

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Jan. 12, 2012
Vol. 177, No. 2

Reporting. Connecting. Inspiring.

Toll free 1-800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

INSIDE



The stories of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament

◆ Pages 4-5



Baptists in District 6 assist with disaster relief

◆ Pages 7-9



No Other Name takes Great Commission seriously in life, music

◆ Page 12

'Being exploited'

Starving families in India force hundreds of girls into prostitution

Imagine living in a society in which you are judged by your station in life, determined by your birth, rather than by your individual worth or accomplishments. As a member of the lowest rung of society, you can barely keep food on the table for your wife and two daughters.

When your wife becomes ill after giving birth to a third daughter who, unlike the son you had hoped for, will be an unbearable financial burden, you have only one choice: You must dedicate your daughter to the goddess as a devadasi, a temple prostitute.

By dedicating your baby, you have given her a profession and a way to obtain food for her family. Perhaps the goddess will now show favor to your family, sparing your wife's life and filling her womb with the long-awaited boy child. Your daughter's sacrifice is small compared to your entire family's alternative fate of starvation. If her body is the price the goddess asks, then it must be paid.

In India, the devadasi (day-vah-dah-see) system, a Hindu practice of temple prostitution, has existed for more than 5,000 years, said David Dass, executive director of the India Gospel League. In the state of Karnataka, where he and his wife live, starving families dedicate hundreds of girls each year to the goddess Yellamma. The children are forced to begin a life of prostitution at age 11 or 12.

"From the very beginning, they're being exploited as babies," said Annette Romick, a humanitarian aid worker in India. "Then, when they hit maturity, their bodies are exploited by men. Even when their bodies are no longer desirable to men, they are still exploited and abused because that stigma is on them. They can never escape from it. It's a trap that they're stuck in; it's a living hell that they're experiencing."

The word "devadasi" literally translates to "god's female servant." Parents usually choose to dedicate their daughters as infants to the goddess Yellamma, in hopes of gaining the goddess's favor or easing a financial burden.



BP photo

TRAPPED — Young girls in Belgaum and many other places in India are dedicated to the goddess Yellamma, to have their bodies essentially sold into prostitution. Although illegal in India, the practice still continues.

Once dedicated, a girl is considered to be married to the goddess and is never allowed to marry a man. When the girl reaches physical maturity, she is forced to begin her life as a prostitute.

Underground practices

"Since 1982, the devadasi system has been banned by the government of India and Karnataka," said Joseph Paul, a Christian pastor ministering among devadasis. "But there are underground practices — nobody knows how they practice and how they dedicate." Because the practice has gone underground, the women work mostly from their homes, only visiting the temple to beg money from worshipers. Many of the prostitutes are trafficked

to the red light districts of Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore and other large cities.

"Our parents gave us birth and threw us on the street. Men come and use us, finish their job and go," said Sugandha, a former devadasi receiving assistance from a nongovernmental organization.

In the Hindu religion, devadasis have hope for a better life only through the cycle of rebirth. Few devadasis have ever heard the name of Jesus Christ, who offers hope for this life and for eternity.

"Their lives have been ruined, and they feel like trash that's just been used over and over again and just discarded," Romick said. "They need to know the love of Christ, and the only way that

(See 'Empower,' page 17)



BP photo

'STIGMA' — When young girls sacrificed under the devadasi system reach maturity, they are exploited by men.

SANCTITY^{of}
Human Life
Sunday is Jan. 15.



COMMENT

Looking for God's Surprise

Joseph and Mary decided to go to church. Actually they decided to go to the Temple in Jerusalem, which was six or seven miles away from where they were staying in Bethlehem. It would take about two hours to walk each way plus the time spent in the service. Deciding to go to church took a lot of effort.

For Joseph and Mary, the decision to go to church was not difficult. They were devout Jews and tried to follow the Law as closely as possible. The Bible says Joseph "was a righteous man." His treatment of Mary, as recorded in Matthew 1:18-25, shows his compassion. His faithfulness to God is demonstrated by his quick obedience to all the angel commanded him in verse 24.

Mary was greeted by the angel as one "highly favored" by God. The many scriptural references to her famous song recorded in Luke 1:46-55 reveal her thorough knowledge of the sacred texts. Her acceptance of what the angel announced was about to happen shows her humble and obedient spirit.

Still Mary and Joseph were a young couple with a new baby, and both were still learning how to take care of a newborn.

This is not unlike many young Christian couples today. Each partner loves the Lord and attempts to walk faithfully before Him. The demands of a child can test one's commitment to the Lord and His church, but like Joseph and Mary, couples still decide to go through all the hassle of getting the baby ready and going to church.

For Joseph and Mary, the decision fulfilled a requirement. Jewish law demanded that 33 days after a baby boy's birth, his mother was to offer a sin offering as the final step of her cleansing process. For couples today, going to church is not as strict a requirement though the Bible clearly commands that Christians are not to forsake assembling together for worship (Heb. 10:25).

What did Joseph and Mary find when they got to church? And what do couples find today?

As the biblical couple entered the Temple compound, closest to them would have been a large altar attended by white-robed priests busily preparing the sacrifices and offerings made by the people. This included slaughtering the animals and placing them in the huge fire where they were burned. Sacrifices were made before the couple would divide and go to the appropriate place for prayers — Joseph to the Court of the Jews and Mary to the Court of the Women.

Today's couples don't find sacrificial fires when they arrive at church, but they do find clergymen



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

and trained volunteers going through all the motions that help the church serve the needs of the people who gather there for worship.

In some places, the couple might be divided into single gender activities — today's version of the separate courts for men and women. Increasingly, however, they are together in Bible study and worship.

Special relationship with the Lord

Simeon was one of the people Joseph and Mary encountered at the Temple. He is described as "righteous and devout" (Luke 2:25). He held tightly to the promise of a Messiah and looked for the Promised One every day. He had a special relationship with the Lord. People could see "the Holy Spirit was upon him."

Despite his faithfulness to the way things were done at the Temple, Simeon had a quality that set him apart from many others. Every day, he came to the Temple expecting God's surprise. He came expecting to see the Savior.

This is not unlike some older gentlemen in churches today who hold tightly to the promise of a returning Messiah. For decades, such men have looked for the coming King and, in the meantime, have done their best to teach God's Word to others. They have invested themselves in providing worship opportunities for those in their communities and attempted to demonstrate God's love through ministry and Christian service to others.

Perhaps you can think of such men who have enriched your life. I can.

Blessed is the church that has Simeon-like leaders, men who are faithful to the valuable lessons of the past but always looking for God's surprise, whatever it might be.

Joseph and Mary also met Anna. She had a hard life. She had been widowed after only seven years of marriage. In her old age (she was 84), the

Temple was her whole life. Anna was the kind of woman who never left the Temple. She prayed all the time. She listened to the Scriptures as they were read. She fasted.

Actually Anna was called a prophetess. Respect for her relationship with God was widespread.

Many churches today have Anna-like members. These women love the Lord with their heart and soul, with their mind and strength. They give themselves to Bible study and prayer. They keep the church functioning and pass the faith on to the next generation.

These women understand the implication of decisions and are quick to see God's hand when it moves among them.

Every successful pastor knows that a church has a matriarch whose support is necessary for it to function effectively. It is hoped that these matriarchs are Anna-like women.

Though Simeon and Anna came from the "old school" and practiced their faith "the old way," both were open to God's surprise.

Imagine Joseph and Mary's reaction when Simeon said the purpose of his life had been fulfilled after seeing the baby Jesus. Imagine their reaction when Anna began telling everyone about their baby's role as the One who would redeem Jerusalem. That was far more than Joseph and Mary expected the morning they decided to go to church.

The words of Simeon and Anna are like a bridge from all the people had known about God in the past to the wonderful surprise God has in store for all who will believe in Jesus.

Today's couple may go to church expecting the experience to be similar to the week before and the week before that. We should be open, though, and even looking for the surprise God may have in store every time we go to church.

Letters to the Editor

USE OF HYMNALS

It has been said that hymnals are the books we used to use. I contend that hymnals are a treasury of sentiments and melodies that have

comforted Christians for many generations. Reading words on a PowerPoint presentation screen is not the same as holding a hymnal and singing, with numbered verses and lines

of quarter notes on the printed page.

Singing "Keep me safe 'til the storm passes by" out of the hymnal reminds us that God's providence can not only

(See 'Letters,' page 10)

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
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is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-870-8957. **Web site:** www.thealabamabaptist.org **E-mail:** news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and other locations.

Subscription Rates:
Church Budget — \$12.50 (plus tax)
Individual — \$20.95

DR. BOBBY S. TERRY, EDITOR

NEWS SERVICES: Baptist Press (BP), Associated Baptist Press (ABP), Religion News Service (RNS), Compass Direct News (CDN), Evangelical Press (EP), Forum 18 (F18).

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

ADDRESS CHANGE: Send old and new addresses, and name of church to Circulation Department, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Allow two weeks.

Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, Correspondent, TAB

Belle Fuhrman

Southside Baptist Church
Etowah Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: Matthew 6:33

FAVORITE HYMN: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

HOBBIES: Gardening, reading and baking cakes

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 54 years of marriage to Gene; five children, Warren, Sally, Susan, Phillip and Cindy; 15 grandchildren; and 26 great-grandchildren



FUHRMAN

Belle Fuhrman, 90, has served in the Southside Baptist Church children's Sunday School department for 60 years, teaching third- through sixth-grade students. Fuhrman has been in the Southside Baptist choir for 32 years and participates in the church's Encourager Class, a group that writes letters to visitors and church members in the hospital. For the past 24 years, she has made it a point to read the Bible cover to cover each year.

Q: When did you come to know the Lord?

A: I was about 10 years old [and] going to the Methodist church.

Q: What led you to serve in children's Sunday School?

A: When I got started, I just didn't want to leave. I felt comfortable teaching; I still like it and I guess I'll keep teaching until they run me off or something (laughs).

Q: What difference has Christ made in your life?

A: I can't imagine any other life. He's here all the time to me. He's answered a lot of prayers. ... I just have a relationship with God. I can't imagine not being close to Him.

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

A: I hope I can keep on as long as my health is good. [I turned] 90 in October. ... I just feel so fortunate that I'm able to do what I do.

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.

PERSECUTION in Nigeria

Christian woman killed in ambush in Kaduna state

KUKUM GIDA, Nigeria — A Muslim villager in Kaduna state allegedly helped Fulani herdsmen and other Muslims from nearby Kafanchan to ambush a Christian settlement, resulting in the death of one woman and gunshot wounds to two other Christians on Dec. 10, area sources said.

Musa Blak, 60, said gunmen lurking behind trees outside his home killed his wife, Kunam Musa Blak, and wounded him and his cousin, 48-year-old Monday Blai Yayok, after a schoolteacher in Kukum Gida village allegedly helped Muslims survey the site. Kunam Musa Blak was 50. The shootings took place in the Jankassa ward of Kukum Gida village, a Christian settlement of 425 people who all attend the local Evangelical Church Winning All. "We believe that Muslim Fulani herdsmen who once lived near our village, with the support of Muslims from Kafanchan, were the ones who attacked us," Blak said. Jonah Bayina, the 43-year-old head of the village ward, identified the Muslim schoolteacher suspected of helping the gunmen as Isa Damu. "On Tuesday, Dec. 6, he brought some Muslims to the village ... and then they launched the attack on us the following day. We believe he brought the Muslims to enable them to survey our village before attacking us," Bayina said, adding that Damu disappeared on the night of the attack and has not been seen since. (CDN)



CDN photo

Catholic church bombing leaves 45 dead, 73 injured

MADALLA, Nigeria — A suicide bomb attack on Christmas Day by Islamic extremist group Boko Haram left at least 45 people dead and 73 others injured in or near St. Theresa's Catholic Church, outside the Nigerian capital of Abuja in Madalla.

"The shock of the incident has been very traumatic for the people who were at the scene. ... We are all still mourning," said Pastor Joseph Akor, director of communication of the Minna Diocese.

A widow who is a member of the church went into the building Dec. 29 wailing over the death of her only son. Another woman lost her husband and all their children in the attack. A small girl lost her parents. Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has reportedly tried to forestall violence by holding meetings with Muslim and Christian leaders. (CDN)

Five Christians slain in assault in Kaduna state

UNGWAN RAMI, Nigeria — Local Islamists and Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked a Christian community in Kaduna state Dec. 19, killing five people and wounding six, area sources said, just nine days after a deadly attack on a Christian community in Kukum Gida in the same local government area. The Muslim assailants, brandishing firearms and machetes, attacked Christians in Ungwan Rami village of Kaura Local Government Area at 10 p.m. in a manner consistent with other religiously motivated assaults in the state. Christians were killed in November as well, the sources said.

The five Christians killed were Matthew Yusuf, 28; Joseph John, 30; Innocent Abba, 33; Mathias John, 35 and Didam Zakka, 19. Those injured were Linda Emmanuel, 3; Emmanuel Zakka, 28; Gabriel Zakka, 20; Deborah Emmanuel, 19; Dominic Daniel, 25 and Gideon Anthony, 30. The state has suffered a rash of attacks in recent months. On Nov. 10, Muslim Fulani herdsmen assaulted another Christian village, Apiokashi, in the Jema'a Local Government Area, killing village leader Bulus Adamu, 40, and his wife, Ladi Bulus. One of their eight children, Asabe Bulus, said that the family was asleep when the Muslim Fulani herdsmen arrived. "As Christians, we have been living peacefully with these Muslims, but we do not understand why they should now attack us," she said. (CDN)

Why is this happening?

On Christmas Day, churches were bombed in five Nigerian cities — Madalla (a suburb of the capital Abuja), Jos, Kano, Damaturu and Gadaka — leaving dozens, perhaps hundreds, dead or wounded. The killings were apparently the latest attacks from the violent Islamist group Boko Haram, and they show an increased level not only of violence but also of sophistication, since the explosions were coordinated and widespread, including the northwest, north and center of the country.

These killings mark a further escalation in the growth of radical forms of Islam in Africa's most populous country.

Muslims are the majority in northern Nigeria, while Christians are a majority in the south. The two are about evenly mixed in the middle belt, which has often been the scene of violent conflict. This conflict has tribal and regional dimensions and involves political power, land and resources, but there is also persistent religious tension.

Conflict over Shariah law

Beginning in 1999, Shariah law, previously applicable only to matters of family and personal status, was imposed in 12 northern states, effectively making Islam the de facto official religion in those states, in contravention of the federal constitution. Kano state formed a 9,000-strong Hisba (Shariah-enforcement) force. Conflict over Shariah led to thousands of deaths.

Around that time, a group named al-Sunna Wal Jamma and nicknamed "the Tali-

ban," began attacking Christian settlements in Borno state from bases in the hills of neighboring Cameroon. In January 2004, the group led a violent uprising in Yobe state, displacing 10,000 people before federal forces succeeded in quashing it. In January 2007, the publisher of the *Daily Trust* newspaper was charged in the Abuja High Court with receiving money from al-Qaeda to fund the Nigerian Taliban, including payment for people to go for terrorist training in Mauritania. In early 2007, there were further attacks on the police in Kano by a group calling itself the Taliban, leaving dozens dead.

The Nigerian Taliban's current official name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, but it is usually known by its nickname, Boko Haram, which translates roughly as "Western civilization is forbidden." In late July 2009, around the town of Maiduguri in the northwest, it attacked police stations, prisons, schools, churches and homes, burning nearly everything in its path.

The violence spread to Borno, Kano and Yobe, where Boko Haram treated as infidel anyone — Christian or Muslim — who did not conform to its views. Christians were a particular focus of the violence, as many were abducted and forced under threat of death to renounce their faith. The riots continued for five days before police were able to stop them, with 700 people killed in Maiduguri alone.

One arrested Boko Haram member, 23-year-old Abdulrasheed Abubakar, confessed to receiving \$5,000 and military

training in Afghanistan, with the promise of \$35,000 on his return there. On Aug. 9, 2009, the group released a statement aligning itself with al-Qaeda and calling for jihad in response to the killing of its leader, Mallam Mohammed Yusuf. There are also reports that some of its members have trained with militants in Mali linked to the organization al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Major attention

In August 2011, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Abuja, which killed 23 people. While it continues to attack security forces and outposts of Western influence, it is focusing its major attention on killing and displacing Nigeria's Christian population, which, at some 80 million, is the sixth-largest in the world. It also picked Christmas as a focal time for attacks, a practice followed by its international allies. In 2010, it attacked five churches in Jos as the congregations were celebrating Christmas Eve.

Boko Haram has declared it is in a "holy struggle to oust the secular regime and entrench a just Islamic government" and that it will "hunt and gun down those who oppose the rule of Shariah in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished." Its increased sophistication and contacts with other terrorist groups make it a threat not only to the country's Christians and traditional Muslim leaders, but to the stability of Nigeria as a whole. (BP)

Bible Basics

series

PART 2 OF 8 ON SERIOUS BIBLE STUDY



The stories of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament

By Ken Roxburgh
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The vast majority of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is a series of stories centering on particular individuals such as Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul. More than 40 percent of the Old Testament is story, and the Old Testament constitutes some three-quarters of the Bible. These stories are very down to earth. They tell the stories of these people “warts and all.” Through the stories, we hear God’s story; we see Him at work in His creation and among His people. They often help us understand and appreciate God’s providence, purposes and protection. The stories are designed to stimulate our imagination, to enable us to enter into the encounter that these people had with God and life. Our responsibility is not to see them as allegories or mysteries filled with hidden meanings — they do not always teach us truth or principles directly, but they often illustrate God’s workings. Through these personal stories, which never fade into the background, we see God’s wider purposes for the nation of Israel and the world.

Plan of salvation

Through these encounters, we begin to discover the plan of salvation: God’s desire that human beings live in relationship with Him, becoming “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). The human words and experience help us understand how we can come to know, love, follow and obey God. Sometimes we see the way in which God is working out His overall plan and purpose in the story of the Bible, in the big events of creation, the Exodus, the Incarnation and Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. This is sometimes called “redemption history.”

Clearly the Bible is a collection of books written at different times in different historical settings. Yet a basic unifying theme can be detected in the Bible, the separate books contributing to this theme and later books referring back to earlier ones to develop the theme. Later books build on traditions, sometimes emphasizing different aspects of their stories to stress particular issues but relating what they are saying to an earlier tradition.

When we speak about stories, some doubt their authenticity. We may say, “Let me tell you a story,” and the story may be make-believe or real. Sometimes, in the Bible, it is not clear what is an actual fact and what is a story through which the writer wants to tell us something about God and His ways. For example, in the New Testament, we have, within the parables of Jesus, the stories of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). The first seems to be a simple story, while the second appears to

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be teaching something about the ultimate outcome of our lives. As we interpret the parables of Jesus, we must try to never read too much out of each and every detail. For example, in eternity, will we really see one another from heaven and hell? Or is the story more of a metaphor to teach the importance of living in the present, how the present affects our future and the significance of eternity?

The Bible contains stories that are retold in different contexts as the biblical writers reflect upon earlier stories and reinterpret their meanings for a later time in Israel’s history. Abraham Lincoln did this when he used the Declaration of Independence text “all men are created equal” within his Gettysburg Address. He used an earlier text, well known and respected in the country, in order to show that slavery was self-evidently wrong. In a similar way, the prophets of the sixth century B.C. drew on the Exodus story to encourage God’s people in exile in Babylon that He would once again bring His people “out” and back “home.” In the New Testament, Paul built on the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Romans 8 to demonstrate the great love of God, who “did not spare His own Son but gave Him up freely for us all” (32). In a similar way, we are encouraged to reread the biblical text ourselves and apply its message to the life of discipleship in the 21st century.

The period of the Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries had an enormous impact on the way the biblical stories were read. The rational thinking of writers who had little or no faith in God stressed the humanity of the biblical text, emphasizing that the books came about as a result of “human effort, human faith, human passion and human idiosyncrasy.” The text became subservient to the rational interpretation of the scholarly reader. Often the miraculous aspects of the Bible were dismissed as being absurd and anachronistic in a modern sci-

entific environment. By the end of the 19th century, the impact of this rational thinking concerning Old Testament studies resulted in little attention being given to this part of Scripture as having any sort of authority for the life of faith.

Treating the text with integrity avoids the temptation of a hostile form of skepticism that is seen as being more intellectually respectable than faith. Yet we also avoid the tendency of closing our minds to fresh insights that come from modern research. We also are careful of the modern viewpoint that because there are different interpretations of the text, we cannot know the Bible’s exact message. If we are honest, then we have to admit that we all read the text from our own perspective, through interpretive spectacles. For example, as Baptists, we interpret passages that deal with baptism in such a way as to preclude any interpretation of baptism that might allow infant baptism to be acceptable. A particular faith perspective inevitably colors our interpretation of the passages that we are examining.

We can have confidence that the Bible shares a common narrative. It is the story of God’s love for humankind. However, that one story is made up of many individual and corporate stories. Some of these narratives are very positive in the way they speak of God. Other stories relate events that have a darker tone. The writers tell us about their experiences of fearful faith, of experiencing God as hidden, of suffering without seeing any purpose or meaning in the experience. Our interpretation of the Scriptures must listen to all these voices and allow them to counterbalance one another.

God of creation and redemption

The primary subject of the Old and New Testaments is the God of creation and redemption. These are the twin themes that are woven into the tapestry of the whole of the Bible. In the Bible, there is much talk of God, and yet there is perhaps more talk about Him that arises out of the personal experiences of the subjects and writers. Even in those passages in which we hear God speaking, we are listening to the testimony of those who heard Him speak. So, at times, we are not asking the question “What happened?” but “What was said?” either through the event or what came out of the event related in Scripture.

At the center of the Bible’s testimony to God are various statements and stories concerning the activity of God, a focus on God who has acted in human history. They help us to know who God is and know Him personally.

Through the Old Testament, the creative activity of God is central to how Israel thought about Him. Various verbs are used to speak of this activity. The most basic and

common is “bara,” a verb used of no one other than God. Isaiah 42:5 says, “Thus says God, the Lord, who created (bara) the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.” The image is of a powerful, majestic God who is over all that He has made.

God’s creative work

Another word used of creation reflects the image of the potter, working with the “stuff” of the created order in an artistic endeavor to create beauty and order in the world. The creative work of God in Deuteronomy 32:18 is described with two verbs. It says, “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,” which refers to the paternal role in begetting. It then goes on to say, “You forgot the God who gave you birth,” which refers to the maternal role of birthing. I find this interesting, not because these are commonly used verbs in the Old Testament but because they say something of the issue of gender when speaking of God. Although our normal way of speaking about and to Him is “Father,” our God manifests male and female qualities of creative, compassionate and tender love.

It is also interesting to note that within the expression of Israel’s faith in history, when the people were in exile and being tempted to abandon hope in God, the prophets gave particular emphasis to His creative work. The Babylonian “gods,” who also were seen as being creative, appeared to have conquered and been stronger than Yahweh. In the face of that challenge, we read in Isaiah 45, “I made the earth and created humankind upon it. It was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their hosts” (12). When the people of Judah complained to God and asked Him, “Have you forgotten us?,” His response was “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isa. 40:28). Creation faith is used to dismiss the claims of the other “gods” and encourage Israel to believe that its God had not abandoned it.

The God of creation is also the God who makes promises and enters into a covenant relationship with His people. God’s promises come from one who is trustworthy. Sometimes God is said to “swear” or, as Deuteronomy 6:23 expresses it, “[promise] on oath.” He is a God who takes seriously His commitment to His people. He is obligated to use His resources for their good: to “give” and to bless. The majority of these promises are located in the Old Testament’s exilic books.

God’s promises often relate to the way He will step into our situation and deliver us, provide us with His salvation. This is an

early theme in Exodus: "I am the Lord; I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them" (6:6). These actions speak of the generosity of God's love, which is given freely and without obligation. God alone can help and deliver. Humanity is weak and helpless. Often this theme, related to the Exodus story, is taken up by later writers, especially in the time of exile, to remind Israel that God generously and powerfully acted on its behalf. Their social, economic, political and spiritual needs may have been great, but God's resources were more than adequate.

The story of Israel, along with the examples of people like Abraham and Joseph, teaches us that He is also the God who leads and provides, on a daily basis, for His people. Joseph was able to tell his brothers that although they plotted to kill him, God used the circumstances of his life for good. Deuteronomy 8:2 says, "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart." God is interested in and involved with His people. The leading may not be comfortable — He tests and humbles us as we follow His guidance. However, God can transform even the most discouraging circumstance of apparent abandonment and threat into a place of nourishment and new life.

The God of covenant who calls people into relationship with Himself is the God who expects that His people will live in faithful commitment to Him. Thus He issues commands. Indeed commandments governed Israel's thinking — its God was sovereign over all of life. Yet its freedom was not burdensome and legalistic — it was a response of gratitude. "I am the Lord who brought you out of ... slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:2-3). Israel's response was immediate and complete: "Everything the Lord has commanded, we will do" (Ex. 19:8).

Finding fulfillment in life

Torah piety, which is found in the Psalter (especially in Psalms 1, 19 and 119), are songs that celebrate and remind the people that the Law is crucial for Israel's life. Yet a note of joy fills these Psalms, for the commandments are seen to be a way of finding fulfillment in life. So blessed is the one who walks in the counsel of the godly ... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on that law, he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:1-2). The life of faith is not a life of autonomous freedom because God's way of life is relational — His commandments help us know how to live in right relationship to Him and others.

'Real securities in life'

Horton encourages Samford grads to work hard, know God

Music historian and musician Bobby Horton advised Samford University graduates Dec. 17 that life's only real security lies in how many things they know how to do, how hard they're willing to work and how well they know the Lord.

"Those are the only real securities in life," Horton told Samford's 261 fall graduates during commencement in Wright Center.

Horton, a 1972 Samford graduate, said his grandfather helped him define security many years ago when he needed to decide between two career paths. He could continue a secure career as a computer programmer or follow his passion for music with his popular band, Three on a String.

"Both jobs were going a little bit too well and I was never home," recalled Horton, who heeded his grandfather's counsel to consider which one he liked the best and would also support his family.

Thankfully for the vast audiences that have enjoyed his talent and expertise as a music historian, Horton chose music over his job at Liberty National Life Insurance Co. "I left and haven't looked back other than to recall the fond memories of the people there," he said.

Known for his work to preserve American song, Horton has collaborated with documentary filmmaker Ken Burns on 13 projects, selecting and, in some cases, playing music for such Burns projects as "The Civil War," "Baseball," "Lewis and Clark," "The National Parks" and others.

The Birmingham native plays instruments ranging from banjo to trumpet, which he played as a member of the Samford marching band.

For the commencement audience of about 2,000 at his alma mater, he noted his unusual choice of academic major. "I had a passion for music and history, so I decided to major in accounting and minor in economics," quipped Horton, one of the world's leading authorities on music of the Civil War.

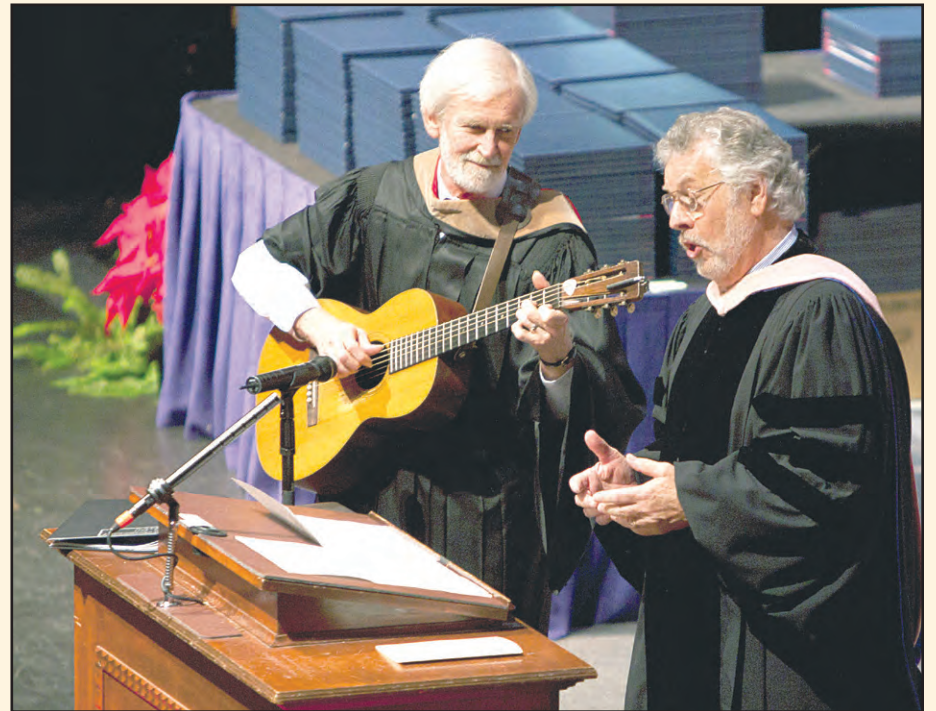


Photo courtesy of Samford University

GRADUATION MELODIES — Music historian and musician Bobby Horton plays guitar while his longtime friend Bill Bugg, retired Samford University music faculty member, sings 'The Wayfaring Stranger' at commencement Dec. 17.

Horton expanded on the advice from his "poppa" by urging the graduates to always grow the number of things they know how to do. "Take advantage of continuing education programs, for instance. Always keep learning. Learn something new every day," Horton said.

'Not too good to work hard'

Also evaluate how hard you are willing to work, he said. "You have to tell yourself, 'I'm not too good to work hard.' There is a satisfaction in it."

Thirdly, he said, consider how well you know the Lord. Horton said over the years, he has realized the importance of a deep spiritual life, whether it relates to family, friends or job. "My heroes are all persons of faith," he said.

"I've had a wonderful life, and I love

what I do. I've gotten to do things I never thought I would do and met people I never thought I would meet. I hope you have happiness and success and realize your dream," he told the graduates.

"Don't ever let go of your dreams but be realistic about them."

Horton lived up to Samford President Andrew Westmoreland's prediction that he would be an interesting and "unorthodox commencement speaker" when he concluded his remarks on a musical note.

Horton played guitar while his longtime friend, retired Samford music faculty member Bill Bugg, sang the 19th-century American folk spiritual "The Wayfaring Stranger." The song, Horton observed, "draws on wisdom for the ages to talk about the journey through this life." (SU)

Seminaries confer degrees on Alabamians

A number of Alabama Baptists graduated from Southern Baptist seminaries with degrees at the master's level or above during the fall 2011 semester.

Their names, hometowns and degrees were provided by their schools.

► New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry — Ronald Glyn Griffin, Mobile; Donald Allen Hays, Birmingham; and Derrick Jason Jarvis, Alabaster

Master of Arts in Biblical Studies — Karen Suzanne Davis, Andalusia

Master of Arts in Christian Education — Michael Lewis Barksdale, Birmingham; Edward Earl Barron, Troy; Angie Bates Green, Hartselle; Matthew M. Green, Jasper; and Daniel Spurgeon Tankersley, Dothan

Master of Divinity — Rhett Whitley Baxley, Pansey; Joshua David Britt, Madi-

son; Joel Jay Dison, Trussville; Joshua Paul Malone, Cherokee; Christopher A. Mills, Greenville; and Jared Daniel Morgan, Clay

► Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies — John Richard Sorrell, Ashville

Master of Divinity with Advanced Biblical Studies — Alex Shane Carr, Dora

Master of Divinity with Christian Ministry — Alex Shane Carr, Dora; Thomas Jonathan Jackson Jones, Attalla; William Forest McGee, Scottsboro; and Troy David Nicholson, Tuscaloosa

Master of Divinity with women's leadership — Bradley Jackson Cleveland, Mobile

► Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctor of Philosophy — Jason Keith

Allen, Mobile, and David Edward Prince, Montgomery

Master of Arts in Theological Studies — Lindsay Liles Deedrick, Birmingham

Master of Divinity — Diana Friend Foster, Grove Hill; Charles Wesley Smith, Montgomery; Deric Delane Thomas, Sterrett; Woodrow Donovan Turner, Dothan; and Brooks Anthony Vinyard, Hartford

► Beeson Divinity School

Doctor of Ministry — Travis Stewart Boline, Birmingham; Clifford Daniel Gillenwater, Montgomery; and Tony Curtis Scott, Montgomery

Master of Divinity — Joel Thomas Busby, Birmingham; Grant David Francis, Birmingham; Judith A. Mason, Birmingham; Benjamin Michael Smith, Birmingham; and Dillon T. Thornton, Birmingham (TAB)

Next week's topic ...

Men and women of faith in the Bible



Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► **Boones Chapel Church, Prattville**, will hold a conference called Reasons for Hope with Carl Kerby Jan. 22-24. The schedule will be Sunday at 8:30 a.m., 9:45 a.m., 11 a.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. and Monday and Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. For summaries of each talk, visit www.rforh.com/about/carl-kerby. Mike Johnson is pastor.

BALDWIN

► **John W. Anderson** is the new senior adult pastor for **Eastern Shore Church, Daphne**. He previously served as pastor of Bromley Church, Bay Minette. Anderson holds a master's degree from Colorado State University in Fort Collins. He and his wife, Brenda, have three children and four grandchildren. Stuart Davidson is pastor.



ANDERSON

BIRMINGHAM

► **Dawson Memorial Church, Birmingham**, will hold a children's music leadership conference Jan. 28, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. The training event is for preschool and children's choir leaders. Speakers include Charlotte McElroy, Derry Billingsley, Susan Earnisse, Terry D. Taylor and Bob Hatfield. Lunch will be provided. To download a registration form, visit www.dawsonchurch.org. Deadline is Jan. 15. For information contact Tracy Hanrahan at 205-871-7324, Ext. 728 or tracy.hanrahan@dawsonchurch.org. Gary Fenton is pastor. ► The senior adult ministry of **Lakeside Church, Birmingham**, will host Bill King (Brother Billy Bob Bohannon) Jan. 12. The event was originally set for Jan. 10. Lunch will be at 11:30 a.m. The program will follow. Breck Ladd

is pastor. ► Friends and family of the former **Ruhama Church, Birmingham**, will hold a reunion Jan. 21, 9 a.m.-noon, at its old building. The event is sponsored by Greater Emmanuel Temple Holiness Church, who now occupies the building. For information call Susanne Shepherd at 205-822-4728.

CALHOUN

► **Hill Crest Church, Anniston**, will host Brenda J. Robinson of New Desire Christian Ministries and her 20th annual Fabulous Faith Women's Conference Feb. 3-4. The theme will be "Victorious Living." Doors will open Friday at 5:30 p.m., and the event will be from 6:30-9 p.m. On Saturday, doors will open at 8 a.m., and the event will end around 3 p.m. New Desire will sing, and Robinson will teach. There will be a youth breakout session for ages middle school through college and career with Brooke Cason and Jessica Guinn of New Desire Christian Ministries. Geraldine and Ricky will make a guest appearance. Lunch on Saturday is included. For tickets call 770-684-8987 or visit www.newdesire.org. Rick Reaves is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► **Bay Springs Church, Dothan**, will host Wiregrass Southern Gospel Choir in concert Jan. 21, 6:30 p.m. For information call 334-692-3138. Scott E. Wyatt is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Davis Shirley**, wife of Harold A. Shirley, died Dec. 19. She was 83. A native of Chambers County, she was a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham. Harold was the first pastor of Weatherly Heights Church, Huntsville. His last Alabama pastorate was First Church, Talladega. The couple also served in other churches in Mississippi and South Carolina. They are members of Oakland Church, Rock Hill, S.C. Betty is survived by her husband, Harold, one daughter, one son, one

granddaughter and one grandson.

COVINGTON

► **Southside Church, Opp**, will hold a blood drive Jan. 16, 2-6 p.m., in the fellowship hall. To make an appointment call 334-493-6340. Stewart Young is pastor.

ESCAMBIA

► **First Church, Brewton**, will host the Strength Team Feb. 3, 6 p.m. The team also will be at the church's 21st annual wild game supper Feb. 4. Dinner will be at 5 p.m. and the service at 6 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the church office or at the door. On Feb. 5, the team will speak at the service at 10 a.m. For information call 251-867-5769. Jack Fitts is pastor.

MUD CREEK

► **Sparks Gap Church, Bessemer**, in the Eastern Valley area, will hold its regular fifth Sunday singing with Holy Destiny Jan. 29, 1:30 p.m. Johnny Thacker is pastor.

SELMA

► **Northside Church, Selma**, will host The MaHarreys in concert Jan. 27, 7 p.m. The church also will host Brian Free and Assurance in concert Feb. 10, 7 p.m. For information call 334-874-8276. Kenny Hatcher is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Chewacla Church, Opelika**, will host Bill King (Brother Billy Bob Bohannon) Jan. 22. Bill will speak at the 11 a.m. service, and Billy will provide a program at 5 p.m. Aaron Pruitt is pastor.

Pastors needed for new book

The Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network (BSCLN) needs authors for chapters of a book expected to be published this spring. The book will be titled "Jesus Loves the Church and So Do I."

BSCLN requests that pastors of bivocational or small membership churches submit an article of 600 words or less explaining why they love the church they have been called to serve. Rather than generic statements, articles should contain stories of specific events and experiences, while protecting the identity of any individuals mentioned. The top 50 articles will be published. BSCLN reserves the right to minor editing by its publishing team.

Pastors interested in submitting an article should send it, along with a brief biography, to Ray Gilder, Tennessee Baptist Convention, 5001 Maryland Way, Brentwood, TN 37024. The postmark deadline is Feb. 1. (TAB)

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

December's CP receipts exceed monthly budget goal

NASHVILLE — December's Cooperative Program (CP) allocation receipts for Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) work totaled \$15,841,476.75. This is the first month in the new fiscal year that contributions have exceeded the monthly goal of \$15,500,000, a 2.16 percent increase.

Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee are 7.01 percent below the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank Page. But December receipts were 1.44 percent more than the \$15,612,660.99 received in December 2010.

As of Dec. 31, 2011, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget totaled \$44,269,203.77, or \$3,334,711.13 behind the \$47,603,914.90 received at the end of December 2010. For the SBC CP Allocation Budget, the year-to-date total of \$44,269,203.77 is 95.20 percent of the \$46,500,000 budgeted to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America.

Designated giving of \$11,700,343.07 for the same year-to-date period is 3.04 percent, or \$367,237.99, below gifts of \$12,067,581.06 received at this point last year. This total includes only those gifts received and distributed by the Executive Committee and does not reflect designated gifts contributed directly to SBC entities.

"It is a great blessing to witness the faithfulness of God's people to give to God's work even in difficult times," Page said. Noting that consumer confidence continues to lag, he said, "The promise of Philippians 4:19 remains true — our God 'will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'" CP allocation budget receipts received by the Executive Committee are reported monthly to the executives of the entities of the convention, to the state offices, to the denominational papers and are posted online at www.cpmis-sions.net/CPReports.

The end-of-month total represents money received by the Executive Committee by the close of the last business day of each month. Month-to-month swings reflect a number of factors, including the number of Sundays in a given month, the day of the month churches forward their CP contributions to their state conventions and the timing of when state conventions forward the national portion of their CP contributions to the Executive Committee.

During the last fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2010 — Sept. 30, 2011), CP receipts for the year were up 0.06 percent — the first increase since 2007. Combined CP and designated giving for the year were up 0.17 percent.

Opposition to contraception coverage broadens

WASHINGTON — More than 60 Protestant and Orthodox Jewish religious leaders wrote the White House Dec. 21 asking President Obama not to implement a mandate requiring all private insurers to provide contraception and sterilization coverage.

Guidelines announced by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on Aug. 1 include a religious exemption designed for the Catholic Church, which does not believe in artificial birth control. Catholics say the exemption, which protects seminaries and a few churches, is too narrow to protect the conscience of all Catholics.

Leaders including the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Richard Land, however, pointed out that Catholics aren't alone in their opposition to the proposed regulations.

"We write not in opposition to Catholic leaders and organizations; rather, we write in solidarity, but separately — to stress that religious organizations and leaders of other faiths are also deeply troubled by and opposed to the mandate and the narrow exemption," the letter said. The Protestant and Jewish leaders said Catholics aren't the only faith group that opposes the use of contraceptives like the "morning-after" pill, which controls birth by removing an egg after it has been fertilized.

In addition to Land, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, signers included Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Tom Minnery, senior vice president of Focus on the Family; Ron Sider, president, Evangelicals for Social Action; and Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

Another signer, Paul Corts, president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, followed up with a separate letter Dec. 23 saying the regulations as written would violate the religious beliefs of the 138 member and affiliate schools that participate in the organization.

Singing in the Rain
Surviving Life's Storms



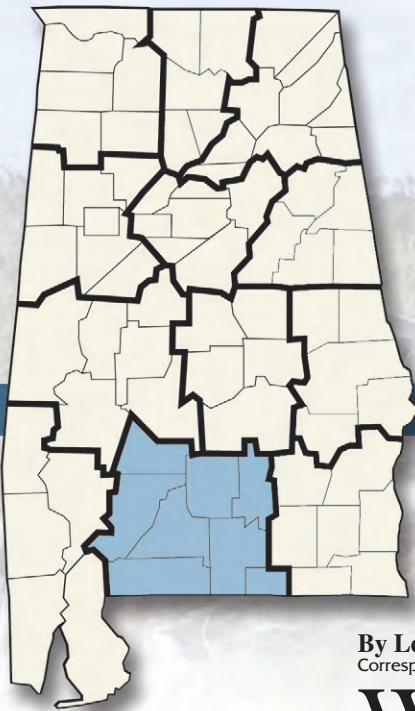
WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

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Baptists RESPOND

to areas devastated by April tornadoes

Baptists in District 6 assist with disaster relief

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When scores of tornadoes traversed the state April 27, hitting 41 of 67 counties and killing more than 240 citizens, Alabama Baptists' District 6 — which covers Butler, Conecuh, Covington, Crenshaw, Escambia, Monroe and Wilcox counties — received some wind damage.

So its people stepped up to meet needs in places that took a direct hit.

"They simply were focused on how they could go to their neighbors and help," said Gary Swafford, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

They sent volunteers, a shower unit, supplies and such to areas that had been affected by the storms, Swafford reported.

Very often, these efforts began not necessarily at the associational level but with churches that had connections in storm-damaged areas. "It was just a natural response," Swafford explained.

The disaster relief efforts have provided tangible evidence of Christianity — people putting on work clothes, getting out in the communities and acting out what they believe, he said.

When Christians go into communities and demonstrate their faith, others come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, Swafford said.

Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association

Volunteers from Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association did put on their work clothes and continue to do so.

The day after the tornadoes, several churches gathered needed items and delivered them to Elmore County, Director of Missions (DOM) Don Yancey said.

Volunteers from about five churches went to Hackleburg in Marion County, Franklin County and Tuscaloosa County to work in cleanup and recovery, Yancey said.

One chaplain from the association was dispatched to north Alabama, he added.

Many churches gave funds to



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Mason

SERVICE — Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association volunteers assist with rebuilding efforts in Phil Campbell.

the state disaster relief effort. Work gloves, safety glasses and masks also were given to the state convention to distribute to disaster relief volunteers, Yancey said.

In addition, a number of people in the association are involved in Campers for Christ and have worked through that organization to offer assistance, he said.

"Everybody wanted to do something," Yancey observed.

Soon after the storms, SBOM asked unaffected associations to be certain no association needing help with rebuilding efforts would be overlooked. More than 40 partnerships have been formed, Swafford said. Some places — such as Marion, Tuscaloosa and Franklin counties — experienced so much damage that their associations require more than one partnership, he added.

Alabama-Crenshaw Association has partnered with Franklin Baptist Association.

"They're building houses for needy people" who had insufficient

insurance or no insurance, Yancey said.

Volunteers from South Luverne Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Luverne; Highland Home Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Rutledge; and Brantley Baptist Church spent a week in August and another in September con-

structing homes in Phil Campbell. First Baptist Church, Russellville, in Franklin Association housed the volunteers during their stay.

"A lot of churches gave money [for the endeavor], and we appreciated it very much," Yancey said.

Moreover Alabama-Crenshaw (See 'Associations,' page 8)



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Mason

'NATURAL RESPONSE' — South Luverne Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Luverne; Highland Home Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Rutledge; and Brantley Baptist Church volunteers rebuild homes.

District 6

Butler Association

Alabama-Crenshaw Association

Sardis Association

Covington Association

Escambia Association

Conecuh Association

Bethlehem Association

Pine Barren Association

Explanation of districts

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

Associations send volunteers, money, supplies

(continued from page 7)

Association has helped by purchasing some building materials, he said.

This summer, the association plans to sponsor two construction trips in an effort to give more people the opportunity to serve, Yancey said.

"We hope to keep going for the next two to five years," so that homes can be built and people reached for Christ, he added.

Yancey noted that Alabama-Crenshaw Association is open to construction missions trips elsewhere as well.

Bethlehem/Pine Barren Baptist Associations

Monroe and Wilcox counties experienced some backlash from the tornadoes.

John Marks, DOM for Bethlehem and Pine Barren Baptist associations, reported that some trees were downed and roofs damaged.

"It was all taken care of by individuals, homeowners," Marks noted.

Volunteers from the associations helped homeowners when needed. Some churches members also assisted with roofing issues, Marks said.

Teams from churches also volunteered in Phil Campbell, Rainsville and Tuscaloosa, he said.

"Helping others is what it's all about," Marks pointed out.

The people of Bethlehem and Pine Barren associations can understand what it is to hurt because of their experience with Hurricane Ivan in 2004, he said.

The April 27 tornadoes presented an opportunity for them to reciprocate the kindness and care they received after Hurricane Ivan, Marks said.

Butler Baptist Association

Even though Butler County escaped harm April 27, Danny Dean said there was loss of life within 30 minutes of the county.

"It still boggles my mind the level of storms and damage that came through that day," said

How to assist in relief efforts

For help in finding associations in need of construction projects, contact Mondene Coker in the disaster relief office at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Coker will help pair volunteers with associations seeking assistance. She can be reached at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 273.

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

For other ways to get involved, call

▶ Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association at 334-335-6169,

▶ Bethlehem Baptist Association/Pine Barren Baptist Association at 251-267-3875,

▶ Butler Baptist Association at 334-382-2513,

▶ Conecuh Baptist Association at 251-578-1855,

▶ Covington Baptist Association at 334-222-3009,

▶ Escambia Baptist Association at 251-296-4640 or

▶ Sardis Baptist Association at 334-347-6717. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Mason

'ON THE ROAD TO HEALING' — Volunteers from Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association give donated items, supplies and hand-stitched quilts and throws to tornado survivors in Phil Campbell.

Dean, moderator of Butler Baptist Association and pastor of Spring Creek Baptist Church, Honoraville.

After the tornadoes struck, the people of Spring Creek Baptist went to Choctaw County to assist there, he said.

Other churches reached out in different ways. First Baptist Church and Southside Baptist Church, both in Greenville, gave funds, while Liberty Baptist Church, Greenville, provided some supplies for people in affected areas.

"We're still trying to keep our finger on the needs for recovery. [We're] trying to keep an eye out for what's next," Dean said of his association.

He said Butler Association is seeking opportunities for partnerships and construction missions trips.

Conecuh Baptist Association

Because Conecuh County was spared damage, its people felt their responsibility was to help those who did experience the ravages of the April 27 storms.

"All [churches] kind of stood up to the occasion," said Joey Rodgers, DOM for Conecuh Baptist Association.

Rodgers noted that Evergreen Baptist Church gathered water, food and clothes and took them to Northport in Tuscaloosa County. A disaster relief volunteer delivered the association's equipment to Cottondale in Tuscaloosa County so that it could be used there, he added.

During the summer, Bower Memorial Baptist Church, Evergreen, took a missions trip to work in the county, Rodgers said.

Churches also collected special offerings for disaster relief efforts, he said.

"I think they all responded well," Rodgers said of the association's churches, which tend to be rural with a significant number of elderly members.

The special offerings gave church members the chance to help others, even if they were not capable of volunteering, he pointed out. The funds helped purchase mobile chapels for churches that suffered much damage and provide resources for repairs at other churches. The money given by one church bought food items for preparing hot meals that were delivered in the Cottondale community.

Covington Baptist Association

"Baptists of Alabama have long appreciated the power of partnership," said Larry Cummings, recently retired DOM for Covington Baptist Association.

Perhaps that's why members of Covington Association churches were swift to respond to their fellow Alabamians.

Cummings said the association's laundry unit was dispatched to Rainsville in DeKalb County to serve the community. Volunteers and churches — such as Westview Baptist, Opp — assisted with projects in Marshall County.

"A lot of collections went up that way" from Covington Association churches, he added.

Cummings said most of the association's 54 churches helped in the aftermath of the storms by giving funds, supplies or volunteer hours.

Leroy Cole, disaster relief coordinator for Covington Association and disaster relief chaplain, served in Tuscaloosa right after the tornadoes.

Escambia Baptist Association

Chaplains from Escambia Baptist Association went to Pleasant Grove on two occasions after the April 27 tornadoes. The association's chain saw team worked in Pratt City, DOM Pat Andrews reported.

Churches sent supplies and worked in the Henagar area twice. Some also donated funds. First Baptist Church and Little Escambia Baptist Church, both in Flomaton, and Lib-

erty Baptist Church, Brewton, were among the churches that assisted storm victims, Andrews said.

"These churches actually went and did work on-site," he explained. "Liberty was very giving with supplies. They're a small church. They have only 50-60 in Sunday School. They were very proactive."

It was after Hurricane Ivan that Escambia Association became proactive in disaster relief. The association saw volunteers come to the area to help and churches and others give funds for disaster relief. That led it to develop a disaster relief team trained in mud-out, chain saw, chaplaincy and food service to be ready to minister to others, Andrews said.

Sardis Baptist Association

The region encompassed by Sardis Baptist Association was not in the path of the April 27 tornadoes.

"We were spared," reported James Preachers, DOM for Sardis Association and pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Coffee Springs.

So in the storms' aftermath, Preachers served a couple of days as a disaster relief chaplain in Tuscaloosa.

Though the association has only 11 rural churches, its goal is to have a disaster relief team. "I want to have them ready by the next time," Preachers said.

The endeavor to form a disaster relief team actually was under way prior to April 27, he said.

A disaster relief volunteer for more than 20 years, Preachers has witnessed the benefit of such a ministry. Through disaster relief, he said he has seen sadness turn to smiles and despair turn to hope.

"It gives people a lot of hope, a new zeal after the trauma they've been through," Preachers said. "It puts them on the road to healing. It's a great ministry."

Alabama continues to be 'pacesetter' for disaster relief

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama's disaster relief force ranks among the strongest in the Southern Baptist Convention in number of volunteers, according to a state Baptist official.

Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), said having a large disaster relief force is common in coastal states because of the potential for natural disasters.

"Alabama is a pacesetter, [though] we're not the largest," Johnson said.

He pointed out that Florida, Texas and North Carolina also have very strong disaster relief capabilities.

Nonetheless Alabama's disaster relief force often is recruited to assist in training other state conventions' volunteers, Johnson said.

Moreover "we have trained the National Guard, fire departments and are even called upon to assist in training for other denominations," he added.

But since April 27 — when 60-plus tornadoes crisscrossed the state, claiming more than 240 lives — training has been focused on the homefront as the number of people being trained for Southern Baptist disaster relief in Alabama has increased fourfold.

In fact, interest has risen so much that the SBOM altered its normal training schedule to provide additional sessions.

"Normally disaster relief training is suspended during hurricane season," which is June 1 through Nov. 30, so that all resources are available to respond if needed, Johnson said.

But during 2011, that was not the case, Johnson said.

Disaster relief training continued right through hurricane season, with the understanding that resources might have to be deployed regardless of any scheduled sessions.

Johnson said Alabama Baptists have shown a great commitment to be ready

to respond when the next disaster occurs.

The heightened awareness of disaster relief ministry and its importance in a time of crisis led to a training session being conducted somewhere in Alabama every week since about a month and a half after April 27, Johnson said.

"We have trained nonstop since that time," he said.

"We've trained in every district," something that is unusual within one 12-month period.

Between April 27 and Dec. 15, 1,322 people were trained to serve with Alabama Baptist disaster relief, Johnson said.

In the same time frame in 2010, 337 people were trained, he noted.

During 2011, some associations saw their disaster relief teams grow in numbers or disciplines provided.

Meanwhile other associations that did not previously have a team are forming one.

Sardis Baptist Association seeks to establish a team, Director of Missions (DOM) James Preachers said.

To prepare for that, the association already has designated a disaster relief contact person.

Two others showing interest are Bethlehem Baptist Association and Pine Barren Baptist Association.

"We're trying to get some teams organized in the future," said John Marks, DOM for both associations.

Another banner year

Marks hopes volunteers from the associations can be trained this year.

Training sessions will begin again this month. Johnson said 2012 looks as if it will be another banner year because churches and associations already are inquiring about training.

A weekend of training — encompassing every discipline available — will be held April 13-14 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

For more information or to register, visit www.sbdm.org.

"We have trained the National Guard, fire departments and are even called upon to assist in training for other denominations."

Mel Johnson
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Alabama-Crenshaw Association becomes 'hands, feet of Jesus'

In August and September, five Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association churches embarked on two missions trips to Franklin County.

Volunteers from South Luverne Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Luverne; Highland Home Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Rutledge; and Brantley Baptist Church went to Phil Campbell to help rebuild homes that fell victim to the April 27 tornadoes.

In addition, members of South Luverne Baptist and Highland Home Baptist undertook ministries that undergirded the volunteers and met specific needs of individuals affected by the storm.

South Luverne Baptist members collected small kitchen appliances to help restock kitchens, Pastor Mike Green said.

"Our people responded very well. It was a lot of appliances," Green said.

He explained that participating in rebuilding homes and restocking kitchens gave church members the opportunity to be the "hands and feet of Jesus."

"Our group was excited about it," Green said. "They were blessed by doing all that they did."

The church's Woman's Missionary Union

also made and gave quilts and throws to those affected by the storms, he added.

Highland Home Baptist collected an offering to pay for food and other expenses for the team on one journey. Plus the church served a "going away" meal to before each trip, Pastor Parker Bowen said.

"Our church is the northernmost church in the association," making it a good place for the volunteers to meet and stage before leaving for Phil Campbell, Bowen said.

The hearts of the Highland Home Baptist members went out to those in need, he said, and they just wanted to help in some way.

The offering collected to cover food and other expenses on one trip was between \$500 and \$600, Bowen reported, noting that the church has a congregation of about 60.

Director of Missions Don Yancey said other churches gave funds for the trips as well.

The team was able to start construction on some houses and get them to the "dried in" stage, reported Stephen Carson, associate pastor of Highland Home Baptist.

"It was a real rewarding ministry," Carson said. (TAB)



Photo by Michael Rodgers



Photo by Michael Rodgers

MEETING SPECIFIC NEEDS — (L to r) Doris Rogers; Reba Mason, Woman's Missionary Union director for South Luverne Baptist Church; and Chrys Baggett stitch quilts and throws for those affected by the April 27 tornadoes.

Bower Memorial youth help in Tuscaloosa

In 2011, like 2010, the youth of Bower Memorial Baptist Church, Evergreen, made plans to go to MFuge, a LifeWay missions event.

It was to be in New Orleans.

But after the April 27 tornadoes marred Alabama's landscape and scarred countless lives, the youth of this Conecuh Baptist Association church approached their leader about a change in plans.

Pastor Jim Griffin said the students told his wife, Miriam, who is the youth and children's administrator, that they felt led to go on an in-state missions trip instead.

As a result, the students and their chaperons — about a dozen people in all — traveled to storm-ravaged Tuscaloosa County in June. Cottondale Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association hosted the group.

The group sorted supplies at a Salvation Army distribution center, served meals at a Salvation Army canteen and helped Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, with cleanup and organization.

This was the first experience with disaster relief for some students, Griffin said.

(TAB)

REMEMBERING THE 2011 TORNADES

April 22, 2012, has been designated
A Time to Remember: 2011 Tornadoes.

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

'Living example'

FBC Guin couple continue missions trips in their mid 80s

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Gilbert and Marguerite Butler are in their late 80s, but they certainly don't act like it. Not only are the Butlers extremely active in their church, First Baptist, Guin — Gil is a choir member and deacon, and Marge teaches Sunday School and participates in Vacation Bible School (VBS) each year — but they are also dedicated to missions work.

Marge was a student missionary for two years in college, but the Butlers were inspired to focus on missions as a family when a tornado hit Guin in 1974. Marge was teaching a Sunday School class at the time, and a class member's uninsured boat had been destroyed by the storm, and she was beside herself with grief.

"That night, I asked my husband if he would pray with me to teach our three children to do something with their time, money and energy that wouldn't be blown away by wind," she said. "The next morning, Gil asked me if it would be all right to call the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) and see if there was a missionary somewhere who would like to use five pairs of hands."

The Butlers had found their calling.

Emphasis on missions

Each year, they traded their family vacation for a missions trip to a new location to offer help. The emphasis on missions evidently affected the Butlers' children, because two daughters served as summer student missionaries in college and their oldest daughter spent two years in Paraguay as a journeyman.

The couple felt so called to missions work that they both elected to retire early to make more time for trips, and at that point, they began traveling overseas. In fact, 2011 was the first year in the last 20 years that they didn't travel abroad.

"We'd planned to go to Haiti over the summer, but Gil got dehydrated before the trip, and two of our granddaughters had to go in our stead," Marge said. "We ended up going to Illinois later that month for a missions trip and helped with VBS, youth groups and nursing home outreach there."

Through the years, the Butlers have visited every continent but Antarctica and, in addition to shorter trips, spent a year teaching in Africa and a year teaching



Photo courtesy of Gilbert and Marguerite Butler

CALLED TO MISSIONS — Gilbert and Marguerite Butler, who are in their late 80s, see three generations of a Guatemalan family accept Christ with the help of an interpreter.

in American Samoa. They've also been plugged in state-side, spending a Christmas with migrant workers in Orlando, Fla., and working with a Laotian ministry in Montgomery for seven months.

They even serve as volunteers in missions area consultants, focusing on Marion and Winston

Baptist Associations, for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

Reggie Quimby, director of the SBOM office of global missions, has had the opportunity to travel with the couple.

"They traveled with me to Venezuela to work in a local church in Caracas," he said. "They prayer walked and witnessed, as well as shared their testimony in local church services."

According to Quimby, who has known the Butlers for 20 years, their dedication to missions has been an inspiration to others across their association and beyond.

"They have been a living example of what the Lord gave as His mandate in Acts 1:8," he said.

They certainly have exemplified the Great Commission, not only to Alabama Baptists but to the ends of the earth."

When they aren't traveling, the Butlers can often be found speaking at churches and events about their passion for missions, and they enjoy sharing their testimony



Photo courtesy of Gilbert and Marguerite Butler

'BLESSED' — Gilbert and Marguerite Butler work in the child care area during a missions meeting in Pattaya, Thailand.

nies and connecting with congregations and audiences.

"We're very much blessed that at our age, God gave us good health, and I don't think He gave it to us for nothing," Gil said. "When people ask us what our favorite place was, we usually tell them that they get better and better and it's usually the last place we've been to!"



GILBERT & MARGUERITE BUTLER

Letters

(continued from page 2)
spare us from the April tornadoes but can also bring us through other kinds of storms that sometimes come into our lives.

Hymnals are dedicated to the memory of loved ones who have gone on to be with the Lord. If the books are never taken out of the back of the pew, then those dedications will never be read.

So open the book; take a look. Hymnals are not obsolete.
Kay Kelley Rudicell
Hamilton, Ala.

THANK YOU

I want to thank *The Alabama Baptist* and the Alabama WMU

for my subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*.

Receiving *The Alabama Baptist* is such a joy for me, because it gives me a real sense of belonging to the Christian family, the Alabama Baptist family.

It is also a call for me to stand strong in my faith and walk with Christ.

Blessings for the New Year.
Jeannie Mestres
Airoux, France

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICES

According to the "Christian perspective" article in the Dec. 15 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, our church is among the majority

other purposes. Both budgets are facing large spending reductions in the coming year. The most difficult situation is found in the General Fund budget, over which the Legislature has complete control. It is expected to have up to 25 percent less money than in the current year. This threatens the state's ability to fund health care, prisons and public safety, among other programs.

Combine two budgets

One option that has been discussed tentatively is to combine the two budgets and un earmark some revenues now set aside for various purposes. This would give the Legislature more choices.

No target list of earmarks has emerged, yet raising the issue highlights the fact that Alabama's budget process does not connect state spending with results. While most other states are improving their ability to measure performance and use it in appropriating tax dollars, Alabama is not. Budget requests for next year contain no performance goals.

The truth is earmarking is a good practice only if a state has no other method of controlling spending.

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

To complement the earmarking, the Legislature adopts two big budgets each year: one for education and the other for all

canceling all but one service on Christmas because it falls on Sunday. I do not criticize our leaders for this decision, since given the state of today's worshiper, I would make the same decision; however, the thought of canceling worship services to celebrate the Christmas holy day seems to me to be an oxymoron!

My father tells of his parents' solution to which denomination to attend. His mother's family attended on Saturday and his father's on Sunday. The solution was to attend both.

Herbert E. Hunter
Huntsville, Ala.

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Conditions in typhoon-stricken Philippines worsened by rain

The plight of people who survived a Dec. 17 typhoon in the Philippines has been worsened in 14 provinces by heavy rains that have caused new flooding. Southern Baptists are helping to provide assistance in the aftermath of the storm, which killed about 1,250 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

"The tragic events of the recent storms and flash floods in the wake of Tropical Storm Washi continue to unfold," said Pat Melancon, managing director of disaster response and training for Baptist Global Response (BGR). "More than 12,000 homes were destroyed. People are seeking refuge with families, churches and in evacuation centers."

The new floods affected 14 provinces in the country's east coast and southern region, according to news reports.

Relief and rescue operations were being stretched by the fresh floods as soldiers, police officers and volunteers were dispatched to

help more than 53,000 new victims, Benito Ramos, administrator of the office of civil defense, told the McClatchy-Tribune news service.

BGR initiated a rapid response with local partners shortly after the storm, Melancon said.

"More than 12,000 homes were destroyed. People are seeking refuge."

Pat Melancon
Baptist Global Response

"In cooperation with local churches and other groups, food, water and other temporary relief has been distributed to the stricken areas," Melancon said. "Local situations have been assessed and a broader on-the-ground assess-

ment of longer-term relief needs continues."

Reports of more than 1,000 unaccounted-for victims continue to circulate but only 84 have been verified, government officials said. While tropical storms occur regularly in the Philippines, the devastation caused by Washi was worsened because it struck the southern part of the country, where such storms are not as frequent and people are not as prepared to deal with them. (BP)

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'Let it start with me'

No Other Name takes Great Commission seriously in life, music

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

Move my feet to follow after you, Lord; change the world; and let it start with me." A three-part harmony echoes through a church sanctuary. No Other Name, an up-and-coming Christian group and International Mission Board (IMB) partner, spends its time in churches impacting listeners with its music and message on sharing the gospel.

"[The IMB partnership] is such a cool thing to be a part of, to be able to educate people about what's going on worldwide ... and to encourage people to be more active through giving and going and praying," group member Sam Allen said.

As far back as Allen can remember, he and his sister Laura were always singing. Since their father was the music minister at a church near Tampa, Fla., they were immersed in music. And as they look back on their musical journey, Sam and Laura are amazed at how "God really blessed" them.

Music school

The siblings traveled to Nashville in July 1997 to attend Ben Speer's Stamps Baxter School of Music, a two-week intensive music school. There they met Chad Smith, "a beast of a vocalist," according to Sam. The three sang in a group performance during a concert at the school's conclusion, and Sam and Laura immediately realized "how well [Chad's] voice blended with theirs but (also) how his commitment to ministry mirrored their own," according to the group's website and spent the next several months communicating about how to form a singing group.

The next year Sam and Laura were encouraged to move to Nashville by some promising contacts. So the siblings packed up and made



Photo courtesy of No Other Name

RECENT RELEASE — No Other Name recently released its first full-length album, 'The Other Side' featuring the song, 'Let It Start With Me.'

their way to Music City to team with Chad, who moved from Louisiana, to form No Other Name — a leap of faith to leave family and try to make it in the ever-competitive music industry. The group's name was pulled from Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

No Other Name's first concert was a "hodge-podge" of a cappella songs at Round Lick Baptist Church, Watertown, Tenn., Sam recalled.

The first few years were rough with little money and few singing engagements. At one point, the group members questioned whether they had made the right decision in starting No Other Name. But after a prayer time together in the small apartment the three rented, they each felt the Lord reassure them of His will in their lives — which included No Other Name.

Laura and Chad worked during the day, and Sam started attending Belmont University in Nashville

in 2002 to pursue a bachelor's degree in commercial music. While a student, he "caught the attention of legendary record executive Mike Curb," according to the group's website.

In 2008, the group signed with Curb Records — a mainly country label filled with Christian employees who believed in No Other Name and other Christian artists like Natalie Grant, Selah and Plumb.

IMB partnership

In 2009, No Other Name was approached by the IMB about forming a partnership. The IMB filmed a music video for its song "Lead You to the Cross" in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The IMB also filmed a music video for "Let It Start With Me" in Bangkok. The song, written by Sam and Laura, is on No Other Name's first full-length album, "The Other Side," which was released recently. It is really "the words of a prayer," Laura said in a video on the group's YouTube page.

Sam said they kept going back to the idea that "God can use anybody (to accomplish the Great Commission), but what if we're not willing to be used?" The lyrics naturally flowed from that idea, he said.

And No Other Name now sees educating people about the Great Commission as its own task and an act of obedience to Christ. "We want to entertain people, but (we) also want to challenge them specifically to be involved in the Great Commission ... and to find their place in it," whether that be in their local churches or Thailand or Africa, said Sam, a member of Inglewood Baptist Church, Nashville.

He, Laura and Chad are personally involved in international missions and have led two IMB missions trips with No Other Name fans to Nicaragua in 2010 and Brazil in 2011.

Ken Winter, IMB church and partner services vice president, said he is "impressed by the heart and depth of the passion of (No Other Name) for the nations."

"God is using [No Other Name's] gift, and the open doors that its musical gift provides ... to communicate and multiply that passion among God's people," he said.

The group was nominated for the New Artist of the Year Dove Award in 2011 and felt it had another confirmation from God, Sam said, like He was telling them, "You're still important to me. Keep doing what you're doing."

"There's so much to do (to reach the world for Christ) ... but the only thing we can do is change our heart and be obedient to what He tells us to do," Sam said.

This spring, the group will make its way to Alabama with the START Tour and a concert scheduled at First Baptist Church, Decatur, on Feb. 19 at 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.no-other-name.com.

Want to know God?

By Pastor Franklin L. Kirksey
First Baptist Church, Spanish Fort

Jesus gives the gist of eternal life in John 17:3: "That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Tracing the word translated "eternal" in the Book of Hebrews yields a five-pointed truth. Initially we discover eternal salvation in Hebrews 5:9: "And having been perfected, [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

Fearfully we encounter the teaching of eternal retribution in Hebrews 6:2b. This verse closes with the words "eternal judgment." Of course, this refers to hell. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this, the judgment" (9:27).

Faithfully we read about eternal redemption in Hebrews 9:12. Within the context of this passage, we read about "the eternal Spirit" (v. 14) and "the eternal inheritance" (v. 15). Jesus Christ's blood (Heb. 9:22-28) is our only hope of redemption.

Expectantly we look for a word about eternal reward. In Hebrews 11:6 and 24-26, we read, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. ... By faith, Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

Gratefully we find the principle of eternal security many times in the Bible. For example, we read from Hebrews 12:2 and 13:5b, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ... For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Corrie ten Boom, who helped many Jews escape the Holocaust, stated, "In God's faithfulness lies eternal security."

Will you have eternal rejoicing or eternal regret? Allow me to encourage you to repent and place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

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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.

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JANUARY 2012

the Giving Heart of Women

By Bob Dewhurst, ABCH VP, Ministry Development

I have been greatly influenced by women. My grandmothers, mother, wife, four daughters and many more have had and continue to impact my life in very positive ways. And women associated with Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) have been molding young lives in Jesus' name throughout the generations.

In fact, if not for the compassion and generosity of one woman more than a century ago, it is likely that this ministry would not exist today. A lady with a long name but an even bigger heart established what we know today as a charitable trust to begin what was then called the Louise Short Baptist Widows and Orphans Home. Mariah Louise Short Becton Woodson's gift provided the momentum that has resulted in providing hope for many thousands of children over the generations.

Thousands of women have given of their time, talents and treasures to serve those Christ called "the least of these" all around us. And during this ministry's 120-year history, hundreds of women have chosen to leave a legacy of love that extends beyond their lifetime here on earth.

The names and faces of many children whose lives have been changed come to mind:

- Ricky, a Marine serving our nation, who, as a young boy, was homeless because his home was destroyed by a tornado and his mother could not cope with the loss of a home and abandonment of a husband.
- Leon, a boy who enjoyed baseball at the Children's Homes as a youngster, and is now a married father and grandfather who serves his community and continues to love playing baseball.

- Michelle, who called this ministry home and is now a Sunday School teacher.
- Brian, a veterinarian who first developed his desire to help injured and ill animals during his childhood under the loving care of a compassionate house mother.
- Leann, a school teacher who understands the needs of at-risk children in her community.
- Marsha and her three children, who found themselves homeless after escaping an abusive situation.

And this ministry is continuing to grow as the needs increase all around us because of the actions of many women who have left a legacy of love. Consider these facts:

- In 70 percent of the families, a woman will be left with the stewardship responsibility of the family assets.
- The income from trusts, wills and similar charitable giving tools provides for the care of about one of every four children served by Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.
- 73 percent of the legacy gifts that provided for the care of children at this ministry came from the estates of women.
- Over the past several years, the average amount of a charitable bequest by a woman has been about \$50,000, with the smallest gift being \$1,000.

So what do you need to do to leave a legacy of love? We have resources to help you. Just give us a call at 888-720-8805 and we will send you a free Guide to Planning Your Estate or other resources specific to your desires. Or you may email me at bdewhurst@abchome.org.

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(Memorialized person's name is bolded.)

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Kay Coleman: Lloyd & Catherine Gaddy

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Churchgoers keeping up with digital age

American churchgoers are just as likely to use Twitter, Facebook and the Internet as non-churchgoers, according to a new study that shows the impact that technology can have on spreading a church's message.

The landline and cell phone survey of 2,303 adults by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project showed that:

► 9 percent of those actively involved in religious groups use Twitter, the same percentage as the general population.

► 46 percent of those in religious groups use social networking sites — almost identical to the 47 percent of all adults.

► 60 percent of both groups use text messaging.

► 79 percent of those actively involved in religious groups use the Internet while

76 percent of all adults do so.

Attendance, though, was a factor in determining the percentage of churchgoers involved in social media and electronic communication.

Church attendance

For instance, 54 percent of weekly churchgoers use Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn — a much smaller percentage than the 71 percent of monthly churchgoers and 65 percent of less frequent churchgoers who do so.

Pew said the average age of weekly churchgoers could explain the disparity.

Also:

► 9 percent of weekly church-

goers use Twitter (15 percent of monthly churchgoers and 14 percent of less frequent churchgoers do so).

► 26 percent of weekly churchgoers make donations online (35 percent of monthly churchgoers; 27 percent of less frequent churchgoers).

► 70 percent of weekly churchgoers who have a cell phone send or receive text messages (80 percent of monthly churchgoers; 77 percent of less frequent churchgoers).

► 36 percent of weekly churchgoers use their cell phone to access the Internet (51 percent of monthly churchgoers; 45 percent of less frequent churchgoers). (BP)

Former Friendship, Marshall DOM dies

Peter J. Tcherneshoff, former director of missions (DOM) for Friendship and Marshall Baptist associations, died Dec. 30. He was 79.

Tcherneshoff graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He served as student pastor of Cunningham Baptist Church in Texas and pastor of Welsh Neck Baptist Church, Society Hill, S.C.

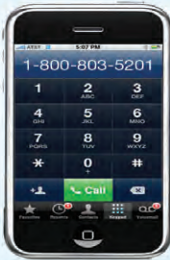
Tcherneshoff and his wife, Rheta, were appointed as Southern Baptist missionaries and served in Brazil for 17 years. Upon returning from Brazil in 1977, he served as a pastor in Decatur and DOM for Friendship and Marshall associations before his retirement in 1997. At the time of Tcherneshoff's death, he was a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville.

"Pete Tcherneshoff lived an exemplary life as a missionary in south Brazil, as a husband, a father, a grandfather and an encourager and supporter of missions until the day he died," said Ron Madison, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist.

Tcherneshoff was preceded in death by his wife of 56 years. He is survived by three sons, one daughter and 10 grandchildren. (TAB)

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LifeWay | Students

'Empower' exploited women; see results

(continued from page 1)

they're going to have that is if we go and tell them." Devadasis come mainly from impoverished families of the untouchables class, the lowest rung of Hindu society. They are used and exploited by men. Sometimes they receive compensation for their services, sometimes not. A vulnerable population, the devadasis are susceptible to HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

"Not only are they shunned because of their profession, but they're shunned by society because of their status," Romick said. "They're the lowest of the low. They're not even in the caste system — they're outside the caste system."

A number of human needs organizations are working to prevent the continuation of the underground devadasi system, but the practice is still widespread throughout India; estimates range from tens to hundreds of thousands of devadasis in the country. A devadasi who dis-

covers a relationship with Christ, Dass said, becomes a powerful witness in her community: a witness against the practice that enslaved her and for the Savior who set her free. "It's like the woman at the well," Dass explained. "Jesus asked questions and finally she realized, 'Hey, here is the person whom I know that He is the Messiah.' Then she goes out, calling other women

and bringing them and telling, 'Here is the answer for our problem.'"

Education and awareness are essential components to bring about the end of the devadasi system. Of the women themselves, Dass said, "Equip them, empower them, mentor them, train them, disciple them and put them back [in their communities] and you'll see what the Lord does." (BP)

Retired Ala. pastor Inman dies

Calvin C. Inman, a retired Alabama Baptist pastor, died Dec. 30. He was 86.

Inman most recently served as pastor of Sardis Springs Baptist Church, Athens. He retired from the Limestone Baptist Association church in 1989.

In 37 years of ministry, Inman also served East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, in Limestone Association and five churches in Mississippi. He also briefly served

the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions as an area consultant in the 1990s.

Inman received his bachelor's degree from Mississippi College in Clinton in 1954 and master of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1957.

He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II.

Inman is survived by his wife of 64 years, Lucile, and one son. (TAB)

CORRECTION

In the article "Springhill Pastor Kenneth Henson retires from ministry" in the Jan. 5 issue, one of the churches where he served as pastor was incorrect. Instead of Round Hill Baptist Church, Thomasville, Henson served as pastor of Grove Hill Baptist Church. He also served as pastor of Westview Baptist Church, Sylacauga, as well as the other churches mentioned in the original article.

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Explore the Bible

By Dale Younce

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

BE RESOLUTE ABOUT LIFE'S VALUE

Deuteronomy 5:17; 19:7-13; 24:6-7;

Matthew 5:17-20

Daily the media report examples of brutality against and devaluation of human life. Tragically the constant stream of knowledge about life-damaging events can numb adults to the biblical mandate to value and protect human life — a mandate that includes protections for the innocent and just punishment for those guilty of victimizing others. God wants His people to show firm resolve in valuing and protecting human life, including the preborn.

Fulfilling God's Commandment

Against Murder

(Deut. 5:17; Matt. 5:17-20)

The sacredness of human life is rooted in the fact that human beings are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27); people are to be treated with dignity and respect. The commandment "You shall not murder" arises out of the fact that humans are God's image-bearers.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained God's original intent in giving the Law of Moses; He made it clear that fulfilling the Law had more to do with attitude than with keeping the letter of the Law. Jesus taught that He had come to fulfill the Mosaic Law, including the commandment that forbids murder, and that His followers' obedience was more than merely a legalistic keeping of the letter of the Law. Our opposition to actions such as abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide is a legitimate application of God's command regarding the sanctity of human life. Jesus' followers are to find ways to fulfill the spirit of the commandments by promoting the biblical view of life's sacredness.

Protecting the Innocent, Punishing

the Guilty (Deut. 19:7-13)

The sanctity of human life is demonstrated in how the Law of Moses differentiates between accidental death and premeditated homicide. Today's law still makes a distinction between premeditated murder and accidental killing (manslaughter).

When Israel entered the promised land, God designated six towns as "cities of ref-

uge." Each was a place to which a person who had accidentally killed someone could flee and have his or her case adjudicated. In these cities, the person guilty of manslaughter was safe until the facts of the case could be examined and a verdict declared. However, these cities were not to become havens for those guilty of intentional homicide. The fact that the Lord established such cities clearly shows the distinction between causing a death accidentally and committing an intentional homicide.

An application of these principles to today's culture means that Christians can and should be equally concerned to ensure that our laws, officials and personal actions protect the innocent and provide for punishing the guilty.

Safeguarding Life's Value

(Deut. 24:6-7)

The Law of Moses provided a number safeguards that demonstrated life's value. These two stipulations show God's desire for people to understand life's value and thus safeguard it.

If a lender needed collateral for a loan, then he or she was prohibited from taking the borrower's millstones. These were used in the home for grinding grain in preparing meals; if either stone were removed, then grain necessary for daily food could not be ground. Families needed the stones in order to eat. Taking the millstones would devalue human life.

Apparently the crime of kidnapping was common in the ancient world; it is mentioned in the law codes of the ancient Mesopotamians and the Hittite Empire. Since the kidnapper would be depriving his or her victim of freedom by taking him or her as a slave or selling him or her, the kidnapper was to be executed, just as though he or she had taken the victim's life. Kidnapping devalues human life by treating him or her as if he or she were not a person made in God's image.

Christians can safeguard life's value by working to oppose abortion and the abuse of senior citizens; we can carefully avoid any attitudes and actions that diminish the value and worth of anyone.

Bible Studies for Life

By Joseph F. Scrivner

Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

CARING IN AN EXPENDABLE CULTURE

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18

The Bible emphasizes humans' value and dignity. In the Bible's opening narrative, we read that God created humans in His image (Gen. 1:26-28). In the next chapter, we see that God created people for companionship because it is not good to be alone (Gen. 2:4-25). Later we witness another powerful affirmation of human worth: God created humanity a little less than Himself and crowned it with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5). These passages illustrate the pervasive biblical theme of God's love for people, especially the most vulnerable. In Psalm 139, we read another moving description of God's care.

God Values Us (1-6)

As the Psalmist considers God's intimate knowledge, he declares that God has "searched and known" him (1). God even knows his words before they are spoken (2-4). Moreover the Psalmist says God encircles him and has put His hand on him (5). In other words, God is immanent before His human creations (see Acts 17:28). The Psalmist concludes that God's omniscience and omnipresence are beyond his comprehension: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" (6).

The Psalmist goes on to explain that there is no hiding from God's knowledge and presence (7-12). Obviously, then, God can evaluate us thoroughly. Indeed this is the ultimate point of this Psalm. The Psalmist contends that he follows God's moral commands. He has affection for what God favors and is against what God condemns (21-22). Yet he asks God to be the final judge by assessing and correcting his motives (23-24).

Since God is so intimately familiar with us, we can approach Him with honesty and vulnerability, asking Him to test our intentions and actions. If we have sinned, then God is ready to forgive because He knows our weaknesses (Ps. 103:8-17). He will throw our sins into the sea (Mic. 7:19). Of course, God's intimate care comes to its fullest expression in Jesus Christ, and it is through Christ that we can

petition God in bold confession and prayer. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time" (Heb. 4:15-16).

God Has a Plan for Us (13-16)

The Psalmist provides us with one of the most moving images in the Bible. He describes God as forming the human body in the mother's womb as a weaver creates cloth. God "created," "knit" and "formed" the human frame. Yet God's intimate knowledge does not end there. Even before God prepared his body, the Psalmist says, God saw him. God also has planned his life's span. This statement of God's foreknowledge is similar to Jeremiah's contention that God called him to be a prophet even before He formed him in the womb (Jer. 1:5). As the Psalmist contemplates God's careful artistry, he responds with praise and awe: "I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful and I know this very well."

God Is With Us (17-18)

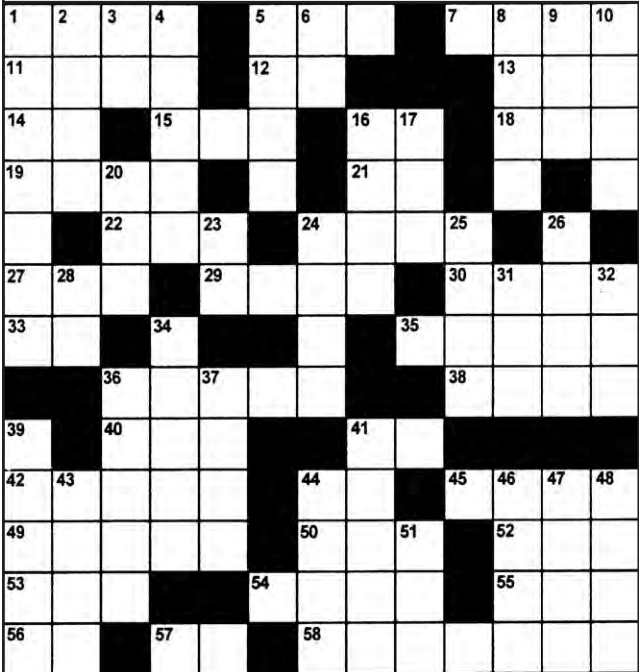
The Psalmist is compelled again to reflect on his inability to grasp God's magnificence. God's thoughts are too weighty and their sum too great for human accounting. Yet God's greatness does not mean He is far away. Instead God is with us.

God's presence and care mean that He is very concerned about the vulnerable. Thus God calls on His people to show special concern for those who are unprotected by money, status or privilege. This includes defenseless children, from the unborn to those deprived of adequate food, housing and education. Immigrants also should be included (Ex. 22:21-23).

Indeed God's holiness is especially offended when there is religious observance without justice for the helpless. God makes this clear in the prophets (Jer. 7:1-15; Amos 5:18-27; Mic. 6:6-8). Jesus also said, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me either" (Matt. 25:45).

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Charity suffereth long, and is _____. (1 Cor. 13:4)
- They have spread a _____ by the wayside. (Ps. 140:5)
- Gather the wheat unto my _____. (Matt. 13:30)
- A thought or concept.
- I will set him _____ high. (Ps. 91:14)
- Having to do with life science. (prefix)
- Compass direction.
- Glory to God in _____ highest.
- How long shall I _____ with you? (Mark 9:19)
- British word for bathroom.
- Some would even _____ to die. (Rom. 5:7)
- _____, C.
- _____, and it shall be given you. (Matt. 7:7)
- _____, Father. (Mark 14:36)
- And did all _____ the same spiritual meat. (1 Cor. 10:3)
- Behold, the _____ wept. (Ex. 2:6)
- And his _____ went throughout all Syria. (Matt. 4:24)
- Decimeter. (abbr.)

- Calls for someone in a public place.
- Far _____ all principality, and power. (Eph. 1:21)
- The veil of the temple was _____ in twain. (Matt. 27:51)
- Nancy. (abbr.)
- _____ angel of the Lord.
- _____ and walk? (Matt. 9:5)
- Before Christ. (abbr.)
- He is _____; yet is he clean. (Lev. 13:40)
- Gets up in the morning.
- All that handle the _____. (Ezek. 27:29)
- Side away from the wind.
- One of the Three Stooges.
- A type of deer.
- The father shall be divided against the _____. (Luke 12:53)
- Saint. (abbr.)
- But also _____ die at Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
- His _____ was cleansed. (Matt. 8:3)

Down

- Boaz was of the _____ of Elimelech. (Ruth 3:2)
- "I've got a great _____!"
- Compass direction.
- Sweet fruit grown on palm

- trees.
- Christmas.
- Inhabitants of _____ dor. (Josh. 17:11)
- No man ... was _____ to open the book. (Rev. 5:3)
- City in Brazil.
- About _____ ... there shone great light round me. (Acts 22:6)
- Find the _____ wrapped in swaddling clothes. (Luke 2:12)
- One type of tide.
- A type of vermin.
- Kilobytes. (abbr.)
- He is _____ also to save. (Heb. 7:25)
- When he saw Jesus _____ off, he ran. (Mark 5:6)
- So be it.
- _____ I my brother's keeper? (Gen. 4:9)
- Die in the flower of their _____. (1 Sam. 2:33)
- Eastern Standard Time. (abbr.)
- And _____ him that is high. (Ezek. 21:26)
- Pay tithe of mint, _____ and cummin. (Matt. 23:23)
- I have commanded my sanctified _____. (Isa. 13:3)

- They went their ways, one to his _____ (plural). (Matt. 22:5)
- If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked _____. (2 words)
- They that count it pleasure to _____. (2 Pet. 2:13)
- The fire causeth the waters to _____. (Isa. 64:2)
- Who loveth God love his brother _____. (1 John 4:21)
- Several popes sharing one name.
- Lest ye _____ your God. (Josh. 24:27)
- To knock on a door; form of music.



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services

Muslim extremists in Uganda throw acid on bishop

KAMPALA, Uganda — Islamic extremists threw acid on a church leader on Christmas Eve shortly after a revival at his church, leaving him with severe burns. Bishop Umar Mulinde, 37, an Islamic teacher before his conversion to Christianity, was attacked Dec. 24 near his Gospel Life Church International building in Namasuba, about six miles outside of Kampala.

From his hospital bed in Kampala, he said he was on his way to a party with the entire congregation and hundreds of new converts to Christianity when a man who claimed to be a Christian approached him. "I heard him say in a loud voice, 'Pastor, pastor,' and as I made a turn and looked



CDN photo

at him, he poured the liquid onto my face as others poured more liquid on my back and then fled away shouting, 'Allahu akbar (God is greater).'" Mulinde said, still visibly traumatized two days after the assault. His face, neck and arms bore deep black scars from the acid, and his lips were swollen.

"We are doing all we can to save his [one] remaining eye and to contain the acid from spreading to other parts of the body," the doctor said. Mulinde said Muslim extremists opposed to his conversion from Islam and his outspoken opposition of Shariah (Islamic law) courts in Uganda attacked him. On Oct. 15, area Muslim leaders declared a fatwa against him demanding his death. Mulinde is known for debates locally and internationally in which he often challenges Muslims regarding their religion.

Groups to sue for refusal to reinstate church license

BOGOR, Indonesia — The Bogor mayor's refusal to obey a Supreme Court order to restore a congregation's permit casts doubt on the ability of the Indonesian government to enforce the rule of law, according to a leading rights group.

Muslim demonstrators and area police have continued to obstruct the services of the Indonesian Christian Church (ICC) congregation in the Yasmin area of Bogor, West Java, which is worshipping on a roadside or in a member's home as the Bogor city government sealed its building last year. Bogor Mayor Diani Budiarto also rejected the July 8 recommendation of the National Ombudsman Institute to reinstate the permit, leaving the congregation to worship on a small strip of land as 15 to 20 Muslim demonstrators taunt them.

"Defiance of the Supreme Court decision and the recommendation of the Judicial Commission is clear evidence of denial of the rule of law," said Bonar Tigor Naipospos, vice chairman of the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace. Far from complying with the court order, the head of the Bogor civil service police, Bambang Budianto, reported that the ICC Yasmin church building is going to be torn down, according to the Bogorplus website.

Anti-Christian acts in Indonesia nearly double in 2011

BOGOR, Indonesia — Acts of violence and intolerance against Christians in Indonesia almost doubled in 2011, with an Islamist campaign to close down churches symbolizing the plight of the religious minority. The Indonesian Protestant Church Union, locally known as PGI, counted 54 acts of violence and other violations against Christians in 2011, up from 30 in 2010.

The number of such incidents against religious minorities in general also grew, from 198 in 2010 to 276 in 2011, but the worst is perhaps yet to come if authorities continue to overlook the threat of extremism, said a representative from the Jakarta-based Wahid Institute, a Muslim organization that promotes tolerance. Rumadi, who goes by a single name, said his Wahid Institute also observed an attempt to institutionalize intolerance; at least 36 regulations to ban religious practices deemed deviant from Islam were drafted or implemented in the country in 2011. West Java, the most populous province that includes the nation's capital city of Jakarta, alone witnessed 160 incidents against religious minorities. Churches in West Java, which has about 520,000 Christians, also suffered the most last year.

'A greater purpose'

Tampa Bay Rays Stephen Vogt lives for his family, the Lord

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Although Stephen Vogt has been put on the Tampa Bay Rays major league roster for 2012, baseball isn't the legacy he's looking to build.

"Every morning, I try to ask myself — and I'm not always good at it — 'What can I do to further the kingdom of God?' I am not living for me. I am living for my family and for the Lord. We live for a greater purpose."

Vogt, 27, has played with Rays minor league affiliate teams since he was drafted in 2007. Although his 2009 season ended early because of a torn labrum, he continued to distinguish himself as soon as he returned to the field. And he actually sees God's work in that injury.

"God definitely took baseball away from me on purpose. Baseball was becoming too much in my life. I was not Stephen Vogt the man of God. I was Stephen Vogt the baseball player. God really tested me to see where my alliances were. I thank Him for it. I learned my identity is not what I do for a living; it's who I am as a person. Baseball doesn't define me," Vogt said.

He applies his favorite Bible verse, Colossians 3:23, to his game: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

"Life is so much better when you are living for something like the Lord. He has totally blessed my life in countless ways," Vogt said.

One recent blessing came Sept. 27, 2011, in the birth of his daughter, Payton Diane.

"I think this is my true purpose: to be a good father and a good example for my kids that they will want to live their lives for Christ," he said.

"God is preparing me to be a father, and I'm learning



Photo courtesy of Tampa Bay Rays/Skip Milos

'BLESSED' — The Tampa Bay Rays Stephen Vogt has learned his identity is not what he does for a living; it's who he is as a person. He says, 'Life is so much better when you are living for something like the Lord.'

how to be a better husband."

Although Vogt became a Christian at a young age, his faith didn't "sink in" until he went to Azusa Pacific University, a Christian school near Los Angeles.

It's not easy

"I came into my faith. I just kind of took it for granted until I got to college. Being a Christian is not easy. If it were easy, everybody would do it. You are held to live to

God's standards and not the standards of the world," Vogt said.

He is very aware of the influence professional athletes can have.

"As baseball players, we are put on a pedestal. We are viewed as celebrities, which we are not. A lot of kids want to be like us. Unfortunately there are some bad examples in this game, but as much as possible, I try to be involved with fans and with kids and give back," Vogt said.

Lao officials arrest 8 Christian leaders

Police early Dec. 19 traveled to Boukham village in Laos' Savannakhet province to meet with officials about the arrest Dec. 16 of eight Christian leaders who had gathered some 200 church members for a Christmas celebration, an advocacy group reported.

Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HRWLRF) reported that the leaders had secured permission for the event from Boukham's village chief. Village security forces entered the building, isolated the eight leaders and marched them to the Boukham government headquarters, where they were detained without charge. Four of the detainees were placed in handcuffs and wooden stocks,

while the other four were left unrestrained.

"While they were held without formal charges, it is quite clear that they were arrested for gathering people for worship," an HRWLRF spokesman said.

On Dec. 18, Lao Evangelical Church representatives managed to negotiate the release of one of the detainees held in stocks, who goes by the single name of King-

namosorn, after paying a fine of \$123 to the village chief. By comparison, the average monthly wage for an unskilled laborer in the province is close to \$40. The content of the discussion between village leaders and the subdistrict police remains unknown, but when police left the village, the chief ordered the other four unrestrained detainees to be placed in stocks as well, HRWLRF reported. (CDN)

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'The heartbeat'

Eastern Europeans growing in church-planting efforts

Kiev gives new meaning to the term "opposites attract."

Ukraine's capital, with nearly 3 million people, is one of the oldest in Europe. However, it is a mixture of former Soviet architecture and highly developed transportation systems; traditional Slavic mind-sets and modern Western European culture; and Orthodox religion and mystic, occultist beliefs.

Home to the first large Slavic kingdom centuries ago, it is where Slavic people first became Orthodox. Ukraine later became part of the Russian empire and consequently the Soviet Union but gained its independence after the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

"[Slavic people] can easily hold two ideas in their head that radically conflict with each other and see no problem," said Dan Upchurch, a Southern Baptist representative who serves in Kiev with his wife Lori. "It's not hard for them to deal with the fact that they are Orthodox by tradition but atheist by practice."

Four-year program

This dichotomous mindset is a major challenge in the Upchurches' ministry work. They and another Southern Baptist couple, Joel and Mary Ellen Ragains, teach church planting at Kiev Theological Seminary. The four-year undergraduate program requires students to attend classes four times

each year for 10 days at a time.

People think in two distinct categories in Ukrainian culture — knowledge and practice, Upchurch said, noting they love to gain knowledge, but "they have no idea what to do with it."

"Their default setting would be to put theological education in the knowledge category but not in the practice category," he said.

The seminary's church-planting program, however, pushes students to put knowledge into practice. Not only do they take classes about theological subjects but students also must be involved in planting a church in order to earn their diploma.

Alabama Baptists are familiar with this effort. Having partnered with the Baptist convention in Ukraine since 2005, Alabama Baptist churches, associations and the State Board of Missions (SBOM) have assisted church-planting and evangelism efforts in various ways. One of the major efforts has been at the seminary.

"We have worked through the International Mission Board's Shannon Ford and through the seminaries (in Ukraine) to help support young church planters who were in seminary and who were involved already," said Reggie Quimby, director of the SBOM office of global missions.

"We have assisted about 10 different church planters ... through

"Nationals have the capability and the freedoms still in many places where we can't do anything."

Dan Upchurch
Southern Baptist representative



BP photo

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH INTO PRACTICE — Sunday worshipers gather at a church started by a Kiev Theological Seminary graduate. The seminary attracts students not only from Ukraine, but also Russia, Belarus, Romania, Azerbaijan and Lithuania.

the Cooperative Program," he said, noting that about 500 Alabama Baptist volunteers have gone to Ukraine since the partnership began.

Covington Baptist Association and its churches have taken the lead in church-planting efforts from Alabama, Quimby added.

In 2008, then-Director of Missions Larry Cummings and four pastors from the association taught a leadership conference for Ukrainian church leaders and spoke in eight churches. This began a partnership with the Ukrainian oblast (a region about the size of 10 counties) of Rivne, west of Kiev. Now the association directly supports two church plants and has helped fund the education of a church planter at Kiev Theological University.

A team from First Baptist Church, Opp, traveled to Rivne in October, leading worship in a few

church plants and praying with a Ukrainian pastor over starting a new plant.

"We're hoping to go back in the summer," said Randy Breedlove, pastor of First, Opp. The missions team will minister to Ukrainian youth who love sports and any opportunity to practice English.

Dozens of new churches

Students from across Eurasia — including Russia, Belarus, Romania, Azerbaijan and Lithuania — have come to learn the church-planting methods taught at Kiev Theological Seminary.

"Nationals are the ones that are going to get the job done," Dan Upchurch noted. "Americans in Eastern Europe, unless trends change, are going to directly be able to do less and less, but nationals have the capability and the freedoms still in many places where we can't do anything in

terms of direct church planting and mass evangelism — they can still do that. They are the heartbeat."

Though the seminary's church-planting program is only about six years old, the Upchurches are encouraged. More than 30 graduates have started 30-plus new churches; these graduates also have baptized approximately 600 new believers. In addition, current seminary students are planting an additional 30 churches.

The Upchurches and Ragains ask prayer that Ukrainians will see Jesus as the only truth; that students from Kiev Theological Seminary and their families will put their knowledge into practice as they plant churches; that students and financial resources will continue to come to the seminary; and that they will see fruitful results in mentoring and discipling the students who will spread the gospel across Eurasia. (BP, TAB)



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CAPITAL CITY — A skyline view of Kiev, Ukraine, which has nearly 3 million people, can be seen from the bell tower of Saint Sophia Monastery.