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'Go means go'

Great Commission 'about discipleship, not just evangelism,' Evans explains

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

When Jesus says to baptize them in Matthew 28, "He's not telling you to get them wet," Dallas pastor and radio personality Tony Evans said. "He's saying to Trinitize them ... like Paul said in Romans 6 ... raised to walk in newness of life, that's your baptism."

"If you don't look different, I don't care how wet you got."

Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, delivered the closing sermon of the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference (see story, page 4), held Feb. 27-28 at Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Attracting an overflow crowd of nearly 1,700, he detailed an hourlong exposition of the Great Commission, using a description of football as his backdrop.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, described Evans' sermon as "the most fresh, refreshing and inspiring exposition of the Great Commission I have ever heard."

Evans also reminded the racially diverse audience of past and present racial issues and urged it to be different from the culture.

As Paul told Peter in Galatians after Peter was pressured by his race not to mix with the Gentiles, "it is no longer about you. It is about Christ who is in you. You are supposed to be crucified with Christ."

"It is easy to be unified here today because this is a safe place," Evans told the crowd. "The world is not in here tonight. It's just us Christians hanging out together."

"But when you go to hostile territory, do you still represent the Kingdom or do you acquiesce to the culture?"



Photo by Neisha Fuson

CHALLENGING MESSAGE — Nearly 1,700 people pack the sanctuary and overflow room of Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Feb. 28 to hear Dallas pastor and radio personality Tony Evans at the State Evangelism Conference.

"God works through the Church to determine what He's going to do in society," Evans said, pointing to Ephesians 3:10. "If you belong to Jesus Christ, you aren't supposed to be a secret agent citizen. ... It's about implementation, not merely information."

"Jesus said, 'Teach them to observe whatever I have commanded you. ... Teach them how to live what I said, not just teach them what I said.'"

"You make disciples; you don't just have church," Evans said, pointing to the Great Commission at the end of Matthew 28. "The Great Commission is not about evangelism. The Great Commission is about discipleship, but you start discipleship with evangelism, with the good news of the gospel."

"The message of evangelism forgives your sins and guarantees you heaven," he said. "What it does not do is give you earth. That is discipleship."

Jesus says to deliver the word that

Christ has come and "the grace of God is available to all who come to faith alone by Christ alone for the gift of eternal life," Evans said. "But that's just the first participle (in the phrase). There are two more."

"You and I are living in a world today that is greatly divided ... politically ... racial division ... culture ... class and on and on," he said. "In the midst of all the calamity that engulfs the culture, God has a ... team that can't be owned by the home team or the visiting team."

Similar to the team of referees in a football game, God's disciples "are owned by the Lord."

The Great Commission was delivered during a scheduled meeting of the disciples called by Jesus after He

had risen from the grave but before He ascended into heaven, Evans said. "Jesus takes the podium ... and says, 'I'm in charge now' ... not only in the sweet by and by but in the nasty here and now; in heaven, where perfection reigns; and on earth, where evil is dispensed."

"I would like to suggest most Christians don't believe that," Evans said. "They've gotten intimidated by the plays on the field, the voices in the crowd. ... They've forgotten they have a (league) commissioner sitting in the chair."

"[Jesus] says to make disciples. ... The problem is not that God does not have enough Christians. His problem is that He doesn't have enough disciples."

Alabama, NAMB partnership changing

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) are entering a new phase of ministry, said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). NAMB no longer focuses on some ministries Alabama Baptists think important, so the partnership, including fund-

ing from NAMB, will be limited, he noted.

Reporting to the SBOM meeting Feb. 27 at the Baptist Building in Montgomery, Lance explained that NAMB's emphasis on church planting inhibits Alabama Baptists from being in full partnership as they have been in the past.

"We are involved in church planting (See 'Plotting,' page 3)

COMMENT

One of Those That Used to Happen

Shortly before the final session of the 2012 Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference began, a pastor sitting near me turned to a friend and said he hoped the session would be like those that people talk about that used to happen. “Maybe when we are older, we will talk about how great this conference was and the impact it had on Alabama Baptists,” he said.

The growing excitement about the session was easy to see. Scores of people skipped their evening meal to be sure they had good seats in the 1,350-seat auditorium of Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery. A half-hour before the scheduled time to begin, the auditorium was full and more than 300 people had to be escorted to overflow facilities.

The featured speaker was nationally known Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and radio preacher heard on more than 500 stations across the nation. His presence had been advertised locally, and hundreds of African-Americans from non-Southern Baptist churches joined the congregation for the final service of the annual evangelism conference.

The estimated crowd of nearly 1,700 may have been the most racially diverse gathering the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has ever assembled.

And Evans did not disappoint. With a mixture of perceptive illustrations, scholarly insights and astute applications, he made plain the Great Commission’s imperative to make disciples. Along the way, he chided Baptists who concentrate only on evangelism. “Getting people saved is the first step,” he declared. “The goal is to make disciples.”

Evans took note of the fact that he was speaking in Montgomery, site of the famous bus boycott that was catalytic for the civil rights movement. “We give thanks for the progress made in civil rights over the past 50 years,” he said. “But if the Church had been disciples and calling culture to play by the Book, the whole thing should have been over in about three minutes.”

Deftly moving between humorous personal examples and indicting applications of discipleship, Evans carried the congregation along. It was the Anglos in the congregation more than the African-Americans who encouraged him with shouts of “amen” and groans of “oh my.” In the end, a standing ovation was the crowd’s response.

The young pastor who hoped for a night to re-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

member got his wish. He heard what I personally believe to be one of the most prophetic and poignant sermons I have ever heard. What its long-term impact will be only God knows. Certainly if Alabama Baptists take seriously the Bible’s clear call to make disciples whose lives are changed to reflect God’s values, then church life in this state will change and so will the impact of God’s people.

Biblical discipleship

There is something dreadfully wrong when studies find no discernible differences between the values and lifestyles of Christians and non-Christians. There is something dreadfully wrong when Alabama Baptists make up more than 20 percent of the state’s population and yet, in the public square, are practically silent about God’s concern for hurting people. That is not biblical discipleship.

But the 2012 State Evangelism Conference was more than the final session. It was four excellent sessions, beginning on Monday evening with the key address by Mac Brunson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla. In previous years, the evangelism conference started Monday afternoon. But with only a handful of people there for the opening session, the beginning often was more like a whimper than a bang.

Not this year. Attendance was higher for the opening session than for most of the recent Monday night meetings. Perhaps it was because pastors know that First, Jacksonville, has a remarkable history of helping pastors. A pastor knows he is not going to be verbally “spanked” by someone from First, Jacksonville, for all the things he is not doing right. Pastors get enough of that in the ebb and flow of their regular work. The evangelism conference is supposed to be a time to be encouraged and refreshed. This year, it was.

Throughout the four sessions, the congregational singing was uplifting. Music evangelist Daniel Crews blessed participants as did the choir and orchestra of the host church in both evening sessions.

Perhaps the moment of greatest introspection came during the sermon by Larry Wynn, vice president of evangelism at the North American Mission Board. Wynn related vignettes about the growth of Hebron Baptist Church, Dacula, Ga.

During his pastorate, the church went from being a 200-member country church to one of the nation’s megachurches.

Over and over again, Wynn emphasized that people do not want to know how much one knows or one’s theological convictions. What people want to know is “how much you care” for them, he emphasized.

Wynn challenged those attending the evangelism conference to demonstrate in their personal ministries and their church’s ministries that they care for people as God cares for them.

Wynn described that kind of ministry as “obedience” and challenged those present to recommit themselves to obedience, seeing people as Jesus sees them and loving people as Jesus loves them.

Hundreds of pastors and others flocked to the altar. It was a special moment, a memorable moment for all. In a way, it set the stage for what Evans did in the closing service.

The 2012 State Evangelism Conference was promoted as a celebration of the 65th anniversary of the event. Sammy Gilbreath, director of evangelism for Alabama Baptists, recognized his predecessor, Harper Shannon, as the only other living director of that office and recalled contributions of evangelism conferences past.

But the greatest tribute to the anniversary was the conference itself. It was a time of inspiration, challenge, direction and more. This was a conference like “one of those that people talk about that used to happen” as the young pastor said.

Let us pray that its lasting impact will be as great as its initial impression.



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

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DON'T FORGET

to set your
clocks forward
March 11!





TAB graphic

Disaster relief offering set; Baptists challenged to give \$1

If every Alabama Baptist gave just \$1, we could purchase additional equipment for our associations to use in disaster relief," said Mel Johnson, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) disaster relief strategist. "We've got the personnel; we just lack the resources."

Alabama Baptists will have the opportunity to do just that as they gather to worship and remember the 2011 tornadoes April 22. On that day of remembrance, the SBOM is encouraging churches to receive a special offering to raise \$200,000 to purchase things like additional shower units, smaller feeding units and equipment to aid in cleanup and recovery efforts.

"Receiving this offering near the first anniversary of the (April 15 and 27) tornadoes is most appropriate," said Mike Shaw, president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham.

He added, "This offering will help us be ready for the next crisis by allowing us to purchase some much-needed equipment."

Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, plans to do its part by receiving the offering.

"This offering is a tangible way for our churches to do Great Commission ministry above and beyond what we are already doing," Pastor Tim Cox said.

Money given after the April 2011 tornadoes went to help storm survivors, Johnson explained. It was used to buy water, blankets and other necessities, not disaster relief equipment.

An annual offering for that purpose was introduced and approved by messengers at the state convention annual meeting in November. One hundred percent of the proceeds will be used to better equip disaster relief volunteers to minister during times of crisis.

After all, "disaster relief ministry is one of the most powerful witnesses we have," said John Brock, pastor of Highland Baptist Church, Florence, which plans to promote the offering.

Envelopes for the offering may be obtained by contacting Mondene Coker at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 273, or mcoker@alsbom.org.

For more information about the offering or day of remembrance, call Coker or visit www.sbd.org or www.facebook.com/alsbomdr. (TAB)

A TIME TO REMEMBER: 2011 TORNADOES April 22, 2012

For resources, visit www.sbd.org or call the SBOM disaster relief office at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 273.



Plotting the future

Alabama Baptists, NAMB to have 'limited' partnership

(continued from page 1)

ing, but to say it is the only way to do missions would be beside the point," he said. "To say it is a comprehensive way to do missions would not be a healthy, broad view; to say it is equivalent to and the only way to do evangelism is, at best, short-sighted.

"We do have to plant churches, but if we don't revitalize existing churches, we are going to miss North America," he added.

Besides NAMB emphasizing primarily church planting, it has not defined church planting or church planter, Lance said, noting he does not know how NAMB's plan compares to the model used by Alabama Baptists. In Alabama, associations work through local churches to determine new church plants and then bring in the SBOM to assist. In the past, the SBOM would bring NAMB to the table if appropriate.

"We work together," Lance said. "What happens now if NAMB decides to come to Alabama and start a church? Will there be some degree of conflict? Will it be a Southern Baptist church as we know it? Will it contribute through the Cooperative Program (CP)? Will it be in friendly cooperation with the association? What happens when our definitions (for church planting) are in conflict?" he asked.

"What about someone who is doing ministry evangelism? Is that individual going to have a relationship with NAMB? My hunch is probably not," he added. "My concern is that's missing an element that needs to be a full missions strategy."

NAMB helped fund ministry evangelism positions in the past, but the funding for these positions, which include church and community ministries, is "sort of fuzzy now," Lance said.

No longer equal

"Does the North American Mission Board want to have missionaries in Alabama who are not church planters?" NAMB has not clearly answered these questions and the partnership process is no longer worked out together, Lance said.

The cooperative agreement system between NAMB and the state conventions was established in 1958, and they would sit down as equal partners customizing ministries for the states, he said.

"Yes, some needed to be tweaked, but it worked pretty effectively here in Alabama," he said.

Alabama Baptists provide 52 percent of the funding to NAMB's 48 percent for personnel and ministries for jointly sponsored projects in Alabama. NAMB is adjusting that formula to 65 percent Alabama and 35 percent NAMB by 2018.

So the SBOM and associations have been working to decrease the amount of NAMB dollars — a little less than \$750,000 — coming in for

the 22 church planters and 18 associational and SBOM personnel impacted by this change.

"The real incentive was that we didn't have the 52 percent to match at times, and we certainly won't have the 65 percent in the future," Lance said.

Eliminating funds

By mutual consent, the SBOM and NAMB have agreed to eliminate \$166,000 in NAMB funding for seven SBOM state missionary positions by the end of 2013. Because these positions are critical to reaching Alabama for Christ, the SBOM will assume full responsibility for them moving forward, Lance noted. The funding of benefits (\$177,000) for 11 other ministry positions related to associations across the state will be phased out over the next six years.

These issues, plus the growing confusion and anxiety among Alabama Baptists, led Lance to move ahead to determine exactly how NAMB fits into Alabama Baptists' future.

"Where do we go from here? How do we continue to be on mission with the Great Commission, working together in Alabama, doing what we need to do and having some type of relationship with NAMB?"

"We renew our resolve to reach Alabama for Christ," he said, noting there are 42 state conventions partnering to reach North America and the world but only one convention focused on reaching Alabama. "We are going to have to become more fervent and serious [about] doing just that."

"We also refocus on effective ministries for the 21st century; balance an emphasis on church planting with one on church revitalization; affirm our convention-approved priorities of evangelism and discipleship, missions mobilization and leadership development; and stop the hemorrhaging in the Cooperative Program."

At the same time, Lance plans to continue downsizing the SBOM staff "without compromising ministry effectiveness." There were 119 staff members when he was elected executive director in 1998. Currently there are 93 staff members.

"We are moving toward 90 employees," he said.

To figure out the long-term plan for Alabama Baptists and NAMB, the Future Focus Task Force named last fall will continue its work. Four

state missionaries and six directors of missions are considering all feasible and responsible options for associations to relate to the SBOM, Lance said. From there, the SBOM will determine exactly how NAMB fits into the picture.

The existing Great Commission Task Force will continue working on a "big picture" missions and ministry strategy for the state convention, and Lance is working with other state executive directors on a study committee dealing with the overall picture of NAMB's relationship to state conventions.

"My goal with the study committee ... would be to clarify some things and get the anxiety levels down ... to try again ... to be partners in the process," he said. "There are a lot of moving parts."

"(We're) building a bridge to the future," he said. "What has happened has happened. However, I do think we have to [hit] the reset button if there is going to be a good collegial working relationship (with Alabama Baptists and NAMB) in the future. We can't make the same mistakes as were made in the past. This is not a defense of the State Board of Missions and not a defense of state conventions or the Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC). It is an explanation of the changing landscape as I see it and the challenges before us as I ascertain them."

"This ... should not be adversarial," he said, noting Alabama Baptists give NAMB around \$10 million a year through CP gifts and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. "It should be partners with some disagreement seeking to come to a place of agreement."

"We will partner with NAMB where we can, when we can and with whom we can," he said. "Alabama needs NAMB and NAMB needs Alabama but NAMB needs Alabama more than we need NAMB."

2013 budget

In other business, the SBOM approved a recommended CP base budget goal of \$42 million for 2013. This is \$1 million less than the 2012 budget but more than \$500,000 more than was received in 2011.

The budget goal would be split 57 percent to the ABSC and 43 percent to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and all monies coming in over the base budget would be split 50-50 between the ABSC and the SBC.



Alabama needs NAMB and NAMB needs Alabama but NAMB needs Alabama more than we need NAMB."

*Rick Lance
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions*



The Alabama Baptist is producing a special commemorative issue of the paper marking the one-year anniversary of the April 27, 2011, tornadoes. Initial plans call for up to 300,000 newspapers being distributed through the 3,200 Alabama Baptist churches.

For information on sponsorship opportunities, contact Bill Gilmore at 205-870-4720, Ext. 107 or bgilmore@thealabamabaptist.org.

Hundreds of pastors and others flock to the altar as Larry Wynn, vice president of evangelism at the North American Mission Board, leads in prayer at the State Evangelism Conference.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

‘Hope. Find it Here.’
STATE
EVANGELISM
conference

By Jennifer Davis Rash
 The Alabama Baptist

No one could put their finger on it, but several people acknowledged it.

“There is something different about this year’s evangelism conference.”

Yes, there was a new streamlined format for the 65th State Evangelism Conference — only four sessions instead of five, starting Monday night instead of Monday afternoon and simplifying it to speakers and music instead of combining them with a myriad of practical workshops.

Those items certainly impacted the feel of the event, but it’s more than that, said Sammy Gilbreath, director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). “There’s something more, but I’m not exactly sure what it is.

“This was the most unique experience in all my time organizing these events,” he said as he looked out over a racially diverse, packed sanctuary a half-hour before the closing session was to begin.

While Dallas pastor and radio personality Tony Evans (see story, page 1) attracted nearly 1,700 people for the closing session — 1,350 people in the sanctuary and another 300-plus people in an overflow room nearby — attendance was strong for all sessions. The other sessions remained consistent with around 800 people.

Every piece seemed to fit together — the pastors were hungry and the speakers were encouraging, the music fit everyone’s tastes and the overall spirit “was sweet” — Gilbreath explained.

“The speakers came to serve and that was contagious,” he added. “There was a desire to make a difference.”

Beginning the conference on Monday evening truly made a difference for the pastors who attended, said Mike Northcutt, pastor of the host church, Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Whether for the travel time or to have a few hours in the office Monday morning before coming to the conference, starting Monday evening took some pressure off of those desiring to attend, he said.

‘A shot in the arm’

The conference provides “a shot in the arm,” Northcutt said.

“Nobody can sustain a 100 percent focus on spiritual matters ... but these opportunities remind us ... and help us refocus on priorities.”

And Northcutt took the opportunity seriously. While he and his army of volunteers could be seen busily and joyfully assisting people and taking care of logistical issues in between sessions, Northcutt always found a spot on the front row during each of the sessions.

He was not alone in his attentiveness and



Several ministry displays line the hallway at Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, providing information and a space to fellowship.

Photo by Neisha Fuson

focus. Most of those attending the conference followed the same pattern.

From the opening welcome to the closing prayer, evangelism conference participants experienced a refuge from the distractions of life and ministry and had opportunity to worship, learn and be filled, Gilbreath said.

Mac Brunson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., headlined the opening night’s session. He focused on the believer’s commission through the illustration of John’s commission of John 20:30–31 in John 21.

The commission — taking the name of Jesus Christ to the world so they might believe in Him and have life — is priority, Brunson said.

“We do everything but what Jesus Christ called us to do,” he said. “We don’t have the priority of reaching people any more. It starts in the pulpit.

“Our priority must be sharing Jesus Christ.” There also is a “deficiency of our mission,” Brunson noted.

The Scripture passage describes professional fisherman who fished all night and didn’t catch anything until Jesus showed up.

“The deficiency in our mission is a lack of

dependency on the One who commissioned us,” he said. “We are reaching less and less people every single year because there is no dependency on Jesus Christ

“We are doing a lot of things this day and time but we aren’t directly talking to people about Jesus. We’ll invite them to church. We just won’t talk to them about Jesus.

“There’s got to be in all of this a recognition of the sufficiency of the One who commissions us,” Brunson said.

Just as Jesus asked His disciples if they had any fish, “He asks everyone of us, do you have any fish? That’s uncomfortable.”

Also on the program Monday night was Jeff Crook, pastor of Blackshear Place Baptist Church, Flowery Branch, Ga.

Preaching from Luke 16, Crook challenged Alabama Baptists to “Get Louder” in sharing the gospel and urged pastors to lead the way.

“The best resource we have as pastors is our people,” he said. “When our people begin to see what moves our heart and fires us up, it will begin to fire them up as well.

“We must be intentional about evangelism and keep it in front of our people.”

Why? “Because hell is very real,” Crook said, noting there will be sight, hearing, feel-

65th State Evangelism Conference • Feb. 27–28 • Eastmont Baptist Church • Montgomery, Alabama

ing, memory, hopelessness and concern in hell.

“The things people see and hear will be very dark, perverted, evil, bad,” he said. “People will literally be crying out because of the torment they are experiencing. ... (But) the hell of hells is to have your memory. ... They will remember when they rejected the gospel. ... I believe people in hell will remember by name silent Christians who fill our churches every Sunday.

“Hell is a fixed and final destination,” Crook noted. “All hope perishes ... but there will be concern for others.”

Luke 16 details how the rich man in hell wanted someone to tell his family about Jesus “lest they also come to this place of torment.”

“What was a high priority for the rich man in hell seems to become a low priority for us,” Crook said. “It seems people don’t talk about evangelism any more. ... Here we have a man in hell who has more compassion for the lost than some men who fill pulpits on Sunday.”

Whether it is because sin has silenced one’s witness or “we are too focused on ourselves,” either way “we need to repent ... and resolve to get loud with the gospel.”

“Evangelism — you’ve got to make room for it. Make it a priority,” he said. “If you don’t, you won’t.”

Adam Dooley, pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, opened the Tuesday morning session with a sermon on the unlimited potential of grace using the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10.

“(Christians) often act as if people will miss Jesus because they have sorted pasts, because they disappoint society or because we consider them unimportant,” Dooley said. “But God’s grace sees things that we don’t see. God’s grace covers things that we can’t cover. God’s grace is aware of people that we care nothing about.

“I’m convinced there is a desperate need to return to the pure unadulterated need of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not up for popular vote, not outdated and ineffective. The gospel is God’s primary means of changing lives.

“We preach the grace of God because God’s grace is available to every person ... is aware of every person ... (and) is adequate for every person,” Dooley said.

“We are often guilty of acting as if Jesus came to save the dignified and the qualified,” he said. “We act like that those we deem unimportant are not important to God.”

Dooley urged Alabama Baptists to use every opportunity possible to share the gospel.

“All people will be much more open to the gospel if we are just aware of their presence and their needs,” he said. “I’m not saying encouragement is a substitute for the gospel, but encouragement is a segue for sharing the gospel.

“Does it ever surprise you how much we lean on the grace of God and how unwilling we are to share the grace of God? ... Every-

one wants to receive grace but not everyone wants to share grace with others.

“I’m convinced one reason our heart doesn’t burn with evangelistic fervor is because we get caught doing the good things but not the best things. We get trapped doing ministry with people who don’t have a spiritual bone in their body,” he said.

“No one signs up to play referee with a bunch of bickering Baptists and yet isn’t that often what we do?”

“You are never more like Jesus than when you are seeking to save that which is lost. God is seeking to save sinners, and we are His hands and we are His feet.”

Frank Page, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee, shared about “An Irrecoverable Moment” from John 4:7–30, referencing the Samaritan woman at the well and her encounter with Jesus.

“Christ came to her and it had implications for her past, present and future,” Page said, noting salvation frees one from his or her past, alters his or her present and changes his or her future forever.

“These moments come in every life ... and in the lives of churches. God is dealing with the saved even to do something significant for the Kingdom.

“You can get it right or you can get it wrong,” he said.

“We put up these manmade barriers as if God can’t cross them. We waste a lot of time in God’s church dealing with things we should never waste His time about,” Page said.

‘Renew that passion’

“I want to challenge you ... if you have backed away from a passion of sharing Christ ... that today you’ll renew that passion. ... The world is desperately in need of an irrecoverable moment with Christ.”

Preaching from Matthew 9, Larry Wynn, vice president of evangelism at the North American Mission Board (NAMB), outlined the “have tos” in reaching ones community for Christ.

“I don’t care where God has planted you, if God has placed you there it is the right location. There are no insignificant locations in the eyes of God,” he said.

“If God can move in the first century where there was no building and no budget ... God can move in our church today,” Wynn said.

So, what do you have to have?

1. An obedient spirit.

“You’ve got to do what God says,” he said. “There is not a harvest problem; there is a labor problem.

“If we are going to generate laborers, He doesn’t say to find the latest and greatest program. I believe in doing programming, but programs without the power of God will never bring lasting results. If programs would win the world to Christ, Southern Baptists would have won the world many years ago.”

At the same time, “you cannot separate

prayer from evangelism,” he said. “If there’s anything we need in our church today, it is to fall on our face and ask God to give us a burden like anything we’ve had in years gone by.

“It is the Holy Spirit who brings revival.”

2. The eyes of Christ.

“We need to see people the way Jesus sees them,” Wynn said. “Do we really see the multitudes? One of the reasons we don’t see God move is that we are more concerned about what goes on among us as Christ followers than those who don’t know Christ.

“We are too concerned about things that don’t matter, things that are not going to make an eternal difference whatsoever.”

3. A heart that loves people the way Jesus loves them.

“You (and your church) are not on people’s radar unless you love them with a compassion and love Jesus Christ,” Wynn said. “The world is not looking for us to be fake, it is looking for us to be real.

“We must have Your mind, obey You,” he prayed. “We must have Your eyes, see the way You see. We must have Your heart, love the way You love.”

Wynn also challenged Alabama Baptists to pray a similar prayer.

“Don’t pray this prayer if you want to

remain the same and

look at church the

way you have always

looked at it,” he said.

“It will mess you up.

“When you start

caring about them and

spending time building

a relationship with

them, God will open

incredible doors to

share with them.”

Thomas Hammond,

formerly with NAMB

and now vice presi-

dent for convention

advancement at the

Executive Committee,

encouraged pastors

to take a fresh look at

their churches.

Preaching from Acts

3, Hammond shared

the story of the lame

man begging at the

temple gate and how

he walked for the first

time when Peter encour-

aged him. Peter saw

the need, got involved

and stepped out on

faith, Hammond said.

“Imagine what (the temple gate) looked like

... sounded like ... the smells. It was anything

but beautiful,” he said. “People walked by

this every day ... and some ignored them. ... [Those walking by] had grown deaf to their cries.

“Sometimes we walk by and just don’t see it any more, but on this particular day Peter walks by ... a very familiar sight ... and fixed his eyes on [the lame man].”

‘In the name of Jesus’

Pentecost had just happened and Peter was seeing his world with brand new eyes, Hammond said. “He is compelled to do something.

“Peter reaches down his hand to help [the lame man] up. He believed he was about to walk,” he explained. “When Peter is reaching down his hand, he’s doing it in the name of Jesus.

“Peter was nothing but a conduit of the power of God,” Hammond said. “If you are the body of Christ, aren’t you hooked up?

Phil Hoskins, pastor of Higher Ground Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tenn., urged Alabama Baptists to return the Holy Spirit to “his rightful place in our lives.”

“When we allow the Holy Spirit to anoint the preaching, teaching and music, lives will be changed,” he said. “When the Holy Spirit is allowed to breathe across our congregations one more time, I assure you ... business will

pick up in the house of the Lord.”

Preaching from Acts 2, Hoskins said, “Many Christians do not know what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit ... but ... if the disciples could not perform their work apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit, how much more do you and I need it?”

“When the wind of the Spirit is allowed to move among His people, gone with the wind will be those sins that hold back revival and the power of God in our lives,” he said.

The wind of the Spirit will carry away cowardice in witness-

ing, coldness in wor-

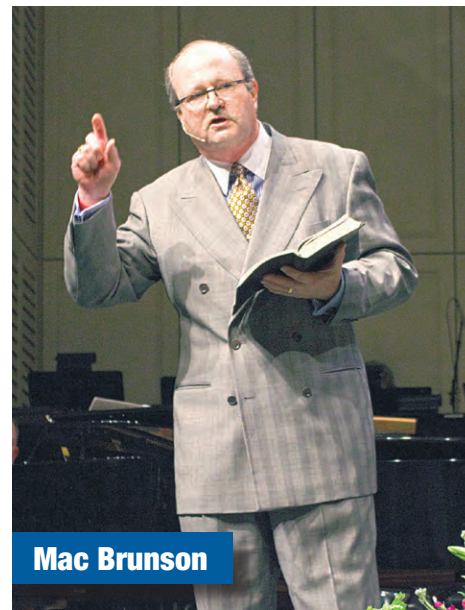
ship and contention in the walk, he noted.

Leading music during the evangelism conference was Roy McNeil, minister of music for Gardendale First Baptist Church. Providing special music was Eastmont Baptist’s choir and music evangelist from First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Daniel Crews.



Adam Dooley

Photo by Neisha Fuson



Mac Brunson

Photo by Neisha Fuson



Around 250 people attend a leadership development banquet held prior to the evangelism conference, featuring Greg Salciccioli.

Photo by Doug Rogers

Across Alabama's Associations

BETHEL

▶ **Pine Hill Church** will hold a harvest celebration weekend March 10–11. The Promise Trio, of Knoxville, Tenn., will sing Saturday at 7 p.m. Evangelist Phil Waldrep will speak Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Chris Kynard is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

▶ **McElwain Church, Birmingham**, will hold Mark Gungor's Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage video seminar March 30–31. The sessions will be Friday from 6:30–9:30 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m.–12:30 p.m. Call 205-956-0388 for child care registration. To register for the seminar visit <http://www.laughyourway.com/events/2012/03/Birmingham-AL/>. Joby Tricquet is pastor. ▶ **Shades Mountain Church, Vestavia Hills**, will host the Answers in Genesis Conference April 1–2. Ken Ham and Gary Parker will speak. Topics will include Reaching Today's Culture with the Gospel, Defending the Christian Faith Biblically and Scientifically and Defending the Christian Faith in a Secular World. For information visit www.answersingenesis.org/outreach/event/VestaviaHills2012/. Danny Wood is pastor.

BLOUNT

▶ **Pleasant View Church, Holy Pond**, will hold its third Sunday night singing March 18, 6 p.m., with The Fishermen. For information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

COLUMBIA

▶ **Bethlehem Church, Midland City**, will hold revival March 18–21 with Don Clark. Joe Holland will lead the music. Services will be Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and nightly at 6 p.m. Paul Edenfield is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

▶ **Westview Church, Sylacauga**, will hold revival March 18–20, 6:30 p.m., with Bill Baker, of Montgomery. For information visit www.wherethefriendsbecomefamily.com. Jimmie Roberts is pastor.

LIMESTONE

▶ **First Church, Athens**, will hold a women's conference April 21, 9 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. The theme will be "Perseverance: How to Handle Times of Trouble Through God's Word, James 1:2–4." Karen Alexander Doyel will speak. For tickets call 256-232-7829 or email jackie-jackson12@gmail.com by April 15.

Edwin Jenkins is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

▶ **Bellview Church, McCalla**, will hold a backyard barbecue cookoff March 24, 9 a.m., to raise money for church missions trips. To compete or for information email David Gallo at David.Gallo@stvhs.com by March 10. There will be a peoples choice winner for the best Boston butts. A community-wide picnic will follow. Tim Hassler is pastor.

WINSTON

▶ **Winston Association** will hold Spring Forward with Joy Prayer Brunch March 31, 9–11:30 a.m., at First Church, Addison. Nancy Parris will speak. Nikki Jefferson will provide special music. For reservations call Velma Everett at 256-747-2446 or the association at 205-489-5137 by March 22. Lee Taylor is pastor of First, Addison. Al Hood is director of missions for Winston Association.

OTHER

▶ **Union Hill Church, Bessemer**, will show the movie "Courageous" March 11, 6 p.m., in the main sanctuary. The event is for all ages. Mickey Bell is pastor. ☞

FBC Bayou La Batre endures fire; looks to 'renewal'

A fire at First Baptist Church, Bayou La Batre, on Feb. 29 marked the second time in almost seven years the historic church has suffered significant damage.

According to Pastor Clint Landry, who was next-door at the pastorium

when the fire began about 4:30 p.m., the blaze appeared to start after a vent fan in the attic shorted out. He said no one was inside the Mobile Baptist Association church at the time and the most significant fire damage occurred to the attic and roof.

The attic is located directly above the sanctuary's pulpit. As a result of extinguishing the fire, the sanctuary suffered water damage. "The main stage got pretty well soaked," Landry said.

He has already spoken to a contractor about the needed repairs. "The recovery may be worse than the fire itself," he explained, adding that a significant portion of the roof will have to be repaired — if not replaced entirely.

Community center

Until the repairs are completed, the congregation will meet at the Bayou La Batre Community Center for Sunday morning services.

The church will accommodate its Sunday and Wednesday evening activities at its facilities.

The church's main structure dates back to 1895, and in 2005, it, along with the rest of the campus, was located in Hurricane Katrina's path and was seriously affected by flooding.

But Landry, who has served as pastor since June 2010, predicted the fire will be remembered as "just a speed bump in the road." His prayer is that God will continue to use the church to minister to the community.

"This really comes during a time ... of incredible renewal [at the church]," he shared, adding that at a recent morning worship service, four new believers were baptized. (TAB)



Photo by Philip Hicks

BIVOCATIONAL PASTORS OFFICERS ELECTED

The 2012–13 officers for the Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Pastors are (l to r) Secretary/Treasurer Eric Sullivan of Liberty Baptist Church, Bessemer; Vice President Victor Bonner of Woodland Park Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa; and President Dave Sexton of Barton Chapel Baptist, Cordova.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

CP funding for Pastors Conference being phased out

NASHVILLE — In a three-year plan toward receiving full reimbursement from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Pastors Conference for use of the SBC annual meeting facilities, the Executive Committee voted Feb. 21 to increase the reimbursement stipulation of \$50,000 last year (up from \$38,000 in 2010) to \$100,000 for 2013, \$150,000 for 2014 and a full reimbursement for all costs by 2015.

The Executive Committee also asked Executive Committee staff to "continue to document the variable cost attributed to the Pastors Conference and annually request a written financial report be provided by the Pastors Conference leadership by Aug. 10 to the Executive Committee for review during its September meeting."

The Pastors Conference has paid a \$38,000 reimbursement since the 1992 SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis while its costs have risen over the years to \$201,000 last year in Phoenix, for example, and \$179,000 in 2010 in Orlando, Fla. The balance has been paid from Cooperative Program funds in the SBC Operating Budget.

Bryant Wright, who serves on the Executive Committee as SBC president, voiced concern.

Wright, a former Pastors Conference president, noted that the income received by the conference was not used solely for expenses but also was distributed to missions causes (helping with the translation of the "JESUS" film into an unreached people group's language in the Arabian Peninsula and conducting pastors conferences on two continents, encompassing about 20 countries).

GuideStone, Brotherhood Mutual form alliance

DALLAS — GuideStone Financial Resources and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company have announced the formation of an alliance to provide property and liability insurance services to Southern Baptist churches and affiliated ministries.

GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins said the alliance with Brotherhood Mutual brings together two ministry-focused organizations that share common values as well as a heritage of serving churches.

"The risk management needs of churches continue to grow and change," Hawkins said. "Brotherhood Mutual understands the unique needs of ministries, and working with them through this new alliance enhances and strengthens our ability to provide the best possible property and liability coverage for the churches and ministries we serve."

Brotherhood Mutual is one of the nation's leading church specialty insurance companies, with an A Excellent rating from the A.M. Best credit rating organization and more than \$337 million in assets. Brotherhood Mutual provides property, liability, commercial auto, workers' compensation and foreign travel insurance coverage exclusively to churches and related ministries in 42 states and the District of Columbia.

Loper resigns as head of medical-dental group

OKLAHOMA CITY — Dr. Fred Loper, executive director of Baptist Medical Dental Fellowship (BMDF), announced his resignation effective May 31, 2012. Loper served BMDF for nearly 10 years, first as associate executive director and then as executive director.

During his tenure, Loper led the organization in membership growth, established numerous strategic partnerships both nationally and internationally and led international teams of health care professionals in projects to Central America, Mexico and India.

Loper brought an extensive background in this consultation from his years of service with the North American Mission Board. Recently BMDF was the recipient of a large charitable grant that led to the purchase and operation of a mobile medical and dental clinic that currently serves the Oklahoma City homeless population and the uninsured in rural Oklahoma. For more information, go to www.bmdf.org.

Baptist college files suit against contraceptive mandate

PINEVILLE, La. — A Baptist college has joined the list of schools and universities suing the federal government in opposition to the Obama administration's contraceptive/abortion mandate, making it clear the issue is not simply a Catholic one.

Louisiana College — affiliated with the Louisiana Baptist Convention — filed suit Feb. 20 in federal court, saying the mandate violates the U.S. Constitution by, among other things, entangling the government in religious matters and forcing the college to violate its "sincerely held religious beliefs regarding abortion."

"The time for silence is over," Louisiana College President Joe W. Aguiard said. "Louisiana College will not sit by and allow this or any government to usurp our God-given religious freedoms." ☞

'No compromise'

Amendment boosting contraceptive/abortion mandate's conscience protections dies

Reactions to the Obama administration's controversial contraceptive/abortion mandate continue to mount as the U.S. Senate deals a setback to the effort to protect religious freedom and conscience rights, and religious leaders voice grave concern over the issue.

With a 51-48 vote, senators tabled an amendment March 1 to guard the "religious beliefs or moral convictions" of those offering and purchasing insurance under the health care law enacted in 2010. By its action, the Senate refused to consider — and, in essence, killed — a proposal offered by Sen. Roy Blunt, R.-Mo., in response to a requirement under the law that all health insurance plans cover without cost to employees sterilizations and contraceptives, including those that can cause abortions.

The contraceptives, as designated by the federal government, include drugs — such as "ella" and the "morning-after" pill Plan B — that act after fertilization and destroy a human embryo.

Religious liberty advocates have criticized what they have described as an inadequate religious exemption in the mandate since it was issued in January.

President Obama announced Feb. 10 an accommodation that he said protects religious organizations by making insurance companies responsible for paying for contraceptives and sterilization, but critics contended his solution was insufficient. Some described it as an "accounting gimmick" that would still require religious organizations to be complicit in paying for employees' abortion-causing contraceptives through their insurance companies. They have pointed out the president's accommodation would not protect faith-based insurance plans or individuals who object to paying for such products.

Supporters of the Blunt amendment expressed their disappointment after the Senate vote.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) is "outraged by the Senate's decision to kill" the amendment, said Richard Land, the Southern Baptist entity's president.

'Not about contraception'

"Make no mistake, the Senate vote was not about contraception but about the right of people of faith to be able to live out the values of their faith free from government coercion," Land said. "This insensitive response to our pleas to the Senate to protect religious freedom from government coercion cannot go unchallenged."

"If the government can tell its citizens that their First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom and conscience is subject to its dictates, then the First Amendment offers no protection to people of faith," Land said.

Charmaine Yoest was "absolutely appalled" that the Senate failed to defend Americans' First Amendment rights, the president of Americans United for Life said at a Capitol Hill news conference after the vote.

Matt Bowman, legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, said in a written statement, "Every vote for religious freedom should be unanimous, but tragically, our fun-

damental freedoms didn't seem to matter to enough senators."

The 51-48 roll call on the Blunt amendment fell nearly along party lines, with the Democrat majority holding its advantage. Three Democrats — Sens. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Ben Nelson of Nebraska — voted against tabling the proposal. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine was the lone Republican to vote to table it. Snowe announced her retirement only two days before the vote.

"This insensitive response to our pleas to the Senate to protect religious freedom ... cannot go unchallenged."

Richard Land
The Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission

Supporters of the Blunt amendment will continue to work for stronger conscience protections in the contraceptive/abortion mandate, they said afterward. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R.-Neb., has 219 co-sponsors for a similar bill he has introduced in the House of Representatives.

The ERLC "will continue to press this battle for freedom to the very end," Land said. "We call on all people who love liberty to join us in this must-win struggle against government tyranny."

After the vote, Penny Nance, president of Concerned Women for America, told Baptist Press the House "is absolutely determined to vote on this, and the leadership will make sure that happens. ... So we fully expect the Senate to have another opportunity to vote on it. This isn't done."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Right to Life Committee and Family Research Council were among other organizations to declare their intention to continue to work for sufficient religious freedom protections in the mandate.

Foes of the Blunt amendment — including Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union and Planned Parenthood Federation of America — applauded the Senate's action.

The vote is "an important victory for covering contraceptives just like other preventive health care," said Cecile Richards, Planned Parenthood's president.

Americans United asserted the amendment was too broad and would have harmed religious liberty and public health.

Under the Blunt amendment, no plan would have been considered to have failed the requirements of the health care law if it declined to provide coverage because:

"[P]roviding coverage (or, in the case of a sponsor of a group health plan, paying for coverage) of such specific items or services is contrary to the religious beliefs or moral convictions of the sponsor, issuer, or other entity offering the plan; or

"[S]uch coverage (in the case of individual coverage) is contrary to the religious beliefs or moral convictions of the purchaser or beneficiary of the coverage."

Land urged 20 senators, including 11 Democrats, in a Feb. 28 letter to back the Blunt amendment. They were chosen because they

had not yet officially joined the list of co-sponsors or were considered open to an appeal. Nine of the 20 voted against tabling the amendment. Another, Republican Mark Kirk of Illinois, was the only senator not to vote.

In related news, a diverse coalition of 500-plus religious leaders, university presidents and professors, and health care professionals has signed a statement calling the contraceptive/abortion compromise a "grave violation of religious freedom" that "cannot stand."

"The simple fact is that the Obama administration is compelling religious people and institutions who are employers to purchase a health insurance contract that provides abortion-inducing drugs, contraception, and sterilization," the Feb. 27 letter reads. "... It is an insult to the intelligence of Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other people of faith and conscience to imagine that they will accept an assault on their religious liberty if only it is covered up by a cheap accounting trick."

Government coercion

"Under the new rule, the government still coerces religious institutions and individuals to purchase insurance policies that include the very same services" that were offered before the compromise, the statement reads. "It is no answer to respond that the religious employers are not 'paying' for this aspect of the insurance coverage."

"For one thing," the statement adds, "it is unrealistic to suggest that insurance companies will not pass the costs of these additional services on to the purchasers. More importantly, abortion drugs, sterilizations and contraceptives are a necessary feature of the policy purchased by the religious institution or believing individual. They will only be made available to those who are insured under such policy, by virtue of the terms of the policy."

It matters not "who explains the terms of the policy" purchased by the religious organizations, the statement says. From a moral perspective, it only matters "what services the policy covers" — and the policy covers contraceptive, abortion-causing drugs and sterilization.

"This so-called 'accommodation' changes nothing of moral substance and fails to remove the assault on religious liberty and the rights of conscience, which gave rise to the controversy," the statement reads. "It is certainly no compromise."

Among the Baptist signers were Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Robert Sloan Jr., president of Houston Baptist University; David Whitlock, president of Oklahoma Baptist University; Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver, president of East Texas Baptist University; David Dockery, president of Union University; and Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.

(Compiled from BP stories)

Two north Alabama churches damaged by March 2 storms

Two Alabama Baptist churches were damaged when strong storms, including two tornadoes, moved through the northern section of the state early March 2. Severe damage and at least seven injuries were being reported in Limestone and Madison counties at press time. The northern and central parts of the state remained under a severe weather threat through the rest of the afternoon and evening.

As the initial storm front moved through the state, Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, put disaster relief teams on alert for possible assignment.

"Our Rapid Response Assessment Team (RRAT) is going to deploy but we are not going to put anyone in there until daylight because there is a severe threat of significant weather ... extending into the evening," he said at press time. While waiting on the weather to pass through, however, Johnson was communicating with his disaster relief contacts in Madison and Limestone Baptist associations, who were out in the communities making initial assessments.

Flint River Baptist Church, Meridianville, suffered major roof damage from the morning tornadoes that swept through extreme north Alabama, according to Ron Lynch, church ministries director for Madison Baptist Association. He said Flint River Baptist Pastor Steve Bell reported no injuries at the church at press time.

U.S. Highway 231/431 near Meridianville — where Flint River Baptist is located — was reportedly closed following the storms due to the damage, and power lines were down throughout the area. Area subdivisions and businesses suffered damage as well.

Fairview Baptist Church, Athens, had received significant damage to its roof, windows, back carport and shed, according to Limestone Baptist Association Director of Missions Robert Fullerton. The area near the church, located at the corner of Nick Davis Road and East Limestone Road, received "a lot of damage with roofs off of homes and houses torn up," Fullerton said.

But despite the damage, Pastor George Whitten and Fairview Baptist members were "on a spiritual high" and "doing OK" as they worked on putting up tarps on the church's roof before the next set of storm systems passed through the area, Fullerton said.

Also damaged was Buckhorn High School and Middle School campus in New Market; however, no students were injured. Limestone Correctional Facility in Harvest was also hit.

At press time, 17,000 customers were reporting power outages near Huntsville. The areas hit hardest were Athens, Hazel Green, Harvest, New Market and Meridianville. (TAB)

"We call on all people who love liberty to join us in this must-win struggle against government tyranny."

Richard Land
The Ethics & Religious Liberty
Commission



IMB photo

TAKING THE GOSPEL — Angela Jenkins, a member of Grace Heritage Church, Auburn, says her life in snowy Russia isn't extraordinary, 'it's just an intentional lifestyle — something that we all get to do wherever we are in the world.'

'An intentional lifestyle'

Alabama Baptist working in Russia brings 'nearness of God'

By Ava Thomas
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Angela Jenkins lives her life layered like an onion, wading through blankets of snow.

But in her mind, there's nothing special about her being a Southern Baptist representative in the cold climate of Russia.

"I think it's just an intentional lifestyle — something that we all get to do wherever we are in the world," said Jenkins, a member of Grace Heritage Church, Auburn. "Some people have very specific calls to a particular place or people, but I think for me, I was just willing and eager to go to a different culture."

And God opened the door for her to move to Russia.



IMB photo

HEAVY ON TRADITION — Jenkins says the biggest need for people with a religious orthodox background is to hear the gospel and have changed lives.

"I didn't have a particular interest in Russia, but I was, in general, interested in Eastern Europe," Jenkins said. "When I saw the request for someone to come and teach and work with students too, it seemed like it was written just for me."

Jenkins spends her day homeschooling four preteen and teenage girls — the daughters of other Southern Baptist representatives in the city where she lives.

She also teaches English to Russian speakers, helps with English camps and spends time building relationships with students so she can share the gospel with them.

"I think God is working to bring people to Himself here through long-term relationships with a lot of trust built and time spent talking through questions and reading the Bible together," she said.

"I think young people are in general open to spiritual things, but not Christianity in particular. Post-communism has left some people very hopeless but has also opened the door for faith. People are looking for answers to life's questions."

The place where she lives was a "secret city" during Soviet times — the site of a missile factory.

Many residents of the city are working-class people, but a prestigious segment of society exists too.

The people in her city are not known for being friendly right off the bat, but once you have met them, they are "extremely open and generous," Jenkins said.

The population, about a million strong, lives in a city of ice and snow surrounded by dense forest.

"Almost everyone lives in apartments, and everyone likes to walk outside — even taking their infants out for a brisk stroll in the negative-degree weather," she said.

The people are diverse, not the fair-skinned, blue-eyed, bearskin-cap-wearing stereotype often thought of for Russians, she said. Many are from Uzbekistan, the nation

of Georgia, Kazakhstan and other countries. And not all are from orthodox traditions — many are from Muslim backgrounds.

"This city needs God's power and grace to open eyes and bring people to Himself," Jenkins said.

And, she said, it needs for its churches to get a passion for their city and for reaching out.

'A living hope'

"It is my prayer that the local church and believers here will become more and more equipped to share the truth in their own culture and context with their own friends and family," she said.

The biggest need for people with a religious orthodox background is "to have truly opened ears and eyes to hear the gospel and have changed lives — a living hope that pervades all of their lives and not just their weekly traditions," Jenkins said.

Marjorie Davis, a Southern Baptist representative who also serves among Russians, said Jenkins' life is helping to turn that ship around.

"Most Russians know about God and about Jesus Christ, but many associate Him with rituals, condemnation and the outdated ways of their grandmothers," she said. "They need to see Him as real and true, and that's what Angela does — she brings the nearness and love of God through her gentle and compassionate spirit."

Her sincerity shines, Davis said.

"She really listens and really cares, and that's what gets through to a people group that many consider difficult to reach out to. I've seen how people are drawn to the love of Christ in her just by how attentive and genuine she is, and that's something this culture desperately needs — to know that God is real and near and that He really cares."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons. (IMB)

Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, Correspondent, TAB

Eugenia Brown

Olive Branch Baptist Church, Evergreen
Conecuh Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES: Psalm 121

FAVORITE HYMN: "Go Tell It on the Mountain"

HOBBIES: Spending time with children, grandchildren and great-grandchild

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after almost 60 years of marriage to Dan; three children, Herbert, Katherine and Frances; four grandchildren; and one great-grandson



BROWN

Eugenia Brown was the first full-time director of missions for Conecuh Baptist Association. She served in that role for approximately three years. Brown also taught a women's Sunday School class

for 50 years and served as a member of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, representing District 6 for 10 years.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: I was blessed to have a mother and father who loved the Lord. I can't remember when I was not taught Bible verses. ... I was carried to Sunday School and church. Then when I was 11 years old, I accepted Him. It was because of the rearing of my mother and father.

Q: How did you become involved in ministry?

A: I have to go back to my mother. She taught me by example to minister.

Q: What were some of ministry's most rewarding aspects?

A: Getting to know people, to share the Lord and for them to share the Lord with me.

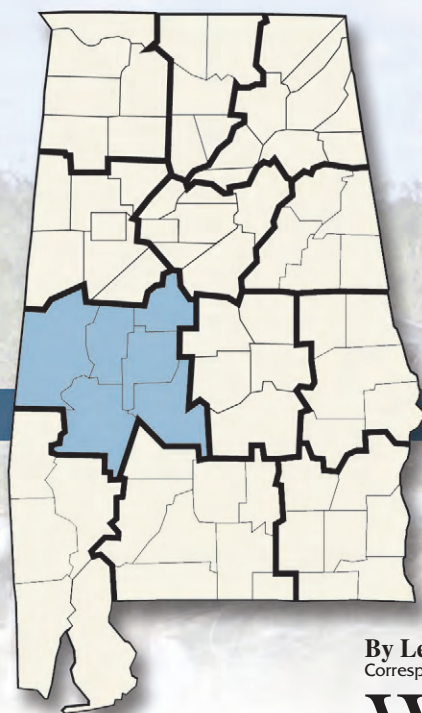
Q: How did your family members support you?

A: They have supported me when I would be away from home. [They also have supported me] with their labor and with their prayers.

Q: What difference has Christ made in your life?

A: I couldn't make it without Him. It's because of His grace that I'm able to live every day.

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.



Baptists RESPOND

to areas devastated by April 2011 tornadoes

Alabama Baptists help District 8 recover, rebuild

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When more than 60 tornadoes traversed the state April 27, 2011, Alabama Baptists' District 8 felt some of their wrath.

In that area, which encompasses Bibb, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Marengo, Perry and Sumter counties, "[the] damage was in isolated pockets," reported Mike Jackson, director of the office of leadership and church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and a state missionary serving District 8 at the time.

Though the damage was not widespread, where it did occur, it impacted people in a significant way, Jackson noted.

He offered Sawyerville in Hale County as an example. "(The tornadoes) really turned their lives upside down," Jackson observed.

At least seven people in Hale and Bibb counties were among the more than 240 Alabamians who lost their lives, according to news reports.

For the most part, the District 8 counties saw to their own cleanup, recovery and reconstruction, Jackson said. In the Eoline community in Bibb County, for instance, people ministered to those around them.

Selma Baptist Association volunteers worked in the district before relocating to serve in another area.

There were also groups from outside the region who ministered in District 8, such as Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Gordo, in Pickens Baptist Association, Jackson said.

And the district's people ministered to others in harder hit areas, he added.

Bethel Baptist Association

Bethel Baptist Association, located in Marengo County, felt the storms' impact and responded to needs outside its area.

Two tornadoes struck in mid-April, and another storm system hit April 27. Director of Missions (DOM) Bobby Hopper, who serves as District 8 disaster relief coordinator, said the association's disaster relief volunteers were put on alert the morning of April 27. They were to respond with Selma Association to Tuscaloosa but had to wait to leave



Photo courtesy of Bobby Hopper

RESPONDING TO NEEDS — Disaster relief volunteers from Bethel Baptist Association help clean up debris in Tuscaloosa following the April 27 tornadoes.

until after a second storm passed.

Then a storm struck Linden. "We worked that storm on the way to Tuscaloosa," Hopper said.

The workers cleaned in Bethel Association as much as they could before dispatching elsewhere. "We were hurting and helping the hurting," Hopper said.

Volunteers from Bethel, Selma, Clarke and Washington associations served in Tuscaloosa for several days until Selma Association was redirected to the Birmingham area, he said.

Some from Bethel Association remained in Tuscaloosa for weeks, Hopper said.

The association was involved not only in cleanup in Tuscaloosa but also with assessments and administration. "We were heavily involved early on," Hopper said.

To assist in recovering and rebuilding, Bethel Association has partnered with Choctaw and Tuscaloosa Baptist associations, he said.

Hopper added that Bethel and Selma associations helped assess damage sustained in Choctaw As-

sociation from the mid-April tornadoes.

Volunteers cleaning up in Nanafalia in southwest Marengo County had to seek shelter from those storms, Hopper said. Their destructive forces came within 75 yards of where the volunteers were.

All of District 8 was affected by those storms, he continued.

When it comes to disasters, "you can't totally get ready for them," Hopper noted. Each disaster brings with it a different level of standards for preparing for the next crisis. "It is a learning experience."

But one thing that remains constant is the need for more people to be trained to help in a disaster, Hopper said.

Bibb Baptist Association

In Bibb County, as many as 45 houses were damaged April 27, along with a fire station and Eoline Baptist Church. Bill Russell, DOM for Bibb Baptist Association, also reported a fatality in the county.

It was one of two April storm systems that left a mark on the county.

About 10 days prior, a tornado followed almost the same path, felling a lot of trees and damaging a cemetery, Russell said.

After the April 27 storms, Selma Association volunteers assisted in Eoline on the way to Tuscaloosa, he said.

The Bibb Association building was used for feeding people affected by the storms and preparing meals for volunteers in Eoline, Russell said. Volunteers from the association received assistance from Shelby and Selma associations.

In addition, the building became a distribution point for items that individuals needed, Russell said.

"We kept it here for a while and sent a lot to Eoline," which also had a distribution site, he said. Likewise items were given to the Red Cross.

"We had volunteers taking supplies to other places as well," such as Fultondale, Russell continued.

He explained that some supplies went to a Bessemer location, which disseminated them to various (See 'Associations,' page 10)

District 8

Hale Association

Bibb Association

Cahaba Association

Selma Association

Bethel Association

Bigbee 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 more than halfway through a monthly series highlighting storm recovery and relief assistance in each of the 12 districts.

Associations, churches help with relief efforts

(continued from page 9)

points throughout the state, such as Hackleburg and Cullman.

"[They] ended up going all over Alabama really," Russell said of the items donated to Bibb Association. "We tried to be a conduit to people who needed things we had."

He noted that Pineview Baptist Church, Brent, was a drop-off point for supplies to go to various locales in the state.

In addition, the association's people helped rebuild in the county. Russell said particular assistance went to Mount Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, which worked to relocate a family left homeless by the storm.

"It always gives you a blessing to be able to help people," he said.

Since that time, two family members have been baptized into the fellowship of Mount Carmel Baptist, Russell said.

Drawing together to help in this disaster has built greater camaraderie among Bibb Association churches, reached at least one family with the gospel and spurred interest in disaster relief preparedness, he said.

Bigbee Baptist Association

On April 27, Greene and Sumter counties did not suffer harm. However, during the mid-April storms, there was damage in Sumter County's Geiger community. Several homes were destroyed, as were two churches of other denominations.

Larry Potts, DOM of Bigbee Baptist Association, said several churches — such as Christian Valley Baptist and First Baptist, both in Livingston — were involved in relief efforts in Geiger. After the April 27 storms, some volunteers from the association served in Tuscaloosa.

Bigbee Association consists of 17 churches and has about five trained disaster relief volunteers, Potts said. "We're really just getting started in disaster relief," he said.

The rash of disasters has "given us an awareness of our need to be prepared," Potts continued. "(It has) gotten people interested in being involved." He noted that a lot of psychological and spiritual needs still must be addressed in the lives of individuals affected by the storms. Plus many structures are yet to be built.

Cahaba/Hale Baptist associations

Perry County, where Cahaba Baptist Associ-



Photo courtesy of Bobby Hopper

FAITHFUL TO SERVE — Disaster relief volunteers from Bethel Baptist Association work to remove a fallen tree in Tuscaloosa following the April 27 tornadoes. The association also helped with assessments and administration.

ation is situated, was spared April 27. But that was not the case earlier that month when Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion, was damaged.

Bill Wallace, DOM for Cahaba and Hale associations, said Cahaba Association gave funds to help rebuild a home along Highway 29 in Perry County and assist in other areas of the state after the April storms. Wallace said Cahaba Association's people are very diligent in helping others and contributed thousands of dollars for disaster relief work.

On April 27, Hale County did not fare as well as Perry County. Wallace reported that about 50 residences were lost, many of them in Sawyerville. "It really hit them hard," he said.

In an area near New Hope Baptist Church, Moundville, seven homes were destroyed, Wallace said.

People from Cahaba and Hale associations became involved in a project to rebuild one of the homes, he said.

For the most part, the disaster relief work needed in the area was done by people in the community. A team from a Bessemer church, though, did help with cleanup and held a block party in Sawyerville, Wallace said.

Hale Association does not have a disaster relief team, he continued. "In the country, we just do it ourselves."

Mennonites arrived on the scene quickly, aiding those affected by the storms.

Also Wallace said his associations received about \$4,000 in relief assistance.

He said a group is scheduled to rebuild a church in Greensboro this summer. Although that church is not in Hale Association, he is helping to coordinate the construction effort.

Selma Baptist Association

Dallas County, home to Selma Baptist Association, sustained minimal damage April 27, DOM Tom Stacey said. It experienced more damage during the mid-April tornadoes, after

which the association's chain saw crew worked in Nanafalia, Sweet Water, Beaver Creek and elsewhere in Marengo County.

On April 28, the crew began its day assisting in Eoline and went on to the Birmingham area from there. Afterward it traveled to Tuscaloosa and Cottondale, where it remained for 10 days, Stacey said.

"I'm very proud of our team," he said of the 30 trained volunteers who have been "very faithful to serve" and are ready to help with rebuilding projects.

Already Selma Association has sent money to St. Clair and DeKalb Baptist associations, as well as Cottondale Baptist Church, all of which saw much damage from the April 27 tornadoes.

While working near Cottondale, volunteers came in contact with a couple who moved to the area from Louisiana because they lost everything in Hurricane Katrina in 2005. On April 27, they lost everything again. On three occasions, volunteers have traveled to the area to assist, pray with and check on them, Stacey said.

In the April tornadoes' aftermath, "everybody (in Selma Association) was doing something," even the smaller churches, he said.

Assisting seemed universally important to the association's people because "everybody here had a contact in the affected area" — friends or family, Stacey said. So they gathered items, gave money or went.

Hale, Cahaba assoc. rebuild home

Relatives, friends, neighbors and volunteers from Hale and Cahaba Baptist associations built a home for someone who lost hers to a tornado April 27, 2011.

On that stormy day, Willa Dean Cook's home was one of six, along with a Methodist church, destroyed in the vicinity of New Hope Baptist Church, Moundville, in Hale Association.

But through the efforts of her son-in-law Butch Hardy, Hale and Cahaba associations Director of Missions Bill Wallace, contractor Glynward Coley, lead carpenter Grady Montz and many volunteers, Cook now has a 1,200-square-foot, two-bedroom home.

Cook, who attends New Hope Baptist, was able to purchase the necessary materials and volunteers gave their time to the project, said Hardy, who also attends New Hope and lost his home in the storm.

"I was glad I could help," said Montz, who attends Pine Grove Baptist Church, Brent, in Cahaba Association.

He found it "exciting" to work with volunteers and was impressed with the number of people willing to serve.

Coley, who attends Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, in Cahaba Association, believes this endeavor exemplifies local missions.

"The local folks built that house," he said.

Construction began in August and Cook moved into the home in November, Hardy said.

When Cook saw her home taking shape, it brought tears to her eyes.

"It was just great. It was just wonderful. It was such a blessing," she said.

And "it's really pretty," Cook said of her new home. (TAB)

How to assist in relief efforts

For help in finding associations in need of construction projects, call the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions at 1-800-264-1225.

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

For other ways to get involved, call

▶ Bethel Baptist Association at 334-295-8805,

▶ Bibb Baptist Association at 205-926-7866,

▶ Bigbee Baptist Association at 205-652-7705,

▶ Cahaba Baptist Association at 334-683-6313,

▶ Hale Baptist Association at 205-361-0274 or

▶ Selma Baptist Association at 334-872-1640. (TAB)

FBC Livingston, Christian Valley assist Geiger, Tuscaloosa communities

After a mid-April tornado struck Sumter County's Geiger community, help came from several sources.

People from First Baptist Church and Christian Valley Baptist Church, both in Livingston and Bigbee Baptist Association, along with members from other churches, went to the area to try to meet the needs of those affected by the storm.

College students from First, Livingston and the University of West Alabama (UWA) worked a week in Geiger, Pastor Jerry Hall said.

"Old and young went" from Christian Valley Baptist to clean up yards and remove debris from houses, Pastor Matthew Kelley said.

Christian Valley volunteers assisted about three days a week for three or four weeks. Kelley estimated that there were probably 15 people working each time.

"They're good people," he said of the members of his church, which averages about 75 in Sunday worship. "They've got big hearts."

A team of about 10 from Christian

Valley did chain saw work and gave out lunches in Tuscaloosa after tornadoes ravaged that area April 27, Kelley said.

Some volunteers from First, Livingston, also served in Tuscaloosa and other places, cooking and serving food and delivering the meals into the community when needed, Hall said.

A cooperative effort

Butch Larkin, who attends First, Livingston, explained that workers prepared some meal items in the church's kitchen and transported them to different sites to feed volunteers, first responders and people affected by the storms.

It was a cooperative effort of the church, the community and businesses, Larkin said. Probably 40 people from four counties and UWA assisted in the effort.

In all, they prepared about 2,500 meals in roughly 10 days, Larkin said.

"I was just glad that we could be there," Hall said.

After all, meeting needs during a crisis may plant a seed that later brings someone to Christ, he said. (TAB)

Selma Assoc. helps tornado-ravaged areas

As of April 2011, Selma Baptist Association's disaster relief team had been deployed 26 times to six states in 12 years, according to Director of Missions Tom Stacey.

"Boy, we've been busy since then," Stacey said.

In April and May 2011, the team served after tornadoes struck Marengo, Jefferson, Tuscaloosa and Bibb counties.

Then, in January 2012, it helped after twisters hit Maplesville and Clanton, Stacey reported.

Now the association stands ready to assist with rebuilding in damaged areas, he said. It already has 20 construc-

tion trips to eight states to its credit.

Plus Selma Association has undertaken another six ministries in Minnesota, Canada and Haiti.

Disaster relief and construction naturally benefit the receivers, Stacey explained. However, the two also are a blessing to those who give the assistance, he said. Being involved in these endeavors has drawn the men of the association together and impacted their worldview.

Stacey said they realize that if they are willing to go all the way to Kentucky to lead someone to Christ, then they should have no problem going across the street to do the same. (TAB)

Sprott's Ephesus Baptist makes plans to rebuild

The sanctuary of Ephesus Baptist Church, Sprott, in Cahaba Baptist Association was destroyed by a January tornado.

Because of the damage to the sanctuary, members of the church — which averages about 30 in Sunday worship and is led by Pastor Henry LeVert — had been meeting in the fellowship hall. However, members are now meeting at a nearby church.

Church officials have met with an architect to begin the rebuilding process, said David Wallace, who is the chairman of the building committee, the trea-

surer and a deacon at Ephesus Baptist.

The building project would replace the sanctuary and Sunday School rooms, he said.

Wallace noted that a lot of donations have been given locally to rebuild the church. Ephesus also has received funds from East Side Baptist Church, Cullman, in East Cullman Baptist Association, which suffered its own loss in the April 27 tornadoes.

"We certainly appreciate all the donations we've gotten to help with our rebuilding," Wallace said. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Bobby Hopper

'A HEART FOR PEOPLE' — Milton and Scarlet Cherry, who attend Fairhaven Baptist Church, Demopolis, in Bethel Baptist Association, became disaster relief volunteers because of all the tough times through which the Lord has brought them.

Fairhaven Baptist couple feel 'God calling them' to disaster relief

Disaster relief is a team effort. "One person can't do it all," said Milton Cherry, who attends Fairhaven Baptist Church, Demopolis, in Bethel Baptist Association and serves as coordinator for the association's disaster relief team.

Like so many disaster relief teams in the state, Bethel Association's team was busy last year, especially during April and May.

Just hours after the April 27 tornadoes, the team was to go to Tuscaloosa to assist. On the way, it cleaned up storm damage that occurred between Linden and Demopolis, Cherry said.

After arriving in Tuscaloosa, the team spent five days serving through Cottondale Baptist Church. Afterward Cherry and wife Scarlet, who is trained in disaster relief chaplaincy as he is, went home for a day

before returning with Selma Baptist Association's disaster relief team for another five days of work.

After that came a request for him to remain in Tuscaloosa three more days with groups from Wetumpka and Northport.

The Cherrys became involved in disaster relief after Milton Cherry's retirement in 1999.

They assisted in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and have worked with Campers on Mission.

Milton Cherry said they became disaster relief volunteers because of all the tough times through which the Lord had brought them. They felt God calling them to serve in

"I love talking to the people. I have a heart for people going through bad times."

Milton Cherry
Fairhaven Baptist Church
Demopolis

this way.

"I love talking to the people. I have a heart for people going through bad times," Milton Cherry said. (TAB)

Faith Chapel puts pre-storm construction plans on hold to make needed repairs

Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion, had been planning to construct a fellowship hall and additional classrooms.

Members of the Cahaba Baptist Association church — which averages about 20 in Sunday worship — had been setting aside funds for the new structure, which would nearly double the church's size, Pastor Lloyd Stockman said.

But then, a mid-April tornado damaged the church.

"The tornado went directly over our church," Stockman said.

Nonetheless "our people handled it gra-

ciously," he said. "We didn't miss a Sunday." Members continued to meet in the damaged building, Stockman said.

Repairing the roof cost about \$16,000. But "[the damage] could have been a lot worse," Stockman said. "The Lord blessed us."

To repair their church, members used some of the money that had been designated for the fellowship hall and a donation from a church in south Alabama.

Within about a month, the repairs had been completed.

Now members are back to planning for a new fellowship hall, Stockman said. (TAB)

Mark your calendar . . .

A TIME TO REMEMBER: 2011 TORNADOES

April 22, 2012

For more information, see page 3.



FINDING CHRIST

in popular culture

When the Academy Awards ceremony aired Feb. 26, an unusual film that bemused some, exhilarated others and drew wide-ranging comments topped the list of nominees.

“Tree of Life” lends itself to a variety of interpretations, but its Christian themes of grace and redemption appear explicitly from the first frame — a quote from the Book of Job asking, “Where were you when I (God) laid the foundations of the earth?”

It’s not the first time directors have discovered powerful religious themes make good films — think Cecil B. DeMille’s “The Ten Commandments” and “The King of Kings” — and it won’t be the last. Director Steven Spielberg announced in January he will direct a biopic about the life of Moses in a style Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper described as a mix of “Braveheart” and “Saving Private Ryan.”

But observers note an increase in independent and Hollywood-produced films inspired by clear religious — even Christian — worldviews. “The Book of Eli,” “The Blind Side” and film versions of C.S. Lewis’ beloved “Chronicles of Narnia” books are only a few.

Some evangelicals say even those films, and their subtle treatment of Christianity, fall short of an adequate alternative to what they regard as Hollywood’s decadent values. Their concerns have spawned a recent flow of much more explicitly Christian films aimed directly at the evangelical market — “Courageous,” “Fireproof” and “Facing the Giants” among them.

Many Christians enthusiastically have embraced those films as clear-cut expressions of their worldviews. Others say they lack artistic merit and assert their overt approach is unlikely to draw any but the most fervent Christian audiences.

The debate raises important questions: Are explicitly Christian films essentially propaganda pieces, not artistic expressions? Are

Christian themes expressed most profoundly in more subtle ways — perhaps by directors who aren’t Christian? And who is the target audience?

Grappling with those questions to some extent requires defining “Christian film,” said Rini Cobbey, chair of the communication arts department at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass.

“Is it a film made by a Christian?” she asked. “Or is it a film made for — or, more likely, consumed exclusively by — Christians? Is it a film

made with the intent to convert viewers? What kind of conversion? An initial statement of faith and prayer of confession or a lifelong conforming to God’s image?”

Lee Farquhar, Samford University assistant professor of journalism, believes it also depends on audience perception and the presentation and explicitness of the material in the film.

“I think most people’s understanding of Christian films is closer to ‘Fireproof,’” he said. “If it doesn’t have Christian values messages woven in, most people don’t think of it automatically that way.”

Cliff Vaughn, media producer for EthicsDaily.com, agreed: “Labeling films ‘Christian’ is a tricky business. Most use the ‘Christian movie’ label to corral films with



Photo courtesy of facingthegiants.com

OVERCOMING — “Facing the Giants” is the second movie produced by Sherwood Pictures, a ministry of Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga. The church also has produced “Flywheel,” “Fireproof” and “Courageous.”

no sex and no profanity — note that a little or a lot of violence isn’t a deal-breaker — or to showcase films with a literal come-to-Jesus moment.”

For a decade, releases by Sherwood Pictures have defined Christian films for many moviegoers. The studio, a ministry of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., has produced four films, including “Facing the Giants” in 2006, “Fireproof” in 2008 and “Courageous” in 2011.

“Facing the Giants” grossed more than \$10 million at the box office, “Fireproof” more than \$33 million and “Courageous,” as of January, more than \$34 million.

Sherwood’s success has encouraged other church-based movie makers, among them Calvary Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn., which last year produced “The Grace Card,” distributed by Sony Pictures.

Alex Kendrick, who directed several of Sherwood’s productions, told *Time* last year: “Our goal is to use movies to change culture. How many sermons would we have to preach to reach 5 million people?”

Michael Catt, pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church, wrote on Sherwood Picture’s website, “Our goal from Day 1 has been to make family-friendly movies that build on the Judeo-Christian ethic and communicate the gospel without compromise.”

Sherwood’s and other producers’ successful foray into the movie-making business is a testament to a burgeoning niche market.

But there’s a danger, some observers insist, that a larger audience will find such films superficial and inauthentic — an impression they might transfer to Christianity itself.

Farquhar thinks it is more likely that the Christian films will reinforce what people already believe about Christianity.

“There might be some who are open-minded and get persuaded, but for the most part, a single film cannot undo or replace all of the lessons that

people have learned for years and years,” Farquhar said.

“My biggest problem with ‘Christian art’ is that it is so typically not authentic,” said Thomas Ward, a professor of acting and directing in the theater arts department at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

“It seems to be a copy of something else. People say, ‘Let’s make the Christian version of this or that.’ Whatever happens in pop culture — whether it’s music or television or film — it seems that a few months later a Christian version of it shows up. I find no

real value in that kind of work. Frankly, I’d rather see the original.

“The idea of having a truly original script would be nearly impossible because so many stories have been told over the years,” he said. “If something works, they change it a little and make another one.”

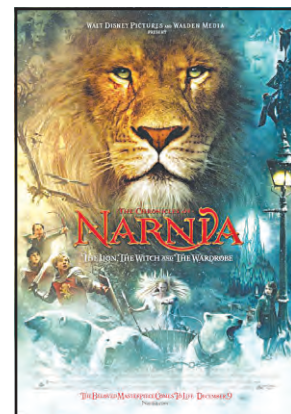
Still, wishful thinking leads to Christian support for some projects, Vaughn noted.

“Sometimes we want a particular movie to succeed ... because we loved the book it was based on, or we’re fans of

the lead actor, or we believe in its message. We may wish for these things in spite of the film’s shortcomings, which our bias may or may not allow us to admit,” he said.

The full story on this topic can be found at www.thealabamabaptist.org. Type in “popular culture” or “Spielberg” in the search bar.

(ABP, TAB)



RNS photo

TELLING THE MESSAGE — More and more churches are making their own films like “The Grace Card,” made by Calvary Church of the Nazarene in Cordova, Tenn., as a way to share the gospel.



Anti-abortion efforts yield positive effect statewide

By **Sondra Washington**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Protecting unborn lives is a major focus for many Alabama Baptists, and their efforts are helping reduce the number of abortions performed statewide and nationwide, according to Joe Bob Mizzell.

"The statistics show the number of abortions is coming down each year in Alabama and the United States," said Mizzell, director of Christian ethics for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"I think it's because evangelicals are preaching that this is wrong — that in that woman is a person not a blob of tissue."

Mizzell's role in the battle to

stop every abortion possible is to monitor current trends concerning abortion and other moral matters and provide information to state Baptist pastors.

He speaks regularly to pastors about the sanctity of human life and gives them data on abortions that occur in the state as well as updates on any actions occurring during the legislative session that deal with this subject.

"I hope they take this information back and use it in sermons that they deliver to their congregations," Miz-

zell said.

"I tell them they don't have to wait [until] Sanctity of Human Life Sunday to talk about saving lives ... and pastors

are doing this (not waiting)."

Bill Morgan, director of missions for Autauga Baptist Association, has seen expanded anti-abortion efforts positively affect his area. In 1991, First Baptist Church, Prattville, in Autauga Association established a pregnancy resource center that is supported by many area churches and pastors.

"I think the fact that we have a vibrant alternative to abortion in our area makes a huge difference in the number of unborn lives that are saved," Morgan said.

The center, Grace Place Pregnancy Center, is directed by Cheryl McLain, a member of First, Prattville.

'Went medical'

She said the ministry is changing its name to River Region Pregnancy Center "to appeal to more abortion-minded women who might not consider coming to a place that sounds like a church."

McLain said the center was established after some church members felt a need for pregnancy resources in the area. After several name changes, the center "went medical" in 2006, when it won an ultrasound machine at a Focus on the Family conference. Area church members volunteered to help expand the facility to house the new technology, and they haven't stopped assisting in the work since.

"We are supported by churches in the area through monthly (donations), special offerings; some small churches will have a shower for us for our boutique — baby

supplies, office supplies," McLain said.

"Some of them give material goods. Sometimes people will come and do a deep cleaning day. ... Some people teach Earn While You Learn classes. Some people only want to be receptionists. We have a lady who has volunteered to make copies for us. ... We have volunteers from a lot of different churches, different religions, (but) mostly Baptist. We try to encourage people that it's not just a Baptist thing. It's a Christian thing."

She added that local Baptist churches allow the center to use their facilities for banquets and volunteer training.

"Not all churches and pastors will stand up and say that abortion is wrong when 25 percent of the women sitting in their congregations have had an abortion," McLain said. "Most of the Baptist churches do. They are committed to (being) pro-life."

So are the Baptist churches in Etowah Baptist Association, where Director of Missions Gary Cardwell said congregations and church members are very involved with the Etowah Pregnancy Testing Center (EPTC) both financially and on a volunteer basis.

"As a result of last year's (fundraising) banquet, the majority of the funds were collected from an

anonymous donor to build a new two-story facility in Rainbow City and it is totally debt-free," he said.

According to Cardwell, who is vice chairman of the board for EPTC, volunteers provide various services and resources to expectant mothers including counseling, spiritual support and much needed baby items.

Saving lives

The center also offers free ultrasounds through its relationship with a local hospital.

"We want to save the lives of babies," Cardwell said.

"That is our main concern there. ... It (EPTC) has been very effective just in the number of moms

that choose not to abort their babies ... and we registered a number of professions of faith last year."

Alabama Baptist congregations across the state support similar pregnancy resource centers through fundraising walks, annual banquets, baby showers, clothing and resource donations

and much more.

Mizzell encourages churches not currently involved in anti-abortion activities to join the battle.

"Anything that saves lives, we want the churches to do it," he said.

"We are all in the same fight to do away with abortion." ❧

"I tell them they don't have to wait [until] Sanctity of Human Life Sunday to talk about saving lives."

Joe Bob Mizzell
Alabama Baptist State Board
of Missions

"Anything that saves lives, we want the churches to do it. We are all in the same fight."

Joe Bob Mizzell
Alabama Baptist State Board
of Missions

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Work together in ministries

It usually starts when she comes to the church or by your house in need. Maybe she is unable to pay her housing bill and is facing eviction and homelessness. Maybe she is in need of clothes. Maybe she is one of many teenagers who are pregnant and hopeless about their future.

As you listen to her, you begin to remember others who have come to you for help with these same issues. Knowing that God calls believers to minister to those in need, you begin to look for a way to help. What ministry can be started to help?

That is when problems can arise if we are not careful.

If people are coming to you in need of clothes, then it makes sense to start a clothing ministry. At least it makes sense until you realize there are already two clothing ministries in the area.

If people are coming to you in need of help paying rent, then it makes sense to start a benevolence ministry. At least it makes sense until you realize they are utilizing the benevolence ministry of the church down the street.

In light of such need, how do you begin ministries that are effective and don't just duplicate what other churches and ministries are doing?

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



When looking at your community, do needs assessments. Needs assessments are basically identifying the needs that are evident in the area. This may come from personal conversations with those in need or through networking contacts with those in your town.

The step that is often missed is asking those contacts what ministries are already in the area. If a ministry exists to meet a particular need, then look for a way to help that does not reinvent the wheel. Especially in tough economic times, we must be good stewards of the money we invest in ministries.

These ministries should not just make us feel good about helping. They also should be effective.

So if there is already a benevolence ministry in the area, then why not try an educational ministry that seeks to equip people with

skills to find better employment? If there is already a clothing ministry in your town, then what about partnering with it to provide the items that are in highest demand such as socks and underwear? If there are pregnant teens in your schools, then how can you work with the schools to provide parenting classes and discover ways to invest in those girls?

An additional benefit to finding those gaps in ministries is that it enables us to build stronger partnerships with the churches and ministries around us. And when we work together, rather than just duplicate each other, our communities can be stronger as well.

A Takeaway Value . . .

Before starting a new ministry, discover what is already available. Then find the new thing!

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

Former Alabama pastor Falgout dies

William Donald "Don" Falgout, a former Alabama Baptist pastor and employee of the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, died Feb. 5. He was 70.

A Tuscaloosa native, Falgout graduated from Livingston University (now the University of West Alabama) and received his master's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He served as pastor of several

churches in Alabama: Eoline Baptist Church; Little Sandy Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa; First Baptist Church, Sandusky; 66th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham; and South Lena Baptist Church, Dothan.

In addition, he served as administrator of Baptist Village Retirement Community in Dothan for 17 years.

Falgout is survived by his wife of 39 years, Sheila; two sons; and two grandsons. (TAB)

Want to know God?

By Pastor Charles Miller
Owens Cross Roads Baptist Church

In today's global society filled with strife, turmoil and uncertainty, there are many asking questions such as "where or to whom can we turn?" Everyone seems to have an opinion on current world issues. Few, if any, honestly have the solution. Those who do are ridiculed, criticized or intimidated by their fellow citizens.

God's Word still carries the answer for man. In Deuteronomy 4:29, Moses told the children of Israel that if they would seek the Lord, then they would find Him if they seek Him with all their heart and soul. The same applies to man today.

If a person wants to know God, experience His peace in life and fill that "eternity" spot placed within the heart of man (Eccles. 3:11), then there are three steps he or she must take.

Admit sin against God; believe in the forgiveness of sin made available through the death of His Son, Jesus, on the cross; and confess that Jesus is Lord.

The person who comes to God will start a new life journey of knowing Him for who He is: our Creator, Redeemer and Lord.

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BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Presently searching for bivocational pastor at Heritage Baptist Church in Pell City, Ala. Send resumé to: Henry Grogan, 921 Hill Top Street, Pell City, AL 35125.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC/FULL-TIME MUSIC EDUCATION OR MUSIC & MISSIONS/OUTREACH: Rainsville First Baptist Church is searching for either a bivocational minister of music or a full-time combination of music and education or music and missions/outreach. We enjoy blended worship with approximately 80 percent praise and worship accompanied by a 7 to 9 piece praise band. Resumés can be emailed to: jmann2270@gmail.com, or mailed to: RFBC, P.O. Box 585, Rainsville, AL 35986. For more information call 256-638-3141.

MUSIC PASTOR: FBC Jacksonville, Ala., is seeking a music pastor to lead both traditional and contemporary worship services. If interested, send resumé by March 29 to: FBC, P.O. Box 400, Jacksonville, AL 36265, or email to: dstaples@fbcjville.org.

PASTOR OF WORSHIP & MUSIC: First Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, a traditional, downtown church, is seeking a full-time pastor of worship and music. The salary range is around \$38,000 plus benefits. Please mail resumés to: Personnel Search Committee, 529 Convention Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, or email: search@fbcbr.com.

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PART-TIME MINISTER OF YOUTH: Nazareth Baptist Church of Rainsville, Ala., is seeking a part-time minister of youth. Please mail resumés to: Search Committee, Nazareth Baptist Church, P.O. Box 541, Rainsville, AL 35896.

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MARCH 2012

your Will as a Testimony

By Bob Dewhurst, ABCH VP, Ministry Development

Historians have well documented the words of one of the American founding fathers, Patrick Henry, who proclaimed, "Give me liberty or give me death!" But there is a less famous statement of Henry's that indicates his Christian faith.

He told his heirs in his last will and testament — which is on public record today — that if he had left them no worldly riches, but had given them a faith in Jesus Christ, they would be, of all people, most wealthy.

And he added that if he had left them all the wealth of the world and had not left them a faith in Jesus Christ, they would be, of all people, most destitute.

Another not-so-famous man expressed his love and admiration for his wife in his will. His words are also a matter of public record in the probate courts. "The above bequest is so made by me," the will states, "for that reason that it was through her untiring efforts that I achieved whatever success I have and for her comforting aid in time of sickness, trouble and sorrow, and also to make more apparent and public the ardent love and deep admiration that bear for the sweetest and dearest wife and pal in the world."

If, 200 years after your death, one of your descendants wanted to find out what was important in your life, could they do so by examining the official records and documents you left behind?

During my years of service with this ministry, I have been blessed with the opportunity to read the Last Wills and Testaments of many who have chosen to practice their stewardship responsibilities by providing charitable bequests on behalf of the children we are privileged to serve.

You too can make your Last Will and Testament a Last Will and Testimony of your faith in Christ, love for your family and compassion for the less fortunate.

Have you prayerfully considered that if your death were to occur tonight what it is that God would have you do with what He has entrusted to your stewardship? If I can help, please let me know by contacting me at bdewhurst@abchome.org or 1-888-720-8805.

We also have available a "Guide to Planning Your Estate" to serve as a tool in the design or review of your will. We are happy to make this available to you at no cost or obligation.

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Magnolia Springs brings history to life

By Judy Bates
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The tiny community of Magnolia Springs snuggles its oak-lined streets against the banks of the gentle Magnolia River. Roughly 15 miles from either Fairhope or Gulf Shores, this spot has to be one of the best-kept secrets in Alabama.

That is why Winston Groom could pen "Forrest Gump" unhindered here; and Fannie Flagg could work on "Fried Green Tomatoes." And it's also why legendary University of Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant enjoyed slipping off to Magnolia Springs for some fishing and relaxation.

One bed and breakfast graces the town, Magnolia Springs B&B (www.MagnoliaSprings.com), a striking century-old mansion that's been featured in Southern Living as well as on Bob Vila's "Restore America" program. For information, call 1-800-965-7321.

A stroll down the quiet virtually traffic-free streets allows for glimpses of pier-mounted mailboxes dotting the waterfront, and if your timing is right, you'll see the mail boat making its deliveries along the river.

No need for directions to Jesse's Restaurant (www.JessesRestaurant.com) — the town's too small to get lost in. Specialties include mouth-watering crab cakes with a spectacular remoulade sauce and lots more seafood dishes.

A great scenic drive is County Road 49 toward Bon Secour, where you can visit Fishermen Baptist Church (www.FOMM.org), with its international ministry and outreach to fishermen.

▶ Hot air ballooning — Taking Off Hot Air Balloon Co. offers 3-hour flights, www.GulfViewBallooning.com; 251-970-3598. The 8th Annual Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival (www.GulfCoastBalloonFestival.com) is June 15-17.

▶ The Bird of Paradise (www.866MustFly.com), a 1928 biplane, whisks passengers upward in an exhilarating open cockpit flight, 1-866-MUST-FLY.

▶ Dolphin watching — take a cruise on the Southern Rose; narrative trips and dinner cruises by reservation, www.SouthernRoseDolphinTrips.com; 251-981-7673.

▶ Magnolia Springs Golf (www.MagnoliaSpringsGolf.com) on CR-49 offers nine 3-par holes and a pocket-pleasing play-all-day rate plus, children 9 and under play for free with an adult. Shoppers will appreciate the bargains at Foley's massive outlet center on Highway 59.

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Request more information about the area from the Alabama Gulf Coast CVB, 1-800-745-SAND, www.GulfShores.com; and Foley CVB, www.FoleyCVB.com; 1-877-25-FOLEY.

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Ala. Tourism recommends 100 road trips

Alabama Tourism recently launched a three-year campaign, 100 Alabama Road Trips, with the release of the first 10 trips. The campaign focuses on driving itineraries that travelers can experience over two or three days. The initial itineraries are now live on the tourism website, www.Alabama.travel, and each is numbered. Other trips will continue to be added.

The first 10 trips are the BCS Championship tour, eagle watching on Lake Guntersville, a romantic getaway to Mobile, Selma to Montgomery civil rights history, spring break at the beach, a walking tour of downtown Birmingham, Huntsville's Space & Rocket Center, Montgomery's history tour, bird watching on the coast and the "To Kill a Mockingbird" tour in Monroeville. A few upcoming trips will include a girlfriends getaway on the Eastern Shore, family fun in Sylacauga, golfing in Alabama, music in the Shoals and Gulf Coast adventures.

"We wanted to make it easier for travelers to plan their trip, so we came up with 100 itineraries," tourism director Lee Sentell said. "If you're planning a trip to the beach, we have an itinerary for that or a trip to experience the small towns of Alabama, we've got that, too."

"Road Trips" is also the theme for the 2012 vacation guide. The 164-page vacation guide provides travelers with information on hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, tourism associations, state parks, golf courses, attractions, trails and museums. Each region of the state is highlighted with articles on the attractions, places to stay and events.

Travelers can pick up copies of the vacation guide at each of the eight Alabama Welcome Centers, by calling 1-800-ALABAMA or by requesting online at www.alabama.travel. Compass Marketing of Gulf Shores publishes the vacation guide. (Alabama Tourism)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 11

Explore the Bible By Cecil Taylor Dean, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

A UNIQUE PERSON: PRAISE GOD Luke 2:3-20

Account of Jesus' Birth (3-7)

For a census, the Roman government required the head of each family to journey to the town where his family records were kept. Joseph had been living in or near Nazareth, up in Galilee. But he was a native of Bethlehem. Therefore he took Mary and returned to his hometown, the city of David.

Wives were not required to go with their husbands for the census but Mary's pregnancy was full-term. Had Joseph left her in Nazareth, the townspeople might have mocked or even abused her when she delivered her baby. That Mary was his "espoused," i.e., promised, wife means only that the marriage had not yet been consummated.

The great number of people returning to their ancestral home left no room for many travelers. The only place open to Joseph and Mary was a stable. There Jesus was born, wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed in a manger. Swaddling a newborn involved bathing it in olive oil and rubbing it with salt and then laying its arms by its sides and wrapping it with cloth bands. This was done to support the baby's body until it "jelled" solidly and/or to promote good posture. A manger was a feed bin for animals. It would not have been made of wood because wood was scarce and expensive.

Announcement by Angels (8-14)

Some stoutly deny that Jesus could have been born in December. They hold that shepherds would have watched their flocks "at night" only in the spring when lambs were being born in case a ewe needed help delivering her young. And they believe no shepherd would have been in those cold, open fields in a winter month. However, it is not at all certain that shepherds were in the fields only in the spring. And Bethlehem is roughly on a line with Mobile. Hardly any snow falls near there, and the winter drop in temperature usually comes only after the first of the year. The bottom line is that no one knows for sure exactly when Jesus was born but no

one can rule out December as a possibility.

An angel, a messenger from God, appeared with radiant glory, and the shepherds "feared a great fear" (literally; doubling shows the intensity of their fear). The angel ordered them to "stop fearing" because of the presence of "great joy!" The joy was all-inclusive and based in the birth of the Savior, further identified as "Christ," i.e., Messiah, "the Lord."

Even before the shepherds could ask, the angel announced a "sign." But the sign of heaven was most unheavenly. They would find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. No palace with silk sheets and strawberries with cream for the King of heaven, only a stable with straw for a bed and His mother's thin milk.

Angelic hosts joined the announcing angel and praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest!" and "on earth, peace among men upon whom His favor settles!"

Visit by Shepherds (15-20)

When the angels left and the glory faded, the shepherds wasted little time. They believed the message and hurried off to see what the Lord had done. "In haste" may mean "to cut across," implying that they did not take time to travel the ordinary path but cut across the fields to reach Bethlehem more quickly. Everything was just as the angel said. They found Mary, Joseph and the baby lodged in a stable.

Some scholars think these shepherds tended special flocks of sheep intended to serve as Temple sacrifices. If that is so, then it is noteworthy that what they saw in the stable was the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice that would end all sacrifice.

That "all who heard the shepherds' testimony were astonished" suggests that Mary and Joseph were not the only people to whom they told their story.

Mary stored up this event in her heart and pondered its meaning.

The shepherds went back to their simple job of guarding the flocks. But they were never quite the same. Perhaps for years after, they kept on praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Bible Studies for Life By James R. Barnette Associate professor of religion, Department of religion, Samford University

I CALL ON YOU

Psalm 86:1-13, 15-16

This Psalm has been described as a lonely "prayer of David" for two reasons. First it is his only poem in the third book of Psalms (Psalms 73-89). Second the poem depicts a David who feels cornered by an unidentified enemy from whom he needs deliverance.

Hear Me (1-7)

David includes himself among those for whom God has special concern. The word "devoted" is from the same root word "hesed," meaning "steadfast love." David sees himself as a son of the covenant who belongs wholly to the Lord. "Devoted" is the equivalent of "saints" in the New Testament, those set apart by and for the Lord. David is declaring that he belongs to God, an identity further affirmed by the repeated phrase "your servant."

The focus is not only on David's identity with God but also on God's identity. Hence the occurrences of the emphatic "you" in verses 2 and 5. The petitions in verses 3 and 6 point to a critical attribute of God that David is seeking: "mercy." David notes other celebrated attributes of his Lord: forgiveness, goodness and abounding love. Because God is merciful, good, forgiving and loving, David appeals to Him for help. By verse 7, the repeated verb "answer" indicates growing assurance that his prayer will be answered. There are at least 14 personal requests in the Psalm, which reminds us that effective praying is specific. Hence David's growing confidence God will answer his sincere cries for help.

Teach Me (8-13)

The focus on God's identity becomes even stronger in this section. David proclaims the incomparability of God and His mighty acts. "Among the gods, there is none like you" is the confession of a man who truly knows God and remembers Israel's confession at the Exodus (see Exodus 15:11). During 10 years in the wilderness of Judea, David learned much about God's nature and the way that He works in His people's lives. Verse 9 indicates that nations will one day recognize God's sovereignty and respond by worshiping or "bow-

ing down" and bringing glory to His name. Verse 10 is the climactic declaration of God's greatness, punctuated by the two occurrences of the emphatic "you." The phrase "marvelous things" recalls the Exodus, that most celebrated demonstration of God's rule over and care for His people.

"Unite my heart" acknowledges a yearning for an undivided heart, one fixed wholly on the Lord. Unlike a fragmented heart that is divided by all manner of distractions and temptations, a united heart is one whose ultimate love is in God alone and whose motivation is to be His devoted servant (see James 1:8; 4:8). This yearning is portrayed beautifully in the Thomas Ken hymn "Awake, My Soul": Direct, control, suggest, this day/All I design, or do, or say/That all my powers, with all their might/In Thy sole glory may unite. With this united heart, David promises to praise God forever for delivering him from the grave of Sheol. This deliverance from the pit of death offers a foreshadowing of future resurrection.

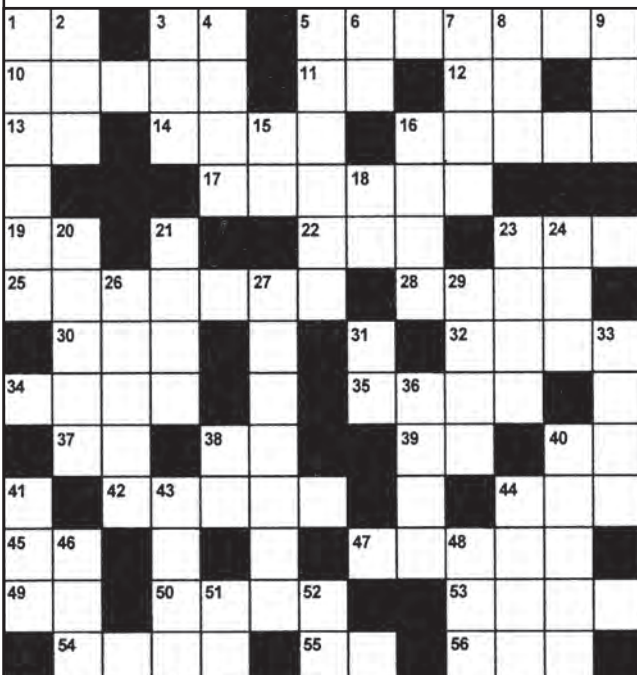
Help Me (15-16)

"The son of your maidservant" means "your devoted servant." Children born to servants were considered especially faithful since they were brought up in the servant's household (see Genesis 14:14). Since David was the Lord's faithful servant, it was his Master's duty to protect and deliver him. The "sign" in verse 17 is the deliverance that David prays for and anticipates. Among the prayers for mercy and comfort, it is significant that he also prays for "strength." While David is confident in the "sign" of God's ultimate deliverance, he is spirited enough to want to "man up" and do his part to drive back the enemy.

Ultimately David's prayer is one of trusting the God to whom he submits. In teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus taught them to submit their lives — "thy will be done." As in David's case, such submission is possible because we trust that God rules the world — "thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Like David, we strive to live out our faith in a broken world that opposes us and God. This reality means we wait with David as we pray — "thy kingdom come."

Christian Crossword

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Across

- River in northern Italy.
- Before Christ. (abbr.)
- The ____ of the loaves. (Mark 6:52)
- ____ unto God thanksgiving. (Ps. 50:14)
- Glory be to God ____ high.
- Musical note.
- ____ it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it. (Acts 5:39)
- To patch a hole in a sock.
- The lowest point.
- The ____ of Jesus was there. (John 2:1)
- Have mercy ____ me. (Matt. 15:22)
- To hurry away.
- ____ meal; a cereal.
- Let all the ____ be gathered together. (Isa. 43:9)
- The quick and the _____. (1 Pet. 4:5)
- Let your moderation be known unto all _____. (Phil. 4:5)
- A type of bomb.
- In order; picked up.
- They shall walk every

- one in his _____. (Joel 2:8)
- Senior. (abbr.)
- ____, so would we have it. (Ps. 35:25)
- Bachelor of Science. (abbr.)
- Television. (abbr.)
- Paul stood on the ____s, and beckoned. (Acts 21:40)
- That they may be one, as we _____. (John 17:11)
- Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
- The fruit of righteousness is sown in _____. (James 3:18)
- 3.14159265.
- A wise man.
- Persia is now known as ____.
- The time is now _____. (Matt. 14:15)
- Who rejoice to ____ evil. (Prov. 2:14)
- God led them by the way of the ____ Sea. (Ex. 13:18)

Down

- The ____ of asps is under their lips. (Rom. 3:13)
- Not on.
- I have made my ____ in the darkness. (Job 17:13)

- To study for a test at the last minute.
- There are 12 in a year.
- I am ____ the Father. (John 14:10)
- The promise is to all that are ____ off. (Acts 2:39)
- A man who is a heel is called a ____.
- Give ____ to my words, O Lord. (Ps. 5:1)
- Nickname for Rosemary.
- I am rich, and ... have ____ of nothing. (Rev. 3:17)
- Hello!
- Whose ____ are in the book of life. (Phil. 4:3)
- To give clues.
- If a man swear an _____. (Num. 30:2)
- Why make ye this ____ and weep? (Mark 5:39)
- Began to wash his feet with _____. (Luke 7:38)
- Say ____ to any man. (Mark 1:44)
- Ingests.
- When the sun was _____. (Matt. 13:6)
- In him we live, and _____. (Acts 17:28)
- He is ____ also to save.

- (Heb. 7:25)
- Support group for problem drinkers.
- Power to ____ on scorpions. (Luke 10:19)
- A little rest.
- He will turn and ____ thee like a ball. (Isa. 22:18)
- Men within ... an half ____ of land. (1 Sam. 14:14)
- To drink slowly.
- The way of an eagle in the _____. (Prov. 30:19)
- Evil to him that was ____ peace. (Ps. 7:4)
- Children of Gad called the altar _____. (Josh. 22:34)



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Suicide bombers attack worship service in Jos, Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria — Two suicide bombers from the Boko Haram Islamist sect drove a car laden with bombs into the worship service of a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) congregation in Jos on Feb. 26, killing at least one Christian girl and injuring dozens of other church members, sources said.

The two suicide bombers broke through a security barrier at the gate of the church building at 7:20 a.m., a church leader said. “When the bombs went off, I saw the dead body of one girl and four other members of our church who were injured,” said Yakubu Dutse, director of finance at COCIN headquarters, which is located in the same building.



CDN photo

Dutse said one of the bombers was shot dead and one was injured by soldiers posted as security guards before the bombs went off, killing the second assailant as well. “When they were stopped at the gate of the church, they refused to stop, hence the soldiers posted to the church shot at the car,” he said. Church member Felix Apollos

rushed to the scene of the attack minutes after the bombs went off; he said he saw the bodies of five people killed in the attack, but the identities of the dead were yet to be confirmed at press time.

At least 38 people were reportedly injured in the blast. Boko Haram, whose name translates loosely as “Western education is forbidden,” seeks to impose a strict version of Shariah (Islamic law) on Nigeria.

Muslims threaten Christian family with ‘blasphemy’

SIALKOT, Pakistan — Tensions are still high in a Pakistani village following Muslims’ attempt to seize land from a Christian family by threatening to accuse them of “blasphemy.”

What began on Feb. 19 as a quarrel over a pigeon between Christian and Muslim youths at Nawa Pind Sabu Mohal village, in Sialkot’s Pasroor area in northeast Punjab province, grew into an occasion to jail some Christians in the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim country, the Christians said.

Gulshan Masih, 20, said that after the young Muslims carried on the stone-throwing fight from within a mosque — later accusing the Christians of desecrating the mosque by throwing stones at it — police officers arrived and took his father, 55-year-old Bashir Masih, and 50-year-old uncle, Pervaiz Masih, into custody. Two days later, Feb. 21, police arrested eight more Christians, including Gulshan Masih, in order to increase pressure on them, according to Napoleon Qayyum, a Christian rights activist. He said it was evident that the Muslims were trying to seize a plot of land owned by Bashir Masih, as they demanded that he surrender it as a condition for the release of the jailed Christians. Police released Bashir and Pervaiz Masih and the other eight Christians the evening of Feb. 22 with a warning that they would be charged with blasphemy if they did not meet the conditions set the previous day by a “reconciliation committee” made up of the area’s notable Muslim leaders, Qayyum said.

Pastor in Turkmenistan freed after 18 months in prison

MARY, Turkmenistan — Nearly 18 months after his August 2010 arrest in Turkmenistan, Protestant pastor Ilmurad Nurliev was among a group of about 230 prisoners freed under amnesty Feb. 18 from a labor camp. “He and the other prisoners were brought by special police train to Mary, and we rushed to the station to meet him,” his wife Maya said. “His release was so unexpected we forgot to get flowers. It is such a joy I can’t tell you.” He was given a four-year prison sentence in October 2010 on charges of swindling, which members of his congregation insist were fabricated to punish him for leading his unregistered church. Nurliev only learned he would be amnestied on the previous evening. “I want to thank you and everyone else who supported me and helped my release,” he said.

He will have to live under restrictions, reporting weekly to the police.

‘A bold heart’

Calera Baptist member shares Christ in Nigeria amid violence

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Prior to 2006, Ron Simpson never would have imagined that he’d be called to become a missionary to Nigeria. But, after six missions trips, Simpson is devoted to the Western African nation and its people.

“Most times, you have churches that go as teams to work with people groups in Nigeria,” said Simpson, a member of Calera Baptist Church. “And I couldn’t quite tell why I was the black sheep, going by myself. I don’t know why He chose me. God is sovereign.”

Simpson first felt called to international missions work after meeting an African cab driver in New York during a choir tour. He left a portfolio in the cab and was touched to receive a call at his hotel later that evening from the driver, who wanted to return the lost documents.

“Then, at about 4 a.m., I woke up praying for this man and I didn’t know why,” Simpson said. “For about two hours, I experienced this feeling. I thought, ‘Something has just changed my life.’ A year later, I woke up one morning and said, ‘I want to go to Africa.’ I’d never thought that in my life.”

Soon he signed up to attend a West African missions conference in St. Charles, Mo., where he connected with Bill O’Dell, who attends Ogletown Baptist Church in Delaware, and Jay Smith, a Southern Baptist representative in Nigeria. They accompanied him on his inaugural trip to Nigeria and helped him get plugged in there.

A heart for the lost

“I knew he [had] a heart for those who don’t know Christ personally, and he knew he was supposed to go to West Africa to see what God had in store for him,” O’Dell said. “I also knew that he had spent hours in prayer, seeking and listening to what God desired of him. I can say that he was prepared to share the gospel with all those God brought near him.”

It was during this initial trip that Simpson was exposed firsthand



Photo courtesy of Tammy Simpson

‘HE CHOSE ME’ — Ron Simpson, a member of Calera Baptist Church in Shelby Baptist Association, has been on six missions trips to the Western African nation of Nigeria.

to the violence in Nigeria and the dissension between many of the people groups there. Recent headlines paint a grim picture: “Islamic extremists bomb church, homes;” “Christian woman killed in ambush in Kaduna state;” “Catholic church bombing leaves 45 dead, 73 injured.”

Also during this trip, he felt called to serve the Gerewa and Fulani people in the states of Gombe and Bauchi specifically.

“There’s lots of persecution here,” Simpson said. “The spirit of God provoked me. I was angry at what He was saying and that became my calling.”

Soon, through Smith in Bauchi, he connected with Adamu, a Nigerian Christian who had converted from Islam (to his family’s dismay). That connection has proven pivotal, since Adamu — being a native — is able to help Simpson achieve things he couldn’t on his own. Now he sends money to Adamu regularly so he can offer support for the work Adamu is doing in Nigeria even when he is home in the United States.

“I know if I had not met Adamu through Jay, I couldn’t have been in Bauchi,” Simpson said. “He opened doors I could never have [opened] on my own. God is doing great work, but there’s a great price to

pay, because becoming a Christian is very dangerous.”

Hal Warren, pastor of Calera Baptist, said he and his congregation are proud of the work Simpson is doing in Nigeria. Though he and others worry about Simpson’s safety, he said Simpson is not afraid of the violence in Nigeria because he feels so strongly that he needs to be there.

Courageous

“This is the place where he feels called,” Warren said. “It’s not a missions trip; it’s where he’s committed himself to go. He doesn’t go anywhere else. He’s committed to Nigeria.”

Committed indeed. In fact, Simpson is planning to return to the country soon to do some training in the villages. He’s quick to point out that he will avoid cities for these training sessions, because the risk of attack is higher in cities than in less-populated areas.

“I really just hope the Lord continues giving Ron the boldness to keep going,” Warren said.

“I know there will be some discouragement from the events that are happening there. When there’s danger like this, your friends and others discourage you from going. I hope the Lord continues to give Ron a bold heart.”

BHS partners with home health services to ‘enhance’ care

A new partnership between Baptist Health System (BHS) and Louisiana-based LHC Group Inc. will enhance home health services for the people of Central Alabama.

The newly formed BHS Home Care, based in Birmingham, will provide high-quality, compassionate home care to area residents.

Qualified BHS HomeCare patients will receive the Philips Lifeline medical alert service at no additional charge as part of the plan of care.

“At Baptist Health System, it’s our vision to reach superior levels of performance throughout our organization — and to engage those who share in our vision,” said Shane Spees, CEO of BHS.

“LHC Group has a proven track record of successful hospital partnerships that are enhancing post-acute care for patients around the nation. Working together, we’ll expand the quality and scope of services available to our patients and communities across Alabama.”

LHC Group, based in Lafayette,

La., is a national provider of post-acute care services and has been repeatedly recognized for excellence and innovation. Keith G. Myers, LHC Group’s chairman and CEO, said the new partnership will result in improved patient care.

“Baptist Health System is nationally recognized for its commitment to improving lives through the delivery of high-quality patient care,” Myers said. “We’re proud to partner with Baptist to deliver superior home health services to the people of Alabama.” (BHS)



NAMB photo

A TEAM — NAMB church planter Danny Egipciano (center) meets with another church planter, a director of missions and a church-planting strategist at a local restaurant to discuss church planting in south Florida.

Second-generation hope

Miami church planter sees English-speaking Hispanics as future

At a brawny 6 feet 6 inches and 255 pounds, 36-year-old Danny Egipciano looks more like a linebacker for the Miami Dolphins than a North American Mission Board (NAMB) national missionary and church planter.

The challenge of spreading the gospel in the Miami metro area is immense because by all accounts, local lostness is vast. According to Egipciano, Miami — with its 5 million people — is one of the most unchurched cities in the United States. About 95 percent of Miamians are unchurched, Egipciano said.

Egipciano lives in nearby Hialeah with his wife, Karina, and their three children, Daniel Jr., Elyse and Brianna. A fourth child is on the way.

Egipciano, who moved to Miami at age 4, grew up in a Christian home, attending a Spanish-speaking Hispanic Southern Baptist church. He accepted Christ as a teen under the influence of his mom, a native Cuban who was led to Christ as a girl by a Home Mission Board (now NAMB) missionary.

Egipciano was serving as a 28-year-old youth pastor in a “legacy” first-generation, Spanish-speaking Southern Baptist church when he realized it just wasn’t working.

“I had to change everything,” he recalled. “We were doing church in Spanish, but instead we needed to connect with the growing second-generation Hispanics in south Florida who spoke English. Second-gen Hispanics is one of the fastest growing people groups in south Florida and the U.S.”

Longtime church-planting missionary Al Fernandez, now director of the Florida Baptist Convention’s Urban Impact Ministries,

offered advice to young Egipciano. “Al had already planted a second-generation, English-speaking Hispanic church, and he shared his wisdom, ideas and experience with me,” Egipciano said. “Thirty days later, I left the youth ministry, started preaching in a local hotel and became a church planter.” That was 2005.

Today Fernandez and Egipciano mentor and coach 30-plus church planters in the Miami area, many of whom are bivocational pastors and even some laymen.

Miamians who use Spanish as their first language make up 67 percent of the population. But some 180 languages are spoken in south Florida public schools.

‘Not on their radar’

“Many people in Miami — especially the second-generation Hispanics — just don’t think about religion, including Christianity,” Fernandez said. “It’s not on their radar screens. Miami is a very materialistic place — a bling-bling kind of place. People are always chasing the almighty dollar. It’s also a fast-paced, time-consuming environment.”

“Conversely some of the first-generation Hispanics who come here exist in survival mode, working two or three jobs just to survive,” he said.

“Miami has a lot of Cuban-based Santeria or Voodoo.”

Up until his appointment by NAMB as a national missionary in 2009, Egipciano was the first and only pastor of Relevant Church, which he helped plant in 2006 and was running 120 weekly attendees when he left six months ago.

At Relevant Church, he never took a salary. He was not merely a bivocational pastor; he was a “trivocational” pastor, holding down as many as three jobs at a time to support his family.

Egipciano believes the real future of church planting in south Florida is the second-generation, English-speaking Hispanics.

“What unites church planting in south Florida is the English-speaking people. When we plant an English-speaking church, it draws many Hispanic people groups to join. ... So our church plants tend to become very multicultural and diverse.”

“Within a one-mile radius of my church, there are 30,000 people. Within a three-mile radius, there are 80,000 people. ... We have only three Southern Baptist churches in a three-mile area.”

“In West Palm Beach, there are 1 million lost people,” Egipciano continued. “We’d need 100 churches that would each hold 10,000 to reach them. ... We need more churches, not less.”

Help is on the way. Miami is one of 29 major North American cities included in NAMB’s Send North America evangelistic church-planting strategy. Send North America: Miami is scheduled to come online in February.

“Danny and I are excited about partnering with other churches from other parts of the country to plant new churches in the Miami area,” Fernandez said. “We need their resources and their missions teams.”

“We have five years of church planting already under our belts. So it’s great timing for Send North America: Miami — God’s timing.” (NAMB)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Is Obama’s federal budget hostile to abstinence?

WASHINGTON — Not only does President Obama’s proposed 2013 federal budget demonstrate hostility toward the sexual risk avoidance message but the budget also contains an “illegal use of funds” that were intended by Congress for abstinence education, an expert said.

Instead of making Title V abstinence education funding available to states that qualify for the grants, the president’s budget redirects the money to a new program that “will not be limited to the Title V definition of abstinence education,” the National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) said Feb. 14. Using Title V funds for programs that do not comply with the federally approved abstinence education definition is a violation of congressional intent and is outside the authority of the budgetary directive, the association said.

“Currently a majority of states accept Title V funding to provide abstinence education and we are seeing more states apply each year,” said Valerie Huber, NAEA’s executive director. “However, the administration’s attempt to usurp this funding will deny states that opportunity.” The 2012 budget contains a 20:1 spending disparity between contraceptive-centered teen pregnancy prevention versus abstinence-centered sex education programs, NAEA reports, and the latest budget proposal eliminates even the small amount of abstinence funding that had been available.

“Why would the president want to censor information that helps teens make healthy choices?” Huber said. “It just doesn’t make sense. With nearly 75 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds choosing abstinence, shouldn’t our federal sex-education policy reinforce those healthy decisions?”

University offers ‘morning-after’ pill in vending machine

SHIPPENSBURG, Pa. — One American university is selling from a vending machine a contraceptive drug that can cause an abortion.

Shippensburg University, a state school in south-central Pennsylvania, stocks a vending machine in its health center with Plan B One-Step, known as the “morning-after” pill or “emergency contraception.” While the method works to restrict ovulation or prevent fertilization, it also has a back-up chemistry that can operate after fertilization, blocking implantation of a tiny embryo in the uterine wall, thereby causing an abortion.

While other universities sell the “morning-after” pill, Shippensburg’s vending machine is reportedly the only one in the country to stock the drug, according to the Associated Press (AP). It has been sold by means of the vending machine for two years and costs \$25. Between 350 and 400 doses are purchased each year, AP reported Feb. 10. Kristan Hawkins, executive director of Students for Life of America, decried the availability of the drug in a vending machine.

“Shippensburg University’s decision to sell Plan B — an emergency contraception that results in the murder of pre-born children and one that touts a slew of harmful effects on women — in a vending machine on campus is reflective of how dangerous the disease of abortion has become,” Hawkins said.

Under federal regulations, women 17 and older do not need a prescription to buy the “morning-after” pill, but they must request the drug from pharmacists, who stock it behind their counters.

Judge says pro-life pharmacists’ religious liberty violated

TACOMA, Wash. — A federal judge has upheld the conscience rights of health care professionals regarding abortion-causing drugs.

Judge Ronald Leighton ruled Feb. 22 that Washington Board of Pharmacy violated the religious freedom of pro-life pharmacists by requiring them to stock and dispense pills that can cause abortions.

Ruling from Tacoma, Wash., Leighton said the pharmacy board’s 2007 rules targeted abortion-causing drugs and “conscientious objectors.” After the board drafted rules that included a conscience clause for pharmacists, Democratic Gov. Chris Gregorie protested and threatened to fire the board members, Leighton said in his 48-page opinion.

The rules that were adopted as a result “are not neutral, and they are not generally applicable,” Leighton wrote. “They were designed instead to force religious objectors to dispense [an abortion-causing drug], and they sought to do so despite the fact that refusals to deliver for all sorts of secular reasons were permitted.”

“In effect, the rules force them to choose between their religious beliefs and their livelihood.”

“The facts of this case lead to the inescapable conclusion that the board’s rules discriminate [the pharmacists’] fundamental right to free exercise of religion,” Leighton said. ☞