the church they attend. Most of the members of this church come from Christian families or from a Hindu background.

The church now does outreach in Muslim areas and members are sharing the gospel with Muslim neighbors.

Strauder partners with Qahir Hamad, a Muslim-background believer and house church pastor, to reach Muslims in Dhaka. Strauder and Hamad are in the midst of a discipleship and church planning training for the 35 members of his house church.

"We've already seen 19 baptisms," Strauder said. "19 might not sound like a big number, but it's significant for us because we haven't seen anything like that since we've been here."

Strauder and Hamad's desire is to see churches start in the homes of the 35 house church members.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons. (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

NAE releases document on climate, poverty

WASHINGTON — The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) released a document Dec. 14 about changes to the environment and how they affect the poor.

The 56-page discussion paper, "Loving the Least of These: Addressing a Changing Environment," explores why evangelicals should consider environmental change, what science says about climate change and how changes in the environment worsen the effects of poverty. Finally lead author Dorothy Boorse of Gordon College discusses "what our role as evangelicals should be and what, if anything, we can do to turn the tide for the sake of the poor."

"While others debate the science and politics of climate change, my thoughts go to the poor people who are neither scientists nor politicians," NAE President Leith Anderson said in the preface. "They will never study carbon dioxide in the air or acidification of the ocean. But they will suffer from dry wells in the Sahel of Africa and floods along the coasts of Bangladesh. Their crops will fail while our supermarkets are full. They will suffer while we study."

The NAE document says that whatever their views on the causes of climate change, most Americans can make lifestyle changes that will reduce their energy requirements. They include using energy more efficiently, switching to renewable energy sources and supporting energy policy reforms.

"Evangelicals have a long history of caring for the poor," the document's closing paragraphs concluded. "It was deep concern for the poor that prompted the NAE to study the potential impact of climate changes on the poor."

New York City's ban on churches in schools upheld

NEW YORK — The U.S. Supreme Court has rejected an evangelical church's plea to overturn New York City's ban on renting public schools for religious worship services. That means the city now has a green light to begin evicting congregations that pay rent to use public school buildings for church services.

The Supreme Court's Dec. 5 decision not to hear the case leaves in place a federal appeals court ruling that upheld the city's policy.

The court case involved the Bronx Household of Faith, a church that has paid weekly rent to hold worship services at a public school since 2002. The church, along with about 60 other congregations, was allowed to continue worshipping at public schools pending the outcome of the lawsuit.

Though it excludes religious groups, the New York City school board's policy permits private organizations to use school facilities for reasons that benefit the community. In addition to the 60 or so churches that meet weekly in the city's public schools, non-Christian religious groups use school buildings with less frequency.

In a 2-1 decision in June, a Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel ruled allowing churches to use schools resulted in an "unintended bias in favor of Christian religions" — since most Christian churches worship on Sunday.

Abstinence funding restored in federal budget

WASHINGTON — Funding for abstinence education has returned to the federal budget in the spending bill passed by Congress and signed by President Obama.

The \$1 trillion budget, which staves off another potential government shutdown, allocates \$5 million for abstinence-based Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) programs that were slashed by the Obama administration beginning in 2009.

Abstinence-only education has been under fire by critics who argue that it is ineffective and leaves teens at greater risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases if they engage in sex. Advocates for abstinence education, meanwhile, point to new evidence suggesting their programs are having a positive impact.

Even mainstream media outlets gave some credit to abstinence education.

'Courageous' becomes Sherwood's top-grossing film

ALBANY, Ga. — The church-made film "Courageous" has become the top-grossing film by Sherwood Baptist Church, passing its previous top film, "Fireproof."

"Courageous" passed Fireproof on Dec. 17 and finished the weekend before Christmas with enough to push it to \$33.5 million in total gross, bettering Fireproof's \$33.45 million.

The ranking means that each film by Sherwood Baptist has grossed more than its predecessor. The church — which gets only a portion of the total gross — also made the 2006 film "Facing the Giants." ■