

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



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INSIDE



Teen's death prompts discussion about meaning of justice

◆ Page 3



Alabama Baptists continue disaster relief efforts in District 9

◆ Pages 5-9



UA football player Jones does what he loves, shares gospel in Nicaragua

◆ Page 11



From every land and nation, people come to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem to celebrate that He is Risen.

Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash

Alabama BCM students spend spring break ministering in NYC

By Doug Rogers
Special to The Alabama Baptist

As a theater major at the University of Alabama, Emily Couch was looking forward to spending spring break in New York City — but not for the reasons you might expect. Having spent the past two spring breaks doing missions work in Memphis and Mexico and last summer in Gulf Shores, Couch began feeling God leading her to New York, not just for her career but to serve Him through missions.

Then when she learned that her Baptist Campus Ministry (BCM) was planning a spring break trip to New York City, she began packing her bags.

"I knew this was an opportunity for me to come up here to see what God is doing and see a way for me to be involved, and I knew this was where he would begin laying the foundation for my future," Couch said.

Couch was one of around 130 college students and leaders from five Alabama BCMs who spent their spring

break in New York City as a part of Passport New York. The brainchild of John Ramirez, Passport New York is designed not just to provide college students with a missions experience but to immerse them in a different culture.

Ministry needs

Ramirez, strategic partnership coordinator for the Metro New York Baptist Association, explained that people often only think of Manhattan when they think of New York. But this experience introduces students to ministry needs in all five boroughs of New York City, where there are more than 550 people groups and 800 languages spoken. "The world comes to New York," he said.

Over the course of one week, students in BCMs from Alabama State University and the universities of Alabama, Alabama at Birmingham, Montevallo and South Alabama became New Yorkers, learning how to use the subway, talk with street vendors and interact with people of different cultures.

Along the way, the students connected with church planters, pastors and other leaders, doing everything from prayer walking, handing out free coffee and picking up trash to teaching English as a second language, renovating a church building and leading in worship.

Like Couch, Twon Mai, a University of Mobile student traveling with the Metro Mobile BCM team, already had a sense of God's hand on his life. He had been praying about planting a church in New York when this opportunity came along at just the right time. "It's given me more of a burden for the people here, it's given me more to pray about and given me more of an emotional investment," he said.

For many others, like Kasey Barrow, this was their first multicultural missions experience. Barrow, a senior

at the University of Montevallo, had never participated in a missions endeavor beyond Vacation Bible School. And while adapting to New York's culture was frustrating at first, Barrow quickly saw God's hand at work. "The amount of lost people in New York seems overwhelming, but God reminded me that He is mighty to save and that it is our job to pray, minister, preach and love," she said.

One of the church planters that Alabama students connected with was (See 'Passport,' page 11)



Photo by Doug Rogers

PRAYERWALKING — (L to r) Chrissy Brown, Twon Mai and Zeb Ramsey, with the Metro Mobile BCM, prayer walk the streets of the Forest Park area of Queens during their spring break in New York City.

COMMENT

Raised to Life

Romans 4:25 declares that Jesus “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Here the apostle Paul linked Jesus’ death and resurrection in one great event. The penalty for sin was paid. Death was defeated. Hope for eternity became a reality, not just for the risen Lord “but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (v. 24).

Salvation is never the result of something humanity earns. It is always the result of being united with Christ through personal faith in Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus was no helpless sheep as the events celebrated at Easter time unfolded. Hebrews 7:27 makes plain that “He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered Himself.” Jesus was at one time both the Lamb being sacrificed — “He offered Himself” — and the High Priest offering the sacrifice of atonement. That is why the writer of Hebrews referred to Jesus as “the Great High Priest.”

The imagery is of Jesus entering God’s presence with the blood offering of the sacrificial lamb to be poured out on the altar. As such, He was the Great High Priest, representing all people in all places for all times.

But unlike the high priest who tended the Temple year after year, Jesus carried a cup with His own blood into God’s presence. It was a moment in time that will never be repeated. Hebrews 9:25–26 declares, “Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

The mystery surrounding the biblical teaching “that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” remains (Heb. 9:22). What is clear is that Jesus died “to take away the sins” of those who identify with Him through personal faith (Heb. 9:28). What is clear is that Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself established a new covenant “now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

committed under the first covenant” (Heb. 9:15).

What is clear is that death was conquered. Again the writer of Hebrews instructs, “Since the children have flesh and blood, He, too, shared in their humanity so that by His death, He might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14–15).

An act of the Father

Jesus “was delivered over to death for our sins.” He also “was raised to life for our justification.”

The resurrection was an act of the Father. The resurrection was a vindication of Jesus that He was who He claimed to be: Son of God, Messiah. He was Israel’s hope and through God’s chosen people, He was the hope of all peoples.

The Gospels affirm the historicity of the resurrection. The apostle Peter, preaching at Pentecost, declared, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:32). Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). He then listed Jesus’ appearances, including his own encounter.

These eyewitnesses knew the reality of what Peter preached: “God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him” (Acts 2:24).

The resurrection was more than vindication. It was God’s way of undoing all the evil sinful human beings — emboldened by Satan — sought to

accomplish by putting Jesus to death. One scholar noted that the resurrection nullified all the fearful aspects of death and its effects.

Paul declared, “But in fact, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Just as Jesus placed His confidence in the Father, so all who are identified with Christ through faith place their confidence in the Father that as Jesus was raised, so shall they be raised (1 Cor. 15:23). Those who believe in Jesus “are of Christ and Christ is of God” (1 Cor. 3:23).

That is why death has no ultimate victory for the Christian, why the grave has no eternal sting.

The resurrected Jesus “ascended into heaven,” Peter declared in his Pentecost sermon. The writer of Hebrews repeatedly teaches that Jesus sits at God’s right hand. “But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12).

Paul added, “Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom. 8:34).

By the Father’s side, the Son continues His role as High Priest, pleading in behalf of all who identify with Him through belief and confession. The Great High Priest, the risen Savior, the Hope of the World will be revealed in glory and present those who have trusted in Him to the Father for ever and ever.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. All who believe will be raised to life eternal because of Him. That is the promise of Easter.

Letters to the Editor

VITAL FOR CHURCH STAFF

Concerning your editorial in the March 15 issue “Personalities Have to Gel,” thank you for introducing me to the book “Owning Up” by Ram Charan. Your article nailed an issue that has hindered the effective work of the church probably more than any single issue. Cohesion is so important not only among committees and lay leadership, but it also is critical among

church staff, especially in a multi-staff church.

Personality conflicts can not only cause the staff to bog down and lose creativity, it can lead to staff members having a judgmental spirit as they make assessments concerning the spiritual condition of other staff members not realizing that it is a difference in how they approach issues. I would suspect that more staff changes

happen over the issue of personality conflict than over doctrinal or moral issues combined. It is so important that pastors and congregations seek God-called leadership whose personality and temperament are a fit instead of those who are prone to throw fits. Thanks again for the great job you do and for this inspiring article.

Mike Johnson
Prattville, Ala.



THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

“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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Trayvon Martin

Teen's death prompts discussion about meaning of justice

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Amid the backlash surrounding the killing of Trayvon Martin, Baptist leaders are calling for proper investigation in the case as well as discussions about racial issues.

"We need to encourage the authorities to do a thorough investigation and make certain that justice is done," said Richard Land, president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "[W]e sadly in this country have a history where ... oftentimes when the victims were black, there was not justice."

Martin, a 17-year-old high school student, was killed by George Zimmerman, a Hispanic neighborhood watchman in Sanford, Fla., in February. Zimmerman has not been arrested and said he acted in self-defense. Nationwide, dialogue on race relations has erupted.

D'Linell Finley Sr., pastor of Southlawn Baptist Church, Montgomery, said, "The question is whether Mr. Zimmerman should be charged with the shooting of Trayvon Martin. That is the central issue."

"Based on all the information as it is slowly coming out, it appears that Mr. Zimmerman was clearly in the wrong," said Finley, a professor of American constitutional law and the American legal system at Alabama State University in Montgomery. "In a criminal case, rather than trying to pursue an angle, you should look straight forward at the facts."

Stick to the facts

"There was a shooting. Was it justified? If not, look at the circumstances surrounding it and then go from there," he said.

John King Jr., associate executive director for Birmingham Baptist Association who formerly worked with African-American churches, pointed out a family has lost a son. "My heart goes out to them," he said. "These things do happen as far as racial profiling goes, but it is wrong. No matter who it is, it is wrong."

Finley agreed Zimmerman did judge Martin by his race and clothing. "[He] looked at the individual and his race and what he was wearing and decided that this person was up to no good."

I'm disturbed that he kept emphasizing that this person is black and looked like he was up to no good.

"Christians in general ... need to be very careful to rush to judgment. ... We need to re-think or reaffirm our values as Christians," he said. "We need to be careful about looking at the race or appearance of a person and allowing us (to use that) to determine whether the person is good or bad."

Discuss the issue

King also said open and honest discussions about racial issues need to happen.

"It is unfortunate that it has taken a tragic situation to bring this back to the forefront ... but we need to get together and talk about these types of situations," he said. "We need to have open discussions about issues that affect all of us ... whether directly or indirectly ... and improve the quality of life for everybody."

Land, in an appearance on CNN's "Starting Point" March 23, said, "Whenever something like this happens, the ghosts of the past rise up and they haunt us because our past in this country is tragic. It is sad, and there's no question."

At the same time, Land noted, "to call someone a racist is about the worst thing you can call somebody ... and rightly so. So we don't want to throw that term around flippantly. ... When we scream 'racism' at the drop of a hat, it cheapens the term and makes it more difficult to deal with racism when there really is racism," he said.

Finley added that both white and black people are expressing outrage over this incident.

"You have seen cross-racial goodwill in this case," he said. "If you've noticed a protest calling for investigation ... you've had black and white people calling for an investigation. ... You have had white people who were close to the scene coming out expressing a version (of the story) different than what Mr. Zimmerman is saying."

"Christians and other people of goodwill should continue to do what you've seen happen across the nation," Finley said.

(TAB, BP)

'Too close for comfort'

Southern Baptist representatives wait out military coup in Mali, ask for prayers for peaceful resolution

Southern Baptist workers in Mali are prayerfully waiting out the unfolding military coup that erupted in the West African nation March 22.

Rebellious factions of Mali's army stormed the presidential palace March 21, announcing on state television the following day that they had ended President Amadou Toumani Toure's rule, suspended the constitution and closed Mali's borders.

Among issues alleged by military forces staging the coup: blame of Toure for lack of support in their fight against an armed rebellion in the north by Mali's nomadic Tuareg people.

The United States joined a chorus of voices — including the United Nations, European Union and many of Mali's West African neighbors — in condemning the coup and demanding return to constitutional rule. Mali's military pledged to hold elections once national unity is restored.

Cliff and Rachel Blunt, Southern Baptist humanitarian aid workers in Bamako, Mali's capital, with their two young daughters, have endured the sound of nearly constant weapons fire since the coup began, but the fighting came especially close this time when the Blunts witnessed a group of men firing guns immediately outside the gate of their home. The Blunts' guard suspects the men were robbing a store. For Rachel, it was too close for comfort.

"We could hear everything the guys with the guns were saying. They were close enough to us that we could have carried on a conversation with them. ... I could actually smell gunpowder," Rachel said. "None of us are [military] targets. The only thing you have to worry about is when already desperate people get [even more] desperate — they can do stupid stuff."

The Blunts awoke to heavy machine gun fire March 23 just a few hundred yards from their home.

"We've heard a good bit of automatic weapons fire," Cliff said. "From time to time we'll hear what sounds like an explosion."

He said the family is "following the [American] embassy's recommendation to shelter in place, avoid unnecessary travel and lay low."

The Blunts believe the biggest threat isn't from rebel soldiers; instead, it's crime that worries them — thieves, bandits and roaming gangs who could take advantage of the police vacuum.

Isolated reports of looting already are surfacing.

Renegade soldiers have imposed a curfew and shut down Bamako's airport. It ruined the travel plans of an Arkansas church volunteer team due to depart Mali March 23. The team is part of Southern Baptists' efforts to share Christ with villages in Mali's bush, which is where the team remained an extra day until it was safe to return to the airport.

Jake Hill, the team's leader, said the group decided to see how God would use the situation rather than be fearful. They saw God work when Hill handed off the teaching of the Bible stories that day to a village believer named Mohammed.

"[H]e was an example ... to the other people there, that they don't have to hear the gospel or come to worship or gather as believers only when the white people



BP photo

IN PRAYER — South Carolina pastor Brad Bessent (center) prays with villagers in Mali during one of his many trips there to the West African country to minister to the Bambara people group.

are there," Hill said. "That would have never happened if we [had returned] on schedule."

"People need to realize these aren't just volunteer trips," he said. "This is part of the Great Commission. This is part of being on mission with God and part of the cost of following Jesus Christ. ... If you can literally say that I'm willing to do anything to bring God more glory and to build His Kingdom in heaven, then I guess you're ready to truly count the cost of following Jesus."

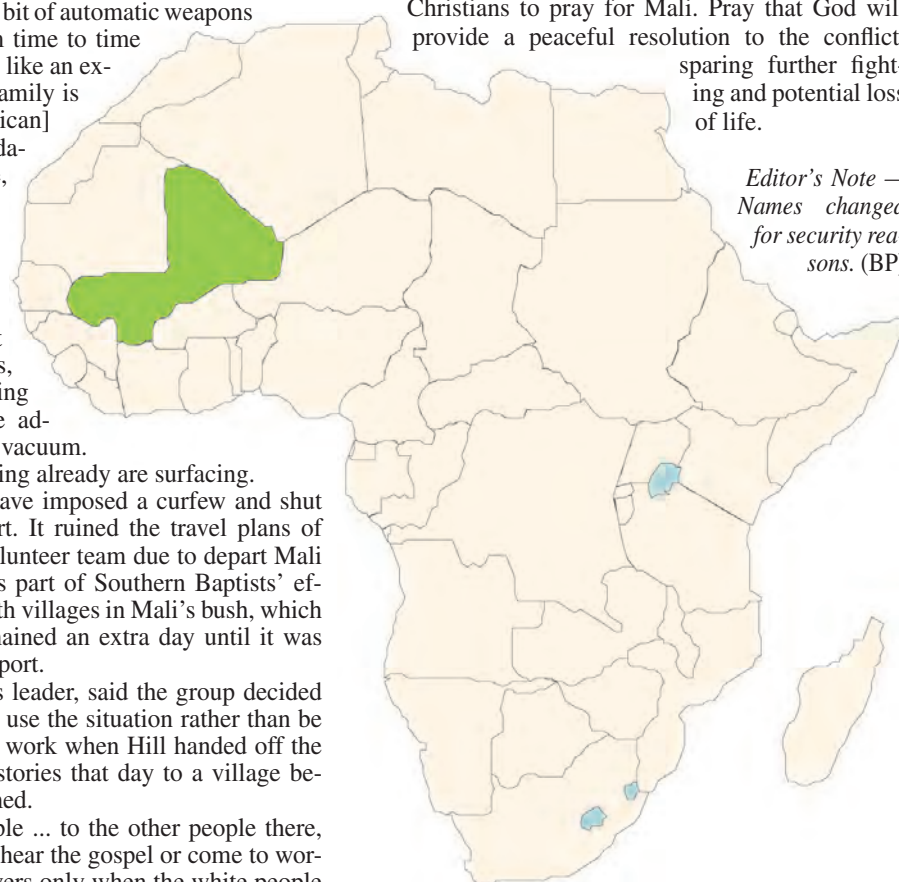
The Blunts agreed. "We knew that there were risks involved. But it's all a matter of your theology. If you really believe that God has a plan ... and that people need to be reconciled to Him through Christ ... it ought to compel you to act," Cliff said. "While some of this stuff might have been a surprise to us ... none of it is a surprise to Him."

"The same God who gave me my family is the same God who called us to this, together. And He loves my wife and my kids more than I do."

Southern Baptist workers in West Africa are asking Christians to pray for Mali. Pray that God will provide a peaceful resolution to the conflict,

sparing further fighting and potential loss of life.

Editor's Note — Names changed for security reasons. (BP)



Across Alabama's Associations

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **South Luverne Church** will hold a spiritual awakening April 15–18. Services will be Sunday at 6 p.m. and weeknights at 7. Herbert Brown, pastor of Southside Church, Greenville, will speak Sunday; Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First Church, will speak Monday; Lawrence Phipps, pastor of Vaughn Forest Church, Montgomery, will speak Tuesday; and Rick Lance, executive director for the State Board of Missions, will speak Wednesday. There will be special music each night. For information call Pastor Mike Green at 334-335-5795.

BESSEMER

► The J.O.Y. senior adult fellowship program of **The Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host Larry Daniels, senior adult minister for Hunter Street Church, Hoover, April 24, 11 a.m. For information call 205-477-8265 or visit www.bcmcadory.org. Lloyd Jones is program director. Bill McCall is pastor. ► **W.I.N.G.S. (Women in God's Service)** women's ministry of **Canaan Church, Bessemer**, will hold a women's conference April 14, 8 a.m.–noon. The theme will be "For Such a Time as This." Tollie Meggs of Out of the Boat Ministries will speak. Morgan Bailey is pastor. ► **Eastern Valley Church, Bessemer**, will hold spring revival April 15–18 with Ronnie Smith, of Dothan. Services will be Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and weeknights at 7. For information call 205-428-8211 or visit www.ronniesmith.org. John Mooney is pastor. ► **Fairfield Highlands Church, Midfield**, will hold fifth Sunday April 29, 11 a.m. Buck Duke will speak. Randy Harwell will lead the music. Lunch will follow the service. There will be an afternoon service of special music by the choir and soloists at 1:30 p.m. For information call 205-780-6621 or visit www.fairfieldhighlandsbaptist.org. Ed Cruce is pastor.

BIBB

► **Calvary Church, Centreville**, will present a walk-through Easter drama called "A Man Named Barabbas" April 11–15. For times and reservations call 205-926-4079. Mike Allen is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Hughes Memorial Church, Pinson**, will host a community Easter egg hunt April 7, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

There will be Easter basket giveaways, hotdogs, cupcakes and moon bounces. Josiah will tell a Bible story, and there will be clowns shaping balloon animals. The egg hunt will begin at 10:30 a.m. For information call 205-681-8493. Don Cunningham is pastor. ► **Southside Church, Birmingham**, will host the Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon sponsored by local churches April 29–May 3. The event will begin Sunday at 6 p.m. and will conclude on Thursday, the National Day of Prayer, at 11:30 a.m. Individuals of all ages can sign up to read aloud in one or more 15-minute increments for 90 hours around the clock. Please arrive 20 minutes before your scheduled reading time. A large print Bible will be available on the podium, however, readers are invited to read from their own Bible and in their native language. For information call 205-969-1236. To sign up visit www.libertypark.org/biblemarathon. J. Stephen Jones is pastor of Southside.

COVINGTON

► **First Church, Opp**, will celebrate its 110th anniversary homecoming April 29, 10 a.m. Wayne Sharpe will speak. Lunch will follow in the fellowship center. Randy Breedlove is pastor.

FAYETTE

► **Oakes Chapel Church, Vernon**, will hold a singing April 13, 7 p.m., with the Chuck Wagon Gang. Scott Stovall is pastor.

GENEVA

► The 39er's C.L.U.B. of **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will hold a luncheon meeting April 10, 11 a.m., with Ellen Cosper. For reservations call 334-684-9617 by April 5. Mike Shirah is pastor.

HALE

► **Gallion Church** will celebrate homecoming April 22. Sunday School will be at 9:30 a.m. and worship at 10:30 a.m. Bobby Hopper will speak. Back Home will provide special music. There will be no evening services. Hank Atchison is pastor.

LAMAR

► **Beaverton Church** will celebrate its 100th anniversary April 29, 11 a.m. Larry Sexton, a missionary serving in Honduras, will speak. Lunch will follow at noon. There will be an afternoon service

at 2 p.m. with Charlie Ballew. Danny Stanford is pastor.

MADISON

► **Flint River Church, Hazel Green**, and **Hazel Green Chiropractic** will sponsor an Easter Eggstravaganza April 7 at the field beside Meridianville Middle School. From noon–1:30 p.m., there will be pictures with the Easter bunny and the Huntsville Rockets football team. At 1 p.m., there will be an egg hunt for preschoolers (up to four years old). At 1:30 p.m., there will be an egg drop for ages five years–fifth grade. A helicopter will drop more than 70,000 eggs. There will be prizes. For information call Jason Parks at 256-828-3692 or visit www.frbc.org/easter-eggstravaganza. Steve Bell is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Flint Church, Decatur**, will host a Spring Fling egg hunt and community block party April 7, 3–5:30 p.m. There will be food, music, door prizes and inflatables. For information call 256-353-7429. The church also will hold revival April 15–18 with Evangelist Don Ledbetter. Services will be Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and weeknights at 6:30. Richard Richie is pastor.

SARDIS

► **Mount Carmel Church, Coffee Springs**, will hold an Easter sunrise service April 8, 5:30 a.m. Breakfast will follow. The church will present its Easter cantata at 11 a.m. directed by Ralph Ward. James Preachers is pastor.

SELMA

► **Valley Grande Church** will host the Buddy Bass Fishing Tournament April 27–28. Dinner will be served Friday at 6 p.m. Jay Wolf, pastor of First Church, Montgomery, will speak. To register call 334-874-6657. Clarke Skelton is pastor.

SHELBY

► **First Church, Vincent**, will hold a piano dedication service April 15, 6 p.m., with Frank Jones. Darryl Wood is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold its fifth annual car show Cruisin April 21, 9 a.m.–1 p.m. Bring your car, truck, motorcycle or tractor. There will be hotdogs, chips, drinks, door prizes and oldies music. For information call 205-553-4210. Curtis A. Kelley is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Winston Association** will hold a music festival April 29, 5 p.m., at Meek Church, Arley. If your church plans to participate, call 205-489-5137 by April 25. Thomas Hyche is pastor of Meek. Al Hood is director of missions for Winston Association.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Georgia Baptist Convention explores property sale

DULUTH, Ga. — The Georgia Baptist Convention's (GBC) executive committee has voted to entertain any valid offers for a potential sale of its 6-year-old Baptist Missions and Ministry Center and 43 acres of property.

GBC executive director J. Robert White, citing interest from realtors and private entities in recent years, made the recommendation to the executive committee during its mid-March meeting. The committee's consensus vote permits White to schedule exploratory site visits with potential buyers.

At-large board member Larry Wynn of Dacula told *The Christian Index*, the convention's newsjournal, that the building is not being listed for sale.

"The building and its location speaks for itself so we have no reason to list it," White said.

"The property is highly desirable and grows with interest on a regular basis."

The 43 acres of prime real estate across from the massive Gwinnett Arena sports and entertainment complex and the chamber of commerce on Sugarloaf Parkway has been a key factor in the site's popularity.

The arena, which includes the Gwinnett Convention Center, draws upwards of a million visitors a year to sports events, concerts and other events.

"We are not bankrupt and we are up to date on all our financial obligations," White emphasized to head off any speculation regarding the recommendation.

White said criticism of the building led him to consider making the request of the executive committee, though it was not the driving factor. He said he knew the building had become a hindrance to some and did not want that to be a roadblock toward cooperation.

IMB seeks to mobilize business leaders worldwide

LAKE CHARLES, La. — Within every Southern Baptist church there are people who can take the gospel around the world — business professionals, International Mission Board (IMB) President Tom Elliff said.

Elliff announced a new component to the IMB's partnership with Southern Baptist churches during the March 20–21 trustee meeting at Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La.: "... a global, strategic mobilization of businessmen and (business)women, corporate leaders across the [Southern Baptist] Convention ..."

Through global strategic mobilization (GSM), the IMB will offer business leaders and their organizations training and equipping to be "active, effective sowers of the seed of the gospel across the world."

The goal is to multiply Great Commission impact by mobilizing business leaders as well as other leaders in their professions across the SBC to "carry the light" of the gospel into their arenas, Elliff said, noting that the GSM concept is an acknowledgement of the first-century practice of believers carrying the gospel along Roman roads of commerce.

In May 2011, the IMB created a marketplace initiatives task force that has been studying scriptural practices and contemporary possibilities throughout the business world. This May, a team of business leaders will meet in Dallas to provide an additional "think tank" as GSM is developed.

Liberia Baptist Convention president elected

VIRGINIA, Liberia — A former war refugee who returned to his native Liberia in 2005 to run a K-12 boarding school has been elected president of the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention.

Olu Menjay, principal of Ricks Institute, a school with 620 students located about 15 miles from Liberia's capital Monrovia, was elected to a three-year term of office at a convention meeting March 17.

Menjay is assistant professor in the Roberts Department of Christianity in Mercer University's College of Liberal Arts. He is also vice president and chairman of the Human Rights Advocacy Commission of the Baptist World Alliance, the youngest person ever to be elected to the position.

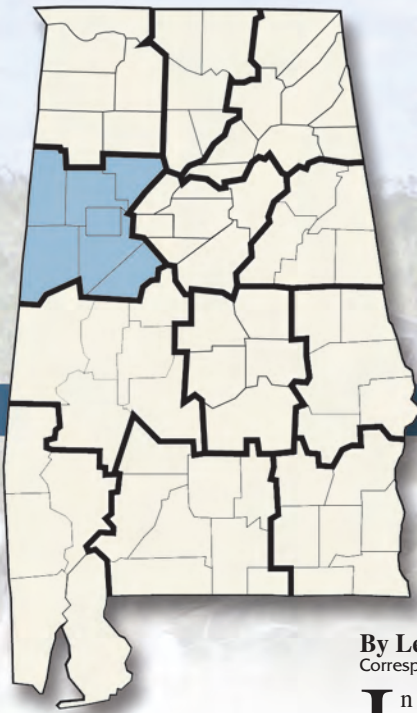
Menjay said his goals as president include improving education by strengthening Baptist schools in Liberia and securing scholarships for Liberian Baptists to study abroad. He also seeks to empower Liberian Baptist churches to "fulfill self-sufficiency with a focus to eliminate a future of dependency."

A third aim of his administration is to expose the convention's work to fellow Baptists around the world.

Old Howard 100 set for April 21

The annual Old Howard 100 bike ride in Perry and Hale counties is set for April 21. The ride, sponsored by Samford University in Birmingham, includes routes of 30, 45, 75 and 100 miles and begins and ends

on the campus of Judson College in Marion. All proceeds from the event benefit the Sowing Seeds of Hope interfaith initiative. For registration or additional information, visit www.samford.edu/oldhoward. (JC)



Baptists RESPOND

to areas devastated by April 2011 tornadoes

Alabama Baptists continue disaster relief efforts in District 9

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In some areas of the state, the destructive storms of April 27, 2011, are now a memory. However, in other portions of the state, such as Tuscaloosa, there are daily reminders of what brief but deadly twisters can do.

When he first saw the ravaged landscape soon after tornadoes ripped through that area of the state, the heart of Billy Gray, interim director of missions (DOM) of Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, ached.

Later after debris had been removed and the remains of homes dissembled, the sight of the barren landscape somehow seemed sadder. "You get this feeling of sadness," knowing that a lot of people lost their lives, lost their homes, lost their businesses and, in some cases, lost their way, Gray observed.

Some do not want to build back in the same place because it would just hurt too much, he said.

In Alabama Baptist's District 9 region — encompassing the counties of Fayette, Lamar, Pickens, Walker and Tuscaloosa — about 60 people perished and many thousands of homes were destroyed that day.

Tuscaloosa was one of several locations in the state to be hit hardest as more than 60 cyclones traversed Alabama.

According to the federal government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), that 24-hour period was the fourth deadliest for single-day tornado outbreaks in U.S. history.

The death toll in Alabama's Hackleburg, Tuscaloosa and Birmingham now number among the deadliest single tornadoes in NOAA records.

Fayette Association

One community in Fayette Baptist Association was hit significantly by the double wave of storms that day, said DOM Larry Barnes.

In Boley (also called Boley Springs), four people were killed by the storms that destroyed about 30 homes. Hubbertville also sustained damage. Congregants of Fayette Association — which includes churches in Fayette, Tuscaloosa and Lamar counties — responded quickly and



Photo by Doug Rogers

FEEDING UNIT — Disaster relief volunteers serve food following the April 27 tornadoes at the 24-hour Red Cross shelter located at Beck Park in Tuscaloosa where around 600 people stayed.

diligently, as did civic groups and churches of other denominations, Barnes said.

Berry Baptist Church, Berry, became a collection and distribution center, Barnes said. The church also helped to coordinate preparation of meals, which were delivered nightly to Boley's volunteer fire department

for two weeks or more, he said.

Fayette Association does not have a disaster relief team, Barnes noted. However, the people of the county assisted their neighbors to such a degree that there was no need for help from outside the area.

In addition, teams from Fayette — involving about 100 people

from the association — responded to needs in Tuscaloosa, Hackleburg, Phil Campbell and Cordova, Barnes said.

First Baptist Church, Fayette, continues to have contact in Hackleburg, offering assistance there, he said.

(See 'Alabama,' page 6)

District 9

Fayette Association

Lamar Association

Pickens Association

Pleasant Grove Association

Sipsey Association

Tuscaloosa Association

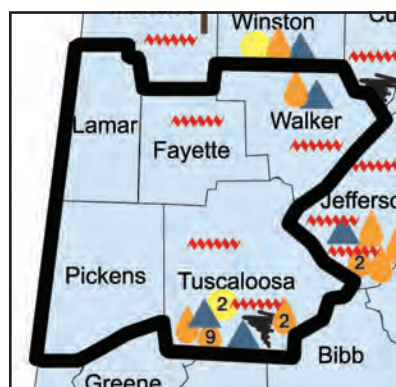
Walker Association

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* has been highlighting storm recovery and relief assistance in each of the 12 districts over the past year and will continue until all districts are covered.

Highlights from District 9

State disaster relief efforts in the area (shown by county)



7 of the 7 associations have Alabama Baptist disaster relief efforts focused on them.

3 on-site command centers were set up immediately following the tornado damage.

1 state feeding unit was set up to help the numerous local units (locations where units traded out noted by numbers).

4 shower unit locations were brought in during the first few weeks (locations where units traded out noted by numbers).

1 Alabama Baptist church in the area was severely damaged.

Alabama Baptist associations, churches help

(continued from page 5)

About \$6,000–\$7,000 was donated by people in the county, money that has been used to help individuals within Fayette, Barnes said.

Those funds paid for items for food kits that were given to each affected household, storage containers, clothes, utilities and materials for repair or construction, he said, noting the association seeks people who need assistance.

Fayette is back to normal, “as much as it can be,” Barnes reported.

Through this crisis, the churches were able to show the love of Jesus to those who were hurting and are maintaining their relationships to affected people, he said.

Lamar Association

“Our county really was not hit,” reported DOM Scott Stokes. But there were storm systems on either side, he stated.

The association did not have a disaster relief team at that time. Nonetheless teams of volunteers from Lamar Association churches aided in Hackleburg, Phil Campbell, Tuscaloosa and Smithville, Miss.

Initially the church teams provided cleanup and food service and gave many items needed by affected households in Phil Campbell, Stokes said. Since then, the focus has turned to ministering and rebuilding.

Stokes said he is “proud of the churches in our association and how they responded” to their fellow Alabamians.

As in so many other parts of the state, the 24 churches of Lamar Association have realized the importance of being ready to help locally and elsewhere when a crisis occurs. Stokes said the association now has a disaster relief coordinator and a trained disaster relief chaplain. Others are interested in receiving disaster relief training, he added.

“All of us have really been challenged to step up and minister,” Stokes said. “It made us aware that there was a need for us to be prepared to help others.”

He said Lamar Association continues to maintain contact in areas of need, seeking opportunities to rebuild and minister.

Pleasant Grove Association

Several sections of Pleasant Grove Baptist

Association felt the impact of the tornadoes.

However “we were fortunate in that we weren’t devastated,” DOM Dan Wiggins said.

The morning storms affected Coaling, Vance and McCalla, while the evening storms hit Brookwood, Holt and Surles, said Wiggins, whose association includes churches in Tuscaloosa, Jefferson and Bibb counties.

Wiggins, who served as “incident commander” for Brookwood at the G.G. Hardin Center in the aftermath of the disaster, said many individuals assumed chain saw and other relief duties. Mormons, volunteers from Samaritan’s Purse and the National Guard also served in the area, he said, noting many from the association went into Tuscaloosa to assist because the magnitude of devastation there was so great.

A few days after the storms, a group of chaplains — one of whom was Sardis Baptist Association DOM James Preachers — came to minister in Pleasant Grove Association.

“They were like angels to me,” Wiggins said. “They made over 50 contacts that day.”

More chaplains arrived a few days afterward, said Wiggins, who is team leader for District 9.

Some chaplains served at the Hardin Center, which was the site for distribution and coordination of relief efforts. Later the Hardin Center’s efforts were relocated to the association’s Christian Ministry Center.

The ministry center, which normally distributes food and clothes on Mondays and Thursdays, was open most weekdays and Saturdays to accommodate people in need during this time, Wiggins said. The ministry center gave out tents and water, as well as food and Meals Ready to Eat (MRE’s) supplied by West Alabama Food Bank. In the early part of the relief endeavor, the ministry center was open and distributing items at the same time efforts were going on at the Hardin Center.

Through the work of the ministry center, individuals and churches, a number of people accepted Jesus as Savior in the aftermath of the storms, Wiggins said.

In recent months, Pleasant Grove Association has worked to prepare for the next crisis. It now has a chain saw team and more disaster relief chaplains. Wiggins said a Church of Christ group in Homewood donated chain saws to equip the association’s team.

In addition, Wiggins said others have trained in food service and HAM radio communication. The association office now has a base station, courtesy of Tuscaloosa’s EMA. The association also has cooperated with Brookwood’s mayor, police, volunteer fire department and city inspector in increasing preparedness, Wiggins said, noting the association is trying to raise funds for certain supplies for the chain saw team and for a small feeding unit.

Sipsey Association

The late April tornadoes left their mark in several areas of Sipsey Baptist Association. Among them were the Zion area, where an EF4 cyclone struck; near New Hope Baptist Church, Berry; Boley and Moores Bridge, DOM Max Stripling said.

“Our churches responded well helping them,” said Stripling, whose association includes churches in Pickens, Fayette and Tuscaloosa counties.

Churches within the association assisted in areas that suffered damage and also ministered outside the association. Thirty-two volunteers from Sipsey Association worked in Brookwood and Cottdale in Tuscaloosa County.

They volunteered for chaplaincy, food service, cleanup, recovery and chain saw tasks, Stripling said.

Many others from Sipsey Association who

Mulberry Springs, FBC Vernon meet needs

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Two churches in Lamar Baptist Association chose a special way to help those affected by the April 2011 storms.

One congregation gave a significant sum of money that actually kicked off an associational gift card project to assist those whose homes suffered damage.

Another congregation adopted a church in a storm-damaged area to support it in addressing needs in that community.

Director of Missions Scott Stokes said the association established a disaster relief fund, through which Lowe’s gift cards were distributed in Phil Campbell and Hackleburg and in Smithville, Miss.

The gift cards were presented to pastors in those areas to give to people affected by the storms. It was handled this way, Stokes explained, to help the pastors and churches in those areas to create stronger ties within their communities.

Approximately \$8,000 in gift cards has been given so far, Stokes said. “We still have money in that fund. We’re still helping people in rebuilding.”

‘First to step up’

The money that went into the fund came from many churches in the association, Stokes said. However, it was a sizeable donation from a small congregation that got the project going.

“One of our smallest churches was the first to step up,” Stokes said of Mulberry Springs Baptist Church, Sulligent.

That church voted soon after the April tornadoes to give \$5,000 from its regular budget to this fund, said Robert Campbell, a deacon. “We just wanted to help out.”

Mulberry Springs Baptist, which recently called Robert Stamps as pastor, gener-

ally has an attendance of about 20 for Sunday morning worship, Campbell said.

Most of the church members are not able to assist in a physical way after a disaster. Therefore, this was their avenue for helping the hurting, he said.

Led by the Lord

A sister church in Lamar Association — First Baptist, Vernon — kept feeling prompted to minister in Phil Campbell.

“I think the Lord led us up there,” Pastor Clyde Stevens said. “We kept going up into that area to see what we could do.”

The church made about a dozen trips, ministering each time to and through First Baptist Church, Phil Campbell, in Franklin Baptist Association.

“We unofficially adopted that church and the pastor’s family,” Stevens said. “We were helping the church and they were helping the people. We just carried whatever they needed up there.”

First, Vernon, also provided food service and debris removal during some of the trips, which spanned from May through September, Stevens said. First, Phil Campbell, “was helping so many people that we wanted to help them. If they had a particular need for something, we took it.”

Actually, all of Lamar Association assisted in some way. Stokes said all the churches brought items to the association office for First, Phil Campbell.

Stevens said First, Vernon, still has contact with First, Phil Campbell, and is ready to help if a need arises. First, Vernon, also had the opportunity to provide a needed getaway for the pastor of First, Phil Campbell, and his family.

were not trained disaster relief volunteers gave their time as well. Stripling estimates that as many as 90 individuals from the association served in affected areas.

In addition, congregants of Sipsey Association gave monetary resources to help those in crisis, Stripling said.

One small church, Big Hill Missionary Baptist, Gordo, gave \$1,000 to each affected household in the Zion community, he said. A sister church, Zion Community Baptist, Gordo, held a benefit and gave the proceeds to people in that region.

“Every church in our association did something to help,” Stripling continued. He gave as two examples Bethabara Missionary Baptist, Northport, which housed volunteers working in the Tuscaloosa area, and Bevan Chapel Baptist Church, Berry, which assisted in Boley.

Assisting after the crisis created a “unity of purpose” and helped individuals to “realize we could help each other and needed to help each other,” Stripling said. “People of the community realized that people of faith cared and reached out to them when they were in need.”

Tuscaloosa Association

Even though 11 months have lapsed since

the devastating storms, the reminders of it are prolific in Tuscaloosa. Like so many others in the state, that area experienced more than one storm that day. Billy Gray, interim DOM of Tuscaloosa Association, said the storm system in the morning struck Coaling. In the afternoon, the path went through Tuscaloosa, as well as Holt, Peterson, Rosedale, Forest Lake, Crescent Ridge, Fleetwood and Brookwood.

The most destructive of the tornadoes left a path the width of a mile in some places, Gray explained. “It did a lot of damage” and 52 people lost their lives.

When he first saw the amount of destruction, Gray thought the death toll “was going to be in the hundreds, if not

thousands.”

Gray climbed onto the roof of Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, to take a look. Because so many trees and buildings had been damaged or destroyed, Gray said he was able to see all the way to Alberta, four or five miles away. “Everything in between was wiped out.”

More than 5,360 homes either were damaged or destroyed, reported Donny Jones, chief operating officer of the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama.

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.sbd.org.

To find other ways of getting involved, call:

► Fayette Baptist Association, 205-932-6901;

► Lamar Baptist Association, 205-695-9625;

► Pickens Baptist Association, 205-367-8632;

► Pleasant Grove Baptist Association, 205-620-0736;

► Sipsey Baptist Association, 205-292-6800;

► Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, 205-339-2273; or

► Walker Baptist Association, 205-387-1820. (TAB)

rebuild, restore tornado-stricken District 9

Neighborhoods along entire streets had been flattened, Gray said.

Jones reported that 600 businesses were damaged or destroyed and more than 7,000 individuals became unemployed.

Several Tuscaloosa Association churches — Forest Lake, Alberta, New Eastern Hills, Jesus Es El Camino and Hopewell — sustained damage, Gray said.

The situation that day was unique in that communications of several helping agencies became nonfunctional. Phone lines were down and cell phones did not always transmit.

“We tried to step in and take up some of the slack,” Gray said.

Ministry to affected individuals began immediately. The association’s chain saw unit quickly dispatched. Volunteers gave out food, clothes and supplies and assisted in cleaning up and making repairs, Gray said. The association’s feeding unit set up at Tuscaloosa’s Belk Center.

Churches — even the damaged ones — attended to needs of people in the community, Gray said. “I was extremely proud of our people.”

Money came from churches, individuals and other sources to help the hurting.

Rapidly, volunteers from outside the area began to arrive and have continued to respond ever since, Gray said, noting more than 10,000 volunteers have worked in Tuscaloosa, some from as far away as Washington state and Oregon.

In an effort to reciprocate some of the kindness received, Tuscaloosa Association’s disaster relief volunteers responded after a deadly tornado hit Joplin, Mo., in May 2011, Gray said. The association’s disaster relief team also has assisted in Birmingham and Pleasant Grove.

Even now, the association receives calls almost daily from groups wanting to help. One volunteer, Gray’s wife, Margaret Ann, works basically full-time scheduling volunteer groups and arranging for lodging at churches. Groups are booked into summer 2012.

Three Tuscaloosa Association churches — Cottondale, Forest Lake and Alberta — have established permanent ministry centers to assist those affected by the storms, Gray said.

A lot of other churches in the association are supporting the work of those centers, he added. “We don’t want anybody falling through the cracks” by not receiving the assistance and ministry they need.

Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, another Tuscaloosa Association church, has adopted more than 100 families to aid them with housing needs and to provide necessities. Other churches have supported Calvary in this effort.

Holt Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, set up a counseling center.

Gray said professions of faith have been reported through the work of the association churches and chaplains.

“Everybody has been so good,” Gray said of churches and individuals.

After a summer of cutting trees and clearing debris, the focus has shifted to repairing and rebuilding, which is likely to take several years to complete, he noted.

Many people are still in temporary housing, which will present a dilemma in a few months. Gray explained that Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds that are paying for some housing expires in October.

In the meantime, Tuscaloosa Association and

other entities are planning what to do to help when that happens. When asked what is still needed by Tuscaloosa and that area, Gray replied, “Everything.”

Many individuals need assistance rebuilding, especially those who don’t have enough insurance to pay for the entire project. Also there is a need for volunteers at the three ministry centers and for more churches to open their facilities for lodging teams coming to the area to work, he said.

Of course, prayer is vitally important and will continue to be, Gray said.

Pickens Association

The northern part of Pickens County felt the wrath on April 27, as storms damaged about 20 homes. A tornado roughly two weeks earlier had hit Aliceville, reported DOM Gary Farley.

After the late April storms, Pickens Association’s disaster relief team worked to clean up the area and assisted in removing a tree off a church of another denomination, Farley said. The association office became a collection center, receiving many truckloads of items for affected people.

“We processed tons of stuff,” he said.

So many contributions were received that the surplus was delivered to Sumter, Greene, Choctaw, Winston, Fayette and Walker counties.

“We distributed stuff every day,” said Gwen Davidson, who spearheaded the effort and is a member of New Salem Baptist Church, Reform.

Davidson said deliveries went to small communities that might otherwise have been overlooked like Geiger, Yantley, Zion and places that may not appear on maps. Supplies were also taken to Reform. The items were given to churches for distribution to people in need, she said.

At least 20 people from New Salem Baptist Church; Carrollton Baptist Church and Pickensville Baptist Church, both in Carrollton; First Baptist Church, Reform, and other churches, including a Gordo church helped sort, distribute and deliver. First Baptist Church, Fayette, in Fayette Baptist Association, also provided some donations, she added.

But Davidson noted, “It’s not us doing it. The Lord’s really doing the work through us.”

Other supplies were sent from Rosedale (Tuscaloosa) to Pickens, which transported them as well to Choctaw County, Farley added.

There was even a contribution of 10,000 T-shirts from Eureka Springs, Ark.

Those affected by the storms also were given needed items at the association’s thrift store, Farley said.

Through ministering to the hurting, people of the association were able to tell many about Jesus and give out a lot of Bibles, Farley said.

In addition to the many individuals who gave their time caring for the needs in the county, volunteers from Pickens Association — about 100 in all — helped outside the county.

Volunteers went to Rosedale to help clean up there. In addition, Farley said they ministered in Geiger and Forkland in Sumter County, where they provided food, clothes and health packets.

Farley hopes that the work of association volunteers will help the churches in the different places to have a stronger connection

with the members of their communities.

As for Pickens Association itself, the aim is to be better equipped to give crisis assistance next time.

Farley said the association already has been able to purchase a tractor with a lift bucket that will greatly enhance the capabilities of the disaster relief team. One of the goals now is getting a shower unit, Farley said. “We need to get prepared for the next time around because it will come.”

And Davidson recalled after Hurricane Katrina, her son, Jacob Hunter Davidson, who was only three years old at the time, spearheaded a distribution campaign of his own.

He saw on the news that the toys of the children had been washed away. He told his mother he wanted to get toys for the children in need.

To accomplish the task, Hunter set up a lemonade stand for a week at the association office and collected donations.

Hunter collected more than \$1,000 in donations as well as mops, brooms, gas containers, food, bottled water, crayons and coloring books. His uncle, Jesse Hughes, donated the use of a trailer to store the donations and later to deliver the items to the affected families.

“My little boy showed me we could do it,” Davidson said.

Walker Association

The double wave of storms claimed at least nine lives in Walker County. However, DOM Lucky Teague said the physical damage seen in Cordova, Sipsey and Jasper was not nearly as much as what surrounding areas experienced.

Many, many volunteers from outside the

association arrived quickly to help, Teague said.

And Walker Association’s disaster relief volunteers activated swiftly, addressing chain saw and cleanup needs.

“The Florida disaster relief team was incredible. And they stayed with us a good, long while,” Teague added. “People from everywhere came. ... It was not just a Baptist effort.” The Mennonites, for example, served in Walker Association.

Local people gave assistance as well and churches of different denominations came together for one purpose.

Teague said First Freewill Baptist Church, Cordova, took up the cause of meeting needs. “Our people channeled help and aid through them,” Teague said of Walker Association churches.

Individuals from the communities and churches assembled health packets, provided blankets, water, food and meals.

“Our people contributed. I don’t think people went lacking very long,” Teague said.

So much was contributed that truckloads of surplus were taken to Hackleburg and Phil Campbell when members of Walker Association churches traveled into those areas to work, Teague said.

As for Walker Association, “our recovery has been excellent here,” he said.

The association’s volunteers continue to be ready to respond and have helped in the rebuilding phase whenever the opportunity has arisen, Teague said. The association and its churches have sought to meet “all the needs that we know of” and continue to try to take care of all requests.

11-year-old creates Operation Teddy Bear ministry for young tornado survivors

William Eide may be only 11, but already he’s learned the power of using available resources.

After the tornadoes hit Alabama on April 27, 2011, he tried to help with what he had — teddy bears.

“I was just sitting at home after we had driven through the devastation of all the tornadoes trying to think of a way to help all the kids,” said William, a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association. “I saw my stuffed animals, and I thought that’s what we should give out to the kids.”

He quickly found 46 at his house and went out with his mom and grandparents distributing them.

“Everyone was very thankful,” he said.

But that wasn’t a good stopping place for William.

Alabama had a lot more than 46 hurting children, so he started enlisting his friends, his neighbors, his state and even the nation.

To date, Operation Teddy Bear has collected and distributed 12,089 stuffed animals.

William’s effort also has collected and distributed canned goods, gas cards and

other needed items, such as vouchers for storm shelters.

“We had originally planned to stop a couple of months after the [tornadoes], but we were at a block party in June and talked with folks who encouraged us to continue on,” said Lara Eide, William’s mother.

She is now in the process of making Operation Teddy Bear a nonprofit charity organization.

“When asked why he does this, William always says, ‘Because it’s the right thing to do,’” Lara Eide said. “He always reminds me to love God more than anything else and he lives by that.”

Jon Hathcock, minister to children at Calvary Baptist, said William’s heart is full of desire to give to others.

“William was quick to think about the boys and girls during the storm,” Hathcock said. “It has now been many months after the storm, but William still chooses to think of others and live out his story to be like Jesus. I am proud to see this boy’s faith in Jesus put into action. God receives another victory in spite of this storm.”

For more information, visit <http://operationteddybear.weebly.com>. (TAB)



sxc.hu

Fayette Assoc. churches prepare meals

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

April 27, 2011, through mid-June is a "complete blur" to Rod Ward, pastor of Berry Baptist Church, Berry, in Fayette Baptist Association.

It was a fast-paced time of providing for the needs of people who suffered in the late April tornadoes.

Berry Baptist — along with many other churches and groups — worked to get one hot meal to the affected people each day.

Ward's wife, Kim, and Christy Bonner, whose husband is pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church, Bankston, were among the people spearheading the endeavor to feed the hurting, Rod Ward said.

Working together

The meals were prepared by several groups and approximately nine churches — including Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Reform, in Pickens County, he said.

At first, the meals were available at Berry Baptist both for volunteers and affected individuals. Later in

the relief process, the meals were delivered to Boley Volunteer Fire Department and into the communities, with Bonner heading up efforts at the fire department, Ward said.

The Sunday right after the storm, Ward's church held its morning service, then suspended activities the rest of the day to clean up in the area and sort items that had been given to help those affected by the storms.

Grace Baptist Church and First Baptist Church, both in Fayette, and Shady Grove Baptist were among the churches that assisted Berry Baptist in this ministry effort. Ward said volunteers from Freewill Baptist and Methodist churches and other denominations also came to help.

In addition, volunteers from the churches assembled boxes of supplies for affected households. The helpers worked with the volunteer fire department to distribute items, Ward said.

Berry High School's field house also was opened for showers. The different churches took turns with the responsibilities there, he said. Another opportunity arose to help

build a house for a lady and volunteers assisted.

"I was very proud of the town of Berry and the greater faith community" and how they responded to the needs after the storms, Ward said. "The community really stepped up to be the hands and feet of Christ."

Branching out

Volunteers "didn't stop until we knew all needs were met" and then branched out, serving in other places. Hard-hit Phil Campbell and smaller areas that had been otherwise overlooked became the focus of relief efforts, Ward said.

"We helped folks in Berry and it kind of branched out from there for about a month and a half," he said, noting he and his wife lived in southern Mississippi at the time of Hurricane Katrina. They grew to understand just how far even a cup of cold water goes in helping people. "I think God let us go through Katrina to be prepared for April 27."

Fayette Assoc. volunteers minister door to door

After the late April 2011 tornadoes struck the communities of Boley (also called Boley Springs) and Flatwoods in Fayette County, a brigade of pastors and other volunteers went door to door to check on the people and address needs.

"That community was a mess," Phillip Bonner, pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church, Bankston, in Fayette Baptist Association, said of Boley and Flatwoods.

"I grew up in that community," Bonner said. "I was very concerned about them. I just did what needed to be done."

Working together

Bonner — along with the pastors of Grace Baptist Church, Fayette, and Berry

Baptist Church, Berry, as well as pastors' wives, volunteers and people from other denominations — visited with individuals and found out their needs.

Necessary items

Among the things the people needed were food, water, ice, hygiene items and gas for generators, Bonner said.

"Everything mostly was brought to Boley Volunteer Fire Department," Bonner said of the necessary items.

From there, volunteers took to each household what the individuals needed, he said.

"We worked for days trying to get everybody settled," said Bonner, who took time off from his job at Taylor Sudden Service Inc. in Bessemer. (TAB)

Sipsey Assoc. 'impressive' in disaster relief

Sipsey Baptist Association — made up of 15 churches — may be one of the smallest associations in the state, but it has a big name in disaster relief.

There are more than 40 people in Sipsey Association who are trained in disaster relief, said Director of Missions Max Stripling.

Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, called that number "impressive."

Johnson said Sipsey is the smallest association in the state to have that number of trained disaster relief volunteers.

In mathematical terms, that figure averages to more than 2.67 volunteers per church.

"Sipsey has one of the highest concentrations of disaster relief personnel in relation to the number of churches," Johnson said, noting

Sipsey's concentration appears to be the highest in the state.

"There is a keen awareness of the importance of disaster relief and a desire in the association to continue the building process," Johnson said. "We are thankful for the great interest and effort to develop disaster relief resources in this area."

A desire to help

Stripling said the people of Sipsey Association have a desire to be prepared not only to minister in their own tornado-prone area, but also in other places of crisis.

Johnson said the commitment is evident in disaster relief courses. "The training events held for the area have been well attended."

Actually, in October 2010, approximately 25 from Sipsey Association were trained and became part of the disaster relief crew, Stripling said.

"We probably doubled our number" with that training session.

Then came April 27, 2011, which for many of those 25 was their first disaster relief experience, Stripling said. Although Sipsey has a disaster relief crew that is strong in number, the members generally must attach themselves to teams from other associations with trained disaster relief leadership.

While Sipsey's concentration of disaster relief personnel may be unique, its commitment to disaster relief is a common thread among many smaller associations.

"It is often the smaller rural associations that have the strongest influence in disaster relief," Johnson observed. "Alabama's heaviest concentration of disaster relief personnel and involvement are often from rural areas and smaller churches." (TAB)

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'My heroes'

Pleasant Grove Assoc. volunteers integral in disaster relief work

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

They may not receive special awards or recognition, but the countless volunteers who worked tirelessly after the April 27, 2011, tornadoes are considered nothing less than "heroes" to those they assisted.

For Dan Wiggins, director of missions for Pleasant Grove Baptist Association, several people stand out as consistent volunteers during his service last year as incident commander for relief efforts at the

G.G. Hardin Center in Brookwood. Those seven volunteers, Lucille Mize, Debbie Cohen, Dwight Kizziah, Roasco Kornegay, Wayne Hope, Loretta Hope and Wiggins' wife, Margaret, were each integral in assisting Wiggins at the center after the devastating storms.

Wiggins said some of the association's churches represented in the effort included Midway Baptist Church, Brookwood; Antioch Baptist Church, Brookwood; Reno Baptist Church, Woodstock; Mission Baptist Church, Woodstock; Ever-

green Baptist Church, Vance and Little Hurricane Baptist Church, Brookwood.

Cohen, a member of Evergreen Baptist, was compelled to offer assistance however she could. She worked with a friend to collect donated clothing and other items for distribution at the G.G. Hardin Center.

Cohen's primary role, assistant incident commander, kept her at the center from 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day for the first two weeks of operation. "I was in charge of organizing how the items inside [the center] were set up," she explained.

She recalled how the Lord showed His faithfulness time and time again. "I had someone who would come in and tell me about a need, and before that person would stop talking, my phone would ring with someone who had [that very thing] the person needed," she said.

In addition to Cohen's organizational skills, Wiggins benefitted from the invaluable knowledge of Mize, treasurer of Pleasant Grove Association, who knew much about the Brookwood community.

When asked why she invested long hours as a volunteer, Cohen, who had just completed her first Southern Baptist Disaster Relief chaplaincy classes two weeks prior to April 27, replied with a simple answer. "For me personally, I feel like I got way more of a blessing than anything I did for anyone else," she explained. "It was all done to the glory of God. Without Him, none of it could have happened."

disaster relief calls us," said Cohen, a member of Evergreen Baptist Church, Vance.

Alongside his fellow volunteers, Kizziah soon found himself reaching out to people across the association. "It was a different outlet God sent me in," said Kizziah, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church, Brookwood. "Working with the association, we've been able to help with the tornado recovery program that's connected to all churches in the association."

They have helped meet physical, mental and spiritual needs of those in the community.

"People are getting their lives back," Kizziah said. "You see smiles again, hugs again. Our association was lucky because when people needed someone, there were lots of shoulders to lean on." (TAB)

Pleasant Grove chaplains volunteer

When Dwight Kizziah was ordained as a minister just a month before the tornadoes hit last April, he had no idea what his first year as a pastor would entail. Soon after the storms, Kizziah decided to undergo training to be a volunteer chaplain.

"They saw a need and went and got training," Dan Wiggins, director of missions for Pleasant Grove Baptist Association, said of Kizziah and fellow volunteers Debbie Cohen and Joyce McFerrin.

Prepared in advance

The trio received Southern Baptist Disaster Relief training through the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' disaster relief ministry as well as training through the Shelby County police chaplaincy program.

"We deploy to different areas as

Vance's Evergreen Baptist ministers to community

After the tornadoes hit in April 2011, Debbie Cohen and many of her fellow Evergreen Baptist Church, Vance, members could often be found at the G.G. Hardin Center in Brookwood. They offered their services as volunteers and were able to reach out to families in need throughout the community.

Once the demand for volunteers petered out, though, the Evergreen group realized there were still several people in need of assistance and they wanted to continue the outreach. Cohen had a list of community members who had been affected by the storm, and she wanted to follow up with the people on that list to be sure everyone was on track to get their lives put back together after the storm.

To help with this process, Evergreen Baptist set up a fund to pay for the ministry.

Meeting needs

"We met the biggest needs first and then continued with smaller needs," Cohen said. "We bought beds, paid for hotels while people's homes were rebuilt, helped with clothes and furniture, whatever we needed to do."

Luckily, Evergreen Baptist has a group of older men who routinely offer their construction services to churches that need help with building or repair

work. These men were able to offer their expertise to the Evergreen storm ministry in many cases. And, when certain jobs were too extensive for the Evergreen men to handle, Cohen was able to reach out to contacts she'd made at the G.G. Hardin Center.

Working together

"If they couldn't fix something, I'd go back through a list of contacts who could help me," she said. "We kind of work together with different denominations and all sorts of connections."

Though she and her fellow Evergreen volunteers have helped several people in the last few months, one of Cohen's most memorable experiences involved a mother and her grown daughter, who was disabled. Their mobile home had been destroyed by the storm, and the daughter was having a difficult time being in new environments.

"We put our heads together to see what we could do to help this family," Cohen said. "They'd gotten some FEMA money, so our church decided to match the FEMA money, which enabled us to find them a mobile home and furnish it, too. There were so many people who worked together to make this happen." (TAB)

Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

This morning I had the privilege of helping a wonderful Christian lady apply for a reverse mortgage. She currently owes around \$80,000. We plan to pay that off and free her from ever making any more mortgage payments. Plus, we plan to get her some cash as well.

Now some of you may be wondering what obligations will she have with a reverse? Well, she will be responsible for paying her homeowners insurance, utilities, maintenance and property tax if she ever loses her exempt status. Her name stays on the deed and it is her house. She can pretty well do as she pleases. One of my loan closers often tells folks when they're closing their reverse, "This is your home, you can paint it polka dot or

purple, whatever you like."

Mentioning property tax compels me to say that I often talk with seniors who are paying property tax when they may qualify for an exemption. In our state, at age 65, if your income isn't over a certain bracket, you can apply for exemption at your county's tax assessor office. I'm not talking about homestead exemption. That's a whole different animal. Check into it. You may be surprised.

For a free brochure or more information, call Jimmy Dixon at 205-567-4800 or email jdixon@mcgowinking.com.

Like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is Bible Study director and a deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.



Jimmy Dixon



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'Unified plan of giving'

SBC's Cooperative Program works to 'penetrate lostness' together

By Roger S. (Sing) Oldham
SBC Executive Committee

Recognizing the drain frequent financial requests made on the churches, our Baptist forbearers in the opening decades of the 20th century hammered out a plan that recognized and sought to address this problem.

The plan was remarkably simple — 1) individuals give their tithes and offerings to their local churches; 2) the churches forward a percentage of their contributions to their state Baptist convention for ministry in the state; and 3) the state convention then forwards a percentage of its funds to provide support for Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) ministries.

Leaders of SBC ministries and leaders of state Baptist ministries realized the churches that were being asked to fund the ministries of the SBC were the same churches being asked to support the ministries of individual state Baptist conventions. Inundated with so many requests from so many legitimate ministries, pastors and churches alike grew weary.

Through a unified, cooperative program of giving, both sets of ministries could be funded — state ministry needs and ministry endeavors of the SBC. This plan was formally adopted in 1925 and called "the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists."

By definition, the "Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist

churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries."

As faithful stewards give of their tithes and offerings through their local churches, they partner with other Southern Baptist Christians to accomplish Kingdom-sized ministries, including:

► Two of the world's largest missionary-sending entities — the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board — are equipped and resourced to deploy some 10,000 missionaries across the nation and around the world.

► Hundreds of new churches are planted annually in major cities and among multiple ethnic, racial and language groups in the United States through a collaboration of local church, associational, state convention and SBC efforts.

► More than 16,000 future church leaders are trained in the largest theological seminary consortium in the United States.

► Tens of thousands of college students are reached with and for the gospel through Baptist Collegiate Ministry, the largest campus ministry organization in America.

► Thousands of children are fed and housed through children's homes ministries in multiple states.

► More than 1,600 mobile disaster relief teams, scattered across the states, constituting the third-largest relief organization in the United States, are trained and on alert for deployment whenever a natural disaster strikes the United States.

► The synergy of cooperative ministry is incalculable.

In the book of Nehemiah, two things stand out in the historical narrative of rebuilding the city wall around Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile. First, the people had a plan to work (Nehemiah 2:11-4:23). Each person had a role to play, but it was only through cooperation that they were

able to accomplish their goal. Second, the people had a mind to work (Nehemiah 4:6). Once they set their minds to the task at hand, nothing was able to deter them from accomplishing their goal. As Nehemiah's story wonderfully illustrates, we each can accomplish so much more when we work together — cooperating for the purpose of penetrating lostness, making disciples and evangelizing the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. (BP)

April is
Celebrate
Cooperative
Program month



Samford library available online

Samford University library patrons can now, via computer, access a treasure trove of historic documents and publications that were once only available by visiting campus or requesting microfilm copies.

The digitization of more than 1,188 books and other items representing about 32,440 pages — will be particularly helpful to researchers, historians and others interested in Samford and Alabama Baptist archives.

"This project has allowed us to open the 'virtual door' of the special collection department, giving access to some of our most treasured, historic and used collections to any user from anywhere on the globe," Samford library director Kim Herndon said.

Materials chosen for digitization came from the earliest, most often requested and most unique regional printed items held in the library. Users can page through a book, download the PDF or search the full text version.

Materials for inclusion in the project were selected by Herndon, special collection librarian and university archivist head Elizabeth Wells, and special collection technical archivist Jennifer Taylor.

To access the Internet archive, go to <http://library.samford.edu/about/special.html>. For more information, call the Samford library's special collection department at 205-726-2749. (SU)

U.S. churches monetary contributions decrease 2.2 percent due to recession

Even as membership remains relatively stable in U.S. churches, the effects of the recession have caused contributions to drop by \$1.2 billion.

According to the "2012 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches," the almost \$29 billion contributed by church members represented a 2.2 percent decrease in terms of per capita giving.

The \$1.2 billion decline in 2010 was nearly three times as large as the \$431 million in losses reported in 2009, and "provides clear evidence of the impact of the deepening crises in the reporting period," the yearbook's editor, Pastor Eileen Lindner, wrote.

The yearbook is produced annually by the National Council of Churches and is considered one of the most authoritative sources of church membership. It does classify Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "Christian churches" and "denominations" even though this would debated in Baptist and other circles. The 2010 figures, released March 20, were collected from 228 U.S. denominations in 2011.

Nation's largest churches

The Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention continued as the nation's largest churches in 2010, and both posted a decrease of less than 1 percent, the fourth year in a row of declining membership for Southern Baptists.

Total membership in the top 25 largest churches declined 1.15 percent, to 145.7 million.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Amer-

ica, though still in the top 10, reported the sharpest decline in membership, dropping 5.9 percent to 4.3 million members.

Four Pentecostal churches out of the top 25 showed a continuing increase in membership, with the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. jumping up 20 percent, the highest out of all reporting churches.

Only six out of the top 25 increased in membership, according to the yearbook. Some of those growing denominations include Jehovah's Witnesses (up 1.85 percent), Seventh-day Adventist Church (up 1.61 percent) and the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc. (up 3.95 percent).

The 10 largest U.S. Christian bodies reported in the 2012 yearbook are:

► The Catholic Church: 68.2 million, down 0.44 percent.

► Southern Baptist Convention: 16.1 million, down 0.15 percent.

► The United Methodist Church: 7.7 million, down 1.22 percent.

► The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 6.2 million, up 1.62 percent.

► The Church of God in Christ: 5.5 million, no membership updates reported.

► National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc.: 5.2 million, up 3.95 percent.

► Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: 4.3 million, down 5.9 percent.

► National Baptist Convention of America: 3.5 million, no membership updates reported.

► Assemblies of God: 3.03 million, up 3.99 percent.

► Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): 2.7 million, down 3.42 percent. (RNS, TAB)

Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne, The Alabama Baptist

Rebekah Lowrey

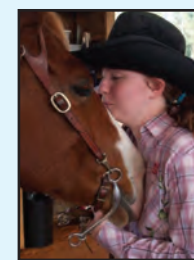
First Baptist Church, Satsuma
Mobile Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: Jeremiah 29:11

FAVORITE HYMN: "He Keeps Me Singing"

HOBBIES: Riding horses, hunting and fishing

FAMILY STATUS: Parents Tommy and Alisa; one brother, Jonathan; one sister, Sara



LOWREY

A recent graduate of Judson College, Rebekah Lowrey earned her bachelor of science in psychology and completed advanced therapeutic horseback riding courses — courses that instruct how to

teach riding to those with disabilities. She was recently certified as a level one riding instructor by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH).

Q: When did you come to know the Lord?

A: I grew up in a Christian home. My father was a preacher when I was [young]. When I was 6, I went to Bible school ... something that week kind of clicked and I talked to my daddy. I ... told my pastor and was able to be baptized by my [dad].

Q: How did you become involved in horseback riding?

A: When I was little, my grandfather had a pony. He started me out when I was about 6. When it came time to look for colleges, I started looking for colleges with a horse program.

Q: What does it mean to be certified as a level one instructor by PATH?

A: It means I'm qualified to teach children with special needs how to ride horses. ... There are different protocols for certain disabilities, and you have to have knowledge of the different disabilities and also knowledge of horsemanship. Not only do we have to demonstrate teaching kids, we also have to demonstrate riding skills.

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

A: A big difference in making decisions and just making sure I keep Him first and ... pray about the decisions in everything I do — it helps me stay centered. I was able to be an example at school. ... Making sure I keep Him first keeps me in check that [I'm where] God wants me.

Passionate about Jesus

UA football player Jones does what he loves, shares gospel in Nicaragua

By Laura Fielding
International Mission Board

Barrett Jones, a 6-foot-5-inch, 300-pound football player for the University of Alabama, would stand out anywhere.

But his love for God and his commitment to sharing the gospel also make him stand out from most of his peers.

"I don't want to be known as a football player who happens to be a Christian, I want to be known as a Christian who happens to play football," Jones said.

A longtime member of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., near Memphis, Jones organized and led a team of 31 of his friends and family members on a missions trip to Jinotega, Nicaragua, during his spring break, March 11-16.

'What I love to do'

The team participated in several nightly revival services at Shalom Baptist Church, Jinotega, and visited three public schools and an orphanage. At each location, they gave their personal testimonies, presented the gospel story and interacted with the children by playing sports and games and simply reflecting God's love.

The 21-year-old Jones gave his priorities in his testimony at the revival service at Shalom Baptist on March 13.

"Tonight I want to talk to you a

little bit about what I'm really passionate about," he told the crowd, "and that's not football — it's Jesus Christ."

This is the third missions trip Jones has organized and led — the past two spring breaks he has taken missions teams to Haiti where they constructed bathrooms for refugees, painted a school building and built a basketball court.

"I love this trip ... because it's all about presenting the gospel," Jones said. "It's not to build a school — those [were] great trips, too."

"But this is the most important kind of trip," Jones said. "This trip could have an eternal effect, hopefully, on some people's lives."

Jones has garnered an impressive list of academic, athletic and community service honors and awards. He graduated as an accounting major in three years with a 4.0 GPA in the University Honors Program. He will play his fourth season for the Alabama Crimson Tide as a graduate student in accounting.

He is involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. In 2011 his football prowess was recognized with the Outland Trophy as the most outstanding interior lineman among the 25-man All-America team, the Wuerffel Trophy for exemplary community service as well as athletic and academic achievement, NCAA Unanimous All-American and 2011 SEC Scholarship Athlete



BP photo

JUST FUN — UA football player Barrett Jones plays a friendly game of keep away with children in Nicaragua.

of the Year.

Between classes, study, football practice and games, spring break is the only free time Jones has during the year. "[People always] say, 'Man, that's awesome that you're giving up your spring break to go on missions trips,' and I say to them, 'I'm not giving up anything.'"

"This is the most fun I could ever have to go on a trip like this and experience this with likeminded Christians and spread the gospel. That's what I love to do, and I'm not just saying that."

"I've been to the beach a million times," Jones said, "and I don't really remember one specific beach trip. But I remember every second and every day of every missions trip I've ever been on." (BP)



BP photo

TESTIMONY — Barrett Jones shares a message on how God — not sports, money, success or relationships — can fill a person's heart at Shalom Baptist Church, Jinotega, Nicaragua.

Passport New York helps open students' eyes to needs in local communities

(continued from page 1)

Nathan Creitz, who is from Alabama himself. Creitz and his wife Kim moved to New York recently to plant a church in the Forest Park area of Queens. For two back-to-back weeks, a group of Alabama students worked with Creitz, prayer walking the area where the church will be planted and engaging people in conversation.

The help the students provided was a great encouragement to Cre-

itz, because right now they don't have a core group or a team — it's just his wife and two toddlers. "To have all these additional hands and feet on the ground serving multiplies what I'm doing incredibly," he said. "It's absolutely essential for us to have teams like this to come in and help us along the way."

Ramirez explained that one of the goals of Passport New York is for some of the students who par-

ticipate to return for a summer, a semester, a year or even a lifetime. But for those who don't, Jerrod Brown, campus minister at the University of South Alabama, sees a huge benefit for the local church.

"I think the investment that Alabama Baptists make in college students through their Cooperative Program gifts makes an eternal impact," Brown said. "We're investing in folks who will be our future church leaders with a missional

mindset, who will help mobilize people for missions or who will be missionaries themselves."

That's one of the primary purposes of BCM spring break missions trips, explained Chris Mills, associate in the office of collegiate and student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "One of the main reasons we have these trips is because when students help meet needs in other places, it opens their eyes to needs

in their own communities," Mills said. "Plus the opportunity to take several groups to New York was ideal because Alabama Baptists have a missions partnership with Baptists in New York."

As for Couch, she's ready to go back. "Just walking the streets, I've seen where God is at work and the opportunities for me to jump in when I move up here. He's showing me such big things that I couldn't have ever imagined," she said.

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Special issue to mark tornadoes

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The Alabama Baptist is producing a 52-page commemorative issue of the paper marking the one-year anniversary of the tornadoes.

Up to 300,000 newspapers will be distributed through the 3,200 Alabama Baptist churches so every Baptist home receives a copy

of the issue. Papers will arrive the week of April 15. (TAB)

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Syrian refugees flee country, meet SBC ministry partners

Ongoing violence in Syria is driving refugees across borders into neighboring countries, where many of them are being met by Southern Baptists' ministry partners.

Thousands of Syrians have poured across the country's borders into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, carrying few possessions. The United Nations recently put the death toll for a year of violence in Syria at more than 8,000.

Abraham Shepherd, who with his wife, Grace, directs work in the Middle East for Baptist Global Response (BGR), is planning an assessment trip to determine how best

to help refugees as the crisis intensifies.

"Our BGR-trained partners and project directors say the need is increasing," Shepherd said. "I'm planning a trip to the crisis zone to assess and plan the next phase of assistance and response as the crisis darkens."

More than \$165,000 has been disbursed from Southern Baptists' World Hunger Fund to assist partners in Lebanon and Syria in meeting refugee needs, Shepherd said. Already, hunger and relief funds have helped more than 12,000 people in at least 49 communities, providing food and hygiene supplies as

well as temporary shelter, bedding, heaters and some medicine.

The steady stream of displaced Syrians has spurred BGR and its partners to action throughout the Middle East, working on all Syrian border fronts to care for the fleeing refugees.

"The crisis throughout the Middle East has been labeled by mainstream media as 'the Arab Spring,' but to the average Arab in the Middle East, it's anything but spring," Shepherd said. "What they are experiencing is more devastation, disillusionment, fear and scarce basic necessities of life."

"That is even more true of the minorities among them, like the Chris-

tian minority of the Middle East," he noted.

Southern Baptist aid is helping not only the fleeing Syrians, but also Christians in neighboring countries by empowering them to be a blessing to their local communities — "showing true Christianity in word and in deed," Shepherd added.

"We are deeply grateful for the generosity Southern Baptists show when they give to hunger and relief needs," Shepherd said. "Your giving and your generosity, along with our trained responders, enable us to show God's love to the suffering Syrian people in their time of need." (BP)

"What they are experiencing is more devastation."

Abraham Shepherd
Middle East BGR

Former Ala. pastor Sheffield dies

Wylie Luther "W.L." Sheffield, a former Alabama Baptist pastor, died March 14. He was 75.

A native of Weirsdale, Fla., Sheffield graduated from the Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville, Fla. (now The Baptist College of Florida), in 1972. He served as pastor of Chalkhead Baptist Church, Ozark, from 1973 to 1977 and Southside Baptist Church, Ozark, from 1979 to 2004.

He was also interim pastor of several churches in Alabama and Florida.

Sheffield is survived by his wife of 55 years, Gracie; two daughters; two granddaughters; and one great-grandson. (TAB)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive, Mt. Olive, Ala., is seeking full-time pastor. Master of divinity preferred; 5-10 years experience as pastor at a Southern Baptist church. Please submit resumes by mail to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive, 3200 Mt. Olive Road, Mt. Olive, AL 35117, or email resumes to: sheila@fbcmo.org.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION/ADMINISTRATION: Lakeland Baptist Church is seeking a full-time minister of education/administration. Lakeland is located in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Those considered will be passionate about Sunday School and have a strong, successful background in finance, leadership, property management and staff relations. Seminary or comparable degree is preferred. Please email resume to: Dr. Ron Osborne, rosborne@lakelandbaptist.org.

WORSHIP PASTOR: Sixth Street Baptist Church is a multigenerational church in Alexander City, Ala., that is seeking a man to become our next worship pastor. Candidate must have a passion to lead God's people into biblical experiences of worship, use worship as a vehicle to reach the lost and lead all aspects of our praise and worship ministry. Please send resumes to: jobs@sixthstreetbaptistchurch.com.

MUSIC MINISTER: Pineville Park Baptist Church in Pineville, La., is seeking a full-time music minister. If interested, email resumes to: Pastor Steve McAllister at steve@pinevillepark.org.

MINISTER OF MUSIC: Jubilee Baptist Church in Daphne is seeking a highly-motivated, full-time worship leader to lead our church to worship in a contemporary yet blended style. Bachelor's degree required, seminary preferred. Resumes can be sent to: 9264 Pleasant Road, Daphne, AL 36526, or emailed to: Paul@jubileebaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER:

Bethlehem Baptist Church in Midland City, Ala., is seeking a bivocational music minister to lead its congregation in a blended style of worship and to lead its choir and band ministries. Please send resumes to: Bethlehem Baptist Church, c/o Personnel Team, 416 Bethlehem Road, Midland City, AL 36350, or to: pastorpaul@bbcdathan.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC: Fulton Baptist Church, Clarke Association, is seeking a bivocational minister of music. Please send resume to: Fulton Baptist Church, P.O. Box 409, Fulton, AL 36446 or call 334-636-5305.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC: Seeking a bivocational minister of music to lead congregation and choir in traditional and praise music. Please mail resumes to: Music Search Committee, Coldwater Baptist Church, 4400 Airport Road, Oxford, AL 36203. Contact number, 256-375-0279.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC: Seeking bivocational minister of music to work with choir and small congregation that desires to grow. Clayridge Baptist Church, Clay, Ala. Contact Ron Hudgens, ronhudgets@JCDH.org, 205-913-9480.

FAMILY MINISTER: A local Baptist church in Cullman is searching for a leader to develop family ministry programs for young families, children and youth. The ministry will need 20 hours per week. Send resumes to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 914, Cullman, AL 35056.

YOUTH PASTOR & CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR: Underwood Baptist Church in Montevallo is currently seeking a part-time youth pastor to work with our 7th-12th grade students. Also, seeking a part-time children's director to work with our 1st-6th grade students. Please mail resumes to: UBC, 4480 Highway 22, Montevallo, AL 35115.

PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR: Shiloh Baptist Church,

Somerville, Ala. (Morgan County) Please email resumes to: DrCharlesOwens@aol.com, or send to: Dr. Charles Owens, Shiloh Baptist Church, 3941 Hwy 36 E, Somerville, AL 35670.

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Want to know God?

By Steve Sellers

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries

In John's Gospel we find an encounter that Jesus had with a man named Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and was what the world would label a very religious man. He could quote verbatim the first five books of the Old Testament. In today's world, he would be sought out for his expert opinion on religious issues. Yet this religious man was still searching for purpose and meaning to life.

Many in the church can identify with Nicodemus' feeling empty inside, even though they are religious. They are actively involved in and even lead in the church, but in the innermost parts of their hearts they still feel empty.

But we can learn from Nicodemus. He did not continue in the wilderness of the religiously lost.

Notice what Nicodemus did when he came to Jesus. He knew there was more to life than just knowing about God. Jesus' response was not to belittle him but to love him.

Notice that Jesus did not tell him that he needed to be more religious.

Instead Jesus explained that being born again has everything to do with a relationship with God. The only way to experience this new birth is by the Spirit of the living God. So hungry was this religious, empty man, he cried out, "How does this happen?" Jesus replied with one of the most powerful promises in all the Word of God, "For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life," John 3:16.

Jesus shared with this devoutly religious man who was lost, that he must surrender his life to the Lordship of Christ. Is that not wonderful?

My question to you is, "Are you religiously lost?" Are you, like Nicodemus, just going through the routine of religion, yet empty in the innermost part of your being? Let me suggest you come to Jesus and simply trust Him to be the Lord of your life. Once you do that, you will come out of the wilderness of religion and be born again to enter a relationship with the living God.

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Walking where Jesus walked

It might have been the Sea of Galilee or the Garden Tomb. For some it was the southern steps to where the temple once stood. For others it was the Garden of Gethsemane, the Via Dolorosa or even experiencing current-day work.

The locations varied, but for all 50 people participating in the recent Holy Land experience sponsored by *The Alabama Baptist* a moment happened. Jesus, our faith and life in general took on an all-new deeper meaning. Many shared how they were excited to read familiar biblical texts again just to watch them come to life in a way they never have before.

Even Acts 1:8 — “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” — has added dimension for me.

All the descriptions you have heard from believers experiencing the Holy Land are true. It is life changing to walk where Jesus walked. And as we begin reflecting back on the experience, I’m sure we will continue to gain new insight and grow in ways we never realized possible just because we were there.

But the key will be to prioritize the reflecting.

Just as with any out-of-town experience, it is easier to push the worries of everyday life to the background when away than when we are staring at them. And as with any missions setting, focusing on God becomes routine during the days we have scheduled for that purpose.

It is when we return home that maintaining clutter-free focus on God as priority each day is difficult. It is hard to avoid getting caught in the ebb

and flow of schedules, commitments and desires of others.

Dur-

ing our last afternoon in Jerusalem, I was reminded of how easily our time with God can be interrupted. We had been going strong for nine days, and we were set to leave for the airport that night. We were given about three hours on our own before we regrouped for the farewell events and then headed to the airport.

It was the one opportunity to truly be alone with God at one of the sites in the “holy city.” At first I couldn’t decide if I wanted to go back to the Garden of Gethsemane or the southern steps. Then I thought of the view from the Mount of Olives as well as the peacefulness of the Garden Tomb. They were all tempting and all good choices. I couldn’t decide.

As I was debating where I would go, I was invited to go back into the Old City to walk around and have a late lunch. I accepted the invitation and had a nice time. I was able to see first-hand just how crowded and chaotic it can be in the area as well as enjoy time with a friend.

But why did I bump my time planned with God so easily? Sure, I was having trouble deciding where I wanted to go, but I could have selected by using a factor such as the closest spot.

I do enjoy spending time with my friend, but that was most likely not my only opportunity for time with her. It was my only opportunity for time alone with God in the Holy Land (at least on this trip).

I can’t really answer why I didn’t take advantage of the opportunity, but I do know God spoke to me through what happened. He reminded me I was only about a day away from walking back into the nonstop pace of life, and if I want to continually grow closer to Him I must guard my time with Him.

He also reminded me not to be discouraged if the quiet times don’t always come. I remembered how many times I connected with Him during the Holy Land experience, even though many moments were hectic. I was surrounded by scores of people and moving at a fast pace, but God was there teaching me and drawing me closer to Him — even amid the distractions and noise.



Rashional EXTRAS ...

What topics are on your mind?

Email jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

TIME — You have all you need if you use it wisely

By Terry D. Newberry
Excerpt from his blog (terrydnewberry.com)

Free time — even the words are beautiful.

Time to spend with family or finally read that latest business book or novel. Time to wash the dog or paint that landscape you’ve been seeing in your mind’s eye. Time to take a long drive in the country or nap in the hammock. Time.

The Greeks had two words for time, Chronos and Kairos. Chronos is the concept of linear time — what our clocks and watches measure. When we talk about time management, it is most often this concept we are discussing.

Kairos is different. It deals with the quality of time. This is the concept we are referring to when we ask someone, “Did you have a good time?” There is an interesting dynamic at work here. Our struggles with Chronos are often aimed at having more Kairos.

So what is the key to getting everything done? First, we must understand that we really do have all the time we need. We often feel we need more time, when the problem is that we just need to learn how to use our time more wisely.

What are some ways we don’t use time wisely? Perhaps we don’t plan well, so we have to go back to the store again. Or back to the office to retrieve something we left. ... Perhaps we don’t eat right or exercise enough, so we are always tired. The list could go on.

We must understand that we have to control our time, rather than letting it control us. One key to this is prioritization.

Prioritization is knowing how to rank the items which you have to do. ... For me, making a “to do” list works wonders. When I am overwhelmed with things to do, it helps

me to capture them all and put them in order. You can use paper, Outlook, Task-management software, your iPhone, whatever works best for you. The key is to find a system and use it consistently. ...

It calms us and helps us think more clearly. That makes the tasks seem a little more achievable. Begin your day with a list, and check off items as you accomplish them.

But don’t overwhelm yourself with a list of things to do today that is so large you couldn’t finish if you had a week. Write all the tasks down, and then prioritize what must be done today. Once you’ve done that, rank them in order for that day. One of the most important keys is that all-important check mark. Looking at those checks by the items we complete gives us a sense of accomplishment and momentum.

Another powerful tool is **delegation**. Effective delegation is one of the most powerful time management and efficiency tools, and it is applicable to all of us, whether we are stay at home moms, volunteers or corporate executives.

Other tips:

- ▶ Create routines for yourself.
- ▶ Plan ahead for specific errands or trips. Coordinate your time.
- ▶ Schedule time for yourself.
- ▶ Set deadlines — accomplishments are dreams with deadlines.

Each of us has the same amount of minutes in each day. The difference is in how we use them.

Editor’s Note — Terry D. Newberry is a motivational speaker, business consultant and personal coach. He is a member of North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville.

Health tips from “40 Days to Better Living — Optimal Health”

By Dr. Scott Morris
Church Health Center of Memphis
www.churchhealthcenter.org

▶ Refilling prescriptions can be difficult to remember. If your pharmacy has an automatic refill program, take advantage of it.

▶ Your physical health is about achieving a balance between medications and lifestyle — between your doctor and you. Be sure to ask your doctor questions about lifestyle changes that could help your health.

▶ Our medical model is often based on what we must do — exercise, eat right, taking the right medications and rest. Sleep gives your body the energy to function properly.

▶ Do you know the symptoms of stroke? They include weakness in an arm, hand or leg; loss of feeling on one side of the body; blindness in one eye; difficulty talking; loss of balance. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of major illnesses or events so you can recognize them in yourself and others.

Excerpt from “Bear Bryant on Leadership: Life Lessons from a Six-Time National Championship Coach” by Pat Williams with Tommy Ford

“Great leaders have a heart for people; they care about other people; they’re interested in people; they have empathy for people; they love people. ... There’s a tendency with top level leaders to get up in an ivory tower and shoot emails across their empire. Rarely does this leader come down among the common folks. How effective as a leader can he be if there’s no personal relationship with his workers ... ?”

UPCOMING TOPICS include having a commitment to prayer. Send us your experiences with this topic. Email jrash@thealabamabaptist.org or comment on our blog at thealabamabaptist.wordpress.com.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 8

Explore the Bible

By Cecil Taylor
Dean, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

BE CONFIDENT OF THE RESURRECTION
Luke 24:13-35

Two facts, among others, support the claim that Jesus rose from the dead on the first Easter. First the tomb was empty (Luke 24:1-12). Even Jesus' enemies admitted this. His opponents would not take His body from the tomb and thus lend support to His "wild" claims that He would rise from the dead. His friends could not take His body from the tomb because it was well-guarded.

Second Jesus appeared in person. Mostly He appeared to His followers but not always (First Corinthians 15:7 may hint that His brother James became a believer when the risen Lord appeared to him). The first appearance of the resurrected Christ that Luke mentioned was to a couple of disciples on the road to Emmaus, a village about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem.

On the Road (13-27)

On Easter evening, these two left Jerusalem after observing Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Along the way, they engaged in deep discussion about the recent events in Jerusalem: the events before Jesus' crucifixion, the crucifixion itself and now the mysterious reports that His tomb was empty and He was alive.

Jesus joined them but they did not at first recognize Him. To draw them out, He asked what they were talking about and pretended to know nothing about the past few days' events. One of them found the question incredible. "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there?" When Jesus asked for more details, the two poured out their disappointment and pain. His words and deeds proved Him a true prophet of God, they said, but the Jewish rulers handed Him over to authorities for execution. Their hope that He was the Messiah was shattered. Many first century Jews thought of the Messiah as a king like David at his best, i.e., the Rambo of Judea or Conan the Destroyer. If a "messiah" lost even one battle, then it was proof he was not the Messiah. Death on the cross meant Jesus was not the

Messiah. These two knew the women reported that the tomb was empty and angels said He was alive, but in the first century, women were not considered credible witnesses. Peter and John checked out the tomb and also found it open and empty. But this was a perplexing mystery for these two.

Taking the lead in the conversation, Jesus rebuked them for failure to believe the whole of Scripture. "Moses and all the prophets" clearly indicated that it was "necessary" for the Messiah first to suffer and then enter into His glory. First the cross, then the crown. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus taught them truths about the Messiah from the Hebrew Bible that they had completely missed. He would suffer and die to redeem His people from their sin.

At the House (28-32)

Jesus' Bible class ate up the time, and soon the three approached Emmaus. Jesus started to go farther, but Cleopas and his partner begged Him to stay the night with them. He agreed. During dinner, He took bread, blessed it and broke it for them to eat. In the breaking of the bread, they knew Him. Perhaps the way Jesus broke the bread reminded them of the feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:16), or maybe they saw the nail wounds in His hands (Luke 24:39-40). Their eyes were opened and they fully recognized Him. It was Jesus, alive indeed.

At that point, He vanished. Perhaps this indicated He would no longer be with His disciples permanently as He was before the crucifixion and resurrection.

Now they saw that they should have known Him earlier. Along the way, Jesus' explanation of what Scripture taught about the Messiah had set their hearts afire.

With the Apostles (33-35)

Jesus' appearance made it impossible for the duo to stay in Emmaus. Immediately they raced back to Jerusalem to find the apostles and tell them the good news. To their astonishment, they found the band abuzz about Jesus appearing to Simon Peter. If much about the resurrection remained a mystery, then they were sure Jesus was alive.

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Barnette
Associate professor of religion, Department of religion, Samford University

JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD
Matthew 27:62-66; 28:5-8; Luke 24:13-16, 32-33, 35

Proof of a Guarded Tomb
(Matt. 27:62-66)

This passage is unique to Matthew, not appearing in the other Gospels. Having shown that no one could have removed Jesus' body from the cross because the soldiers were keeping guard (see verses 27 and 54), Matthew now adds that the watch on the tomb was kept over the Sabbath. This paragraph sets the stage for Matthew 28:11-15 in which the reference to theft of His body appears again. The apologetical nature of these passages no doubt served to refute the criticism that was circulating among the Jews (Matt. 28:15).

The Jews could take no military action without Roman sanction. They asked Pilate that a guard be posted against the possibility of Jesus' body being stolen. Jesus' "first deception" was His claim to messiahship; His "last deception" was His claim that He would rise from the dead. From their viewpoint, the Jewish leaders were protecting themselves and the people from deception; from Matthew's perspective, they were deceiving themselves. Pilate's words "as secure as you know how" sound ironic. They had killed Jesus and now they needed to seal His body in the tomb. They did not realize that no tomb in the world could hold God's Son.

Proof of an Empty Tomb
(Matt. 28:5-8)

The "angel" is the same as the "young man" dressed in the white robe in Mark's account. Here we have an impressive display of divine power, but the women are told not to be "afraid." Jesus had risen, "just as He said" (see Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 20:19). He had promised to go ahead of His disciples into Galilee (see Matthew 26:32). This was a note of historical authenticity in the identification of the risen Lord as the Jesus with whom they associated. The angel had fulfilled his mission, signified by the finality of his words "Behold, I have told you," meaning literally,

"This is what I had to tell you." With mingled fear and joy, the women ran to tell their news to the disciples, thus becoming the first evangelists to share the greatest of news.

Proof of Eyewitness Account
(Luke 24:13-16, 32-33, 35)

The opening words of verse 13 link this story with the entire Easter event. "Now" moves the reader's attention to a new and significant stage of Luke's account. "That same day" connects the narrative to Jesus' death and resurrection. The concept of witness was important to Luke, and a twofold witness was necessary according to the Jewish laws. Simeon and Anna were two witnesses who testified to the Messiah's arrival (see Luke 2:25-38). Now these two travelers testified to a particular resurrection appearance of Jesus.

The men were not two of the disciples but rather followers of Jesus who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. They had been among the "disciples" who celebrated Him on His triumphal entry into the city (Luke 19:39). The fact that this story is about two disciples who were not among the 12 highlights how the significance of this report from these eyewitnesses extends beyond the leaders of the early church.

Luke introduced Jesus into the account with the emphatic "Jesus Himself" and his comment that "Jesus walked along with them."

Jesus' disappearance is not disappearance in a natural sense. In other words, He did not simply get up and walk outside. Rather this was a supernatural act of departure. Jesus disappeared from one place and reappeared at another. His mode of existence is no longer as it was before His death and resurrection. The "burning" within the two men's hearts would soon be unleashed with the coming of Pentecost. After this incredible experience, the two got up and "returned at once to Jerusalem" to report the experience to the 11 disciples "and those with them." But the 11 had already become convinced of the resurrection because Jesus "[had] appeared to Simon," and so the celebrating was under way.

Christian Crossword

By Mary Ann Freeman Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

1. Primate.
4. Every perfect gift is from _____. (James 1:17)
9. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
12. Another fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
15. _____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
16. South American mountains.
17. What a pregnant woman does.
19. Sacred image.
20. Poem.
21. Wesley. (nickname)
22. Behold, I will do a _____ thing. (Isa. 43:19)
23. As a _____ adorneth herself with jewels. (Isa. 61:10)
25. The priest shall _____ his finger in the blood. (Lev. 4:6)
27. The _____ of knowledge. (Gen. 2:17)
28. Digging tool.
30. _____ of God. (1 John 4:7; 2 words)
33. Sarai was _____; she had no child. (Gen. 11:30)
34. Son of Shemidah.

(1 Chron. 7:19)
35. In royal apparel of _____. (Esther 8:15)
36. Missing in Action. (abbr.)
37. The elder unto the wellbeloved _____. (3 John 1)
39. Chlorine, caron. (symbol)
42. Put off ... the _____ man. (Eph. 4:22)
44. Soviet Socialist Republic. (abbr.)
45. Fire causeth the waters to _____. (Isa. 64:2)
46. The daughter of Solomon. (1 Kings 4:15)
48. Major artery.
49. Not. (prefix)
50. Study of places.
52. Compass direction.
53. Ruth's sister-in-law. (Ruth 1:4)
54. Socioeconomic status. (abbr.)

Down

1. _____ I say, Rejoice. (Phil. 4:4)
2. British coin.
3. He shall surely _____ her to be his wife. (Ex. 22:16)
4. Einstein and Gore.
5. _____ ye transformed.

(Rom. 12:2)
6. For a righteous man will _____. (Rom. 5:7; 2 words)
7. Heal me; for my bones are _____. (Ps. 6:2)
8. Extrasensory perception. (abbr.)
10. Ye make clean the _____ of the cup. (Matt. 23:25)
11. Years. (abbr.)
13. Red dragon, having seven heads and _____ horns. (Rev. 12:3)
14. A time to rend, and a time to _____. (Eccles. 3:7)
18. So Hiram gave Solomon _____ trees. (1 Kings 5:10)
20. Minerals.
23. _____ ye all the tithes. (Mal. 3:10)
24. His hands were hairy, as _____ hands. (Gen. 27:23)
26. My tongue is the _____ of a ready writer. (Ps. 45:1)
27. Late-afternoon meal.
29. Before. (prefix)
30. Book written by Jeremiah. (abbr.)
31. Buckeyes.
32. Seven _____ full of the seven last plagues.

(Rev. 21:9)
33. Cloud or confuse.
35. A _____ must be blameless. (1 Tim. 3:2)
38. Fall flower.
39. Military subdivisions.
40. Flexible.
41. Loams.
43. Decimeter. (abbr.)
45. Feather scarf.
46. Ride a yellow one to school.
47. Cornelius said, Four days _____. (Acts 10:30)
48. Argon, hydrogen. (symbol)
51. Peach tree state. (abbr.)

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Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Business to rescue 'left behind' pets a hoax

LANGDON, N.H. — The owner of a business who claimed he would provide atheist rescuers for Christians' pets left behind in the Rapture now says his service was an elaborate hoax and never had any clients.

Bart Centre, who lives in New Hampshire, came clean after the state Insurance Department delivered a subpoena because he appeared to be engaged in "unauthorized business of insurance" through his Eternal Earth-Bound Pets business.

"Eternal Earth-Bound Pets employs no paid rescuers," Bart Centre wrote in a blog post March 16. "It has no clients. It has never issued a service certificate. It has accepted no service contract applications nor received any payments — not a single dollar — in the almost three years of its existence."

Centre's business was reported widely by Religion News Service (RNS), NPR, *The Washington Post*, The Associated Press, CBS News, the British Broadcasting Corp., *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *The Huffington Post* and other media outlets in the past year.

The subpoena, a copy of which Centre provided to RNS, requests a March 29 meeting and copies of applications for "'Rapture' coverage." Richard McCaffrey, the compliance and enforcement counsel who delivered the subpoena, said the subpoena could be withdrawn but the investigation is continuing because of what he considers Centre's contradictory remarks. "He was either lying to the newspapers or he's lying now," McCaffrey said.

Congress reconsidering interstate abortion restriction

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress again are seeking to restrict interstate transportation for minors' abortions after years of failures to enact the legislation.

The Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act, H.R. 2299 in this Congress, was first introduced in 1998 but has never reached the president's desk for signature. A House of Representatives subcommittee heard testimony from supporters and opponents of the measure in a March 8 hearing.

Under the bill, a person knowingly transporting a minor who lives in a state requiring parental involvement for an abortion would need parental permission or a bypass granted by a judge for the procedure to occur in another state. The bill would also require abortion providers to notify parents before performing an abortion on an out-of-state minor. Violators would face up to one year in prison or a fine.

Abortion is a serious procedure and holds consequences for a person's health, such as "increased risk of breast cancer; extremely premature birth in subsequent pregnancies and suicide," said Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., the subcommittee's chairman.

Sibling rivalry fueled Crystal Cathedral fall, son says

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. — As the Crystal Cathedral tries to find its footing without any members of founder Robert H. Schuller's family at the helm, the only son and one-time successor says "sibling rivalry" played a key role in the California megachurch's decline.

"They didn't want to be accountable to me, their brother," said Robert A. Schuller, the church's former senior pastor, of his sisters and brothers-in-law, some of whom were board members and ministry staffers. "So they took steps into their own hands to make sure that they had job security."

In an interview March 19, Schuller, 57, said his siblings took advantage of his father's signs of dementia and halted the younger Schuller's 2006 succession to his father's ministry within two years. He left the gleaming megachurch in 2008. The onetime heir apparently said the memory of his 85-year-old father has been failing for at least 10 years. "My sisters were able to manipulate that because of his mental capacities," said Schuller, now co-owner of Youtoo TV, a TV and social-media network. "It was the demise of the ministry."

New Hampshire gay 'marriage' repeal bill defeated

CONCORD, N.H. — A bill that would have reversed New Hampshire's gay "marriage" law has been defeated in the state House of Representatives, a surprising outcome for a Republican-controlled chamber that just weeks ago was expected to pass it.

It would have become the first state to pass such a bill. The repeal bill was defeated 211-116 on March 21, a surprising margin in a chamber in which Republicans hold more than 290 seats in a 400-member chamber. The Senate had yet to consider it. The bill would have allowed couples "married" at the bill's implementation to remain so.

'Take action'

Redman calls worshipers to respond to human trafficking

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As the writer of praise songs such as "Better is One Day," "Blessed Be Your Name," "The Heart of Worship" and "You Never Let Go," Matt Redman's work is a staple of contemporary worship.

With his newest song, "Twenty Seven Million," Redman is calling worshipers to respond and take action — by combating human trafficking with the gospel.

The idea for the song came from a conversation between Redman and his wife, Beth, who was shocked to discover that an estimated 27 million people are trapped as modern-day slaves.

From there, the Redmans wrote "Twenty Seven Million," based on the true story of a girl trafficked from Eastern Europe in London's sex trade.

The song proceeds go to the A21 Campaign, which is primarily based in Europe and focuses on abolishing injustice in the 21st century. This nonprofit organization works closely with police, hospitals and government officials to seek justice for victims of human trafficking. They also provide shelter, medical care, psychological assessment, educational assistance, counseling and access to legal assistance to those who have been rescued.

Redman debuted the song in front of nearly 45,000 college students during Passion 2012, a four-day worship gathering held at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Further desiring to help increase awareness on this issue, Redman recently embarked on "The 27 Million Tour" throughout England.

Through his music and message, Redman hopes to connect people to the unshakable truth of the gospel while offering hope and healing to



Photo courtesy of The Media Collective

HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS — Through his music and message, Matt Redman hopes to connect people to the unshakable truth of the gospel.

those in need. The songs on his latest album, "10,000 Reasons," focus on God's faithfulness, glory, unending love for His children and the countless reasons He is worthy to be praised.

"When people come to a concert or worship service, you never know what they might be dealing with," Redman said. "I really want to encourage people and let them know that when all around is sinking sand, God's faithfulness and His enduring love are the solid ground we can stand upon."

"I've heard thousands of stories about people struggling with different issues and dealing with brokenness in their lives. It gives me conviction to present the gospel each night while leading songs. So many people are searching for answers and wanting to know about the hope and security that can only be found by having a relationship with Christ."

Realizing the huge responsibility



Alabamian named to National Acteens Panel

A commitment to missions coupled with participation and leadership in their Acteens groups, churches, schools and communities landed six teenagers spots on this year's National Acteens Panel sponsored by national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU).

The 2012 National Acteens Panelists are Mary Virginia Harper of First Baptist Church, Prattville; Sarah Gaby of Heritage Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, Mich.; Sarah Harris of University Hills Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.; Jessica Francis and Lacey Wheeler, both of Abbotts Creek Missionary Baptist Church, High Point, N.C.; and Alys-

sa Hargrove of First Baptist Church, Spring Hill, Tenn.

Broadened perspective

"Acteens has broadened my perspective of the world and increased my awareness of missions across the globe," Harper said. "[Acteens] empowers girls to make a difference in their world for Christ, deepens their knowledge and relationship with God and gives them a safe haven where they can rely on the guidance and support of other strong Christians."

The panelists, who serve through Dec. 31, each receive \$1,000 from the Jessica Powell Loftis Scholar-

ity of crafting theologically sound worship songs, Redman spends a great deal of time reading the Bible and consulting with pastors about songwriting material. In addition to writing songs and leading worship at events, Redman has written several books that offer practical advice for worship leaders and praise teams.

"When I sit down to write songs, I think about the congregations singing the songs and trying to help people voice their praise, prayer and adoration to God," Redman said. "I try to find a universal truth and then think of a unique way to present it to congregations. Often, the process starts with a phrase, word or Scripture that is a springboard to a new idea."

"For me, that's how the songwriting process works. It has to start with some kind of theme. In songwriting, I feel like the lyric is definitely the most important thing. If the lyric is based on the Word of God, it can be enduring and can speak truth into people's lives, hearts and minds."

'Jesus in our worship'

"One of my biggest quests is to try and somehow paint a bigger picture of Jesus in our worship. It seems like so much of society wants to shrink Him down or kick Him out of the equation altogether. But we know Him as the majestic, magnificent One who has no equal and is completely off the charts of our comprehension. I hope these songs help point people higher."

"In this world, we see so many broken promises, but God never breaks His promises. He never turns or changes, never breaks the faith ... yesterday, today, forever the same. Everything else in this world changes but God stays the same. Therefore, His Word and Kingdom endure. My prayer is that these songs inject hope into people's lives and hearts, and that they are connected to the gospel truths."

ship for Acteens from the WMU Foundation.

The panelists will be featured during the WMU Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting in New Orleans, June 17-18, where they will have opportunities to meet national and international missionaries and interact with missions leaders from across the country.

Members of the National Acteens Panel may be requested to speak at churches, associational and state Acteens and WMU meetings and events. They will write articles for *The Mag*, the Acteens missions magazine, and for the Acteens website, wmu.com/students. (BP)



BP photo

TRAIN, ENCOURAGE — Dwight Fern, a Southern Baptist representative in Manila, the Philippines, hosts multiple sessions monthly to train and encourage pastors serving the urban poor.

'They're just as special'

Southern Baptists reach out to Manila's urban poor

Come on," a young man calls as he and a group of teenagers trek to a squatter village to teach the Bible.

They pass an open field where several children are kicking a partially deflated soccer ball.

The children stop and smile when they see who is calling them. Abandoning the ball, they follow, bare feet splashing in the mud. Filipino pastor Romy Albinus and Southern Baptist representative Dwight Fern follow.

As the group reaches the village, some young mothers carrying infants and other women drag benches under a tree and settle on the creaky seats. The young people unfurl their song sheets, Christian lyrics carefully printed on the back of old alcohol advertisement posters.

This is one of thousands of squatter communities in metro Manila, filled with people who moved to the city from rural provinces in search of a better life. Instead, they became part of a mass of urban poor.

'Bleak outlook'

Housing once meant to be temporary has been standing here more than 20 years. Work intended to be a stepping-stone toward better employment has become a career.

Despite the bleak outlook they face, the urban poor have not abandoned hope.

"God wants 104 million Filipinos in His Kingdom," Fern said to a group of pastors he's teaching.

Pastors nod thoughtfully as Fern speaks. For the past 10 years, Fern has been training pastors among the urban poor to start small house groups focused on fellowship and Bible study. More than 300 pastors

now attend the training sessions he conducts every month.

"Filipinos love to study the Bible," Fern said.

Life in the Philippines is steeped in religious traditions. Nuns serve as teachers in most schools, so religious training is nothing new to Filipinos. But the idea of offering poor pastors a sense of value is nothing short of revolutionary.

As pastors study with Fern, they carry back with them the hope they are finding in Christ.

"There is a hope of tomorrow being better," he said. "The poor respond to Christ as they look to the promise of heaven."

Cultural norms and lack of material possessions and social status often discourage the urban poor from seeking a better life. Simple jobs require a college education, which many cannot afford; they are too busy forging a living. However, as they latch on to the training their pastors provide, they begin to understand the gospel and share the hope they receive.

Albinus, who has been part of Fern's training for three years, has taken the training to heart and begun to train the young people of his church to lead house groups.

"They are the future," he said.

Every week, a half-dozen young people parade into nearby squatter communities.

As other villagers swig cheap alcohol and gamble a few pesos at a card game, they watch their neighbors join the Bible study and listen with mild interest to the discussion. It is a small village, after all. Everyone knows everything that happens there.

Albinus and Fern watch the

squatter children's faces, wreathed in smiles, as they sing songs about the love of Jesus.

"Nobody wants them or cares about them. Thing is, they're just as special as anyone else," Fern said.

When the study ends, the children follow the teenagers down the narrow, polluted street.

Sharing truth

Albinus' young people don't just teach children. Their next stop is a small house where nearly a dozen adults crowd in. They spill over into the alleyway, pressing close to hear.

Rachelle Albinas, one of the young people, tells the adults how they can share the truth they have found. Using a bookmark tool created for witnessing, she reviews the plan of salvation and how they can share their faith with others. On the back are 10 blank spaces.

"This week, who will you share the love of Christ with?" she asked.

Her words hang in the air as each person considers the question. They carefully print 10 names on the back of the business-card-sized bookmark. The next week, when they meet again, they will review the names they have written and say how they told those people about Christ.

Fern estimates that through these small house groups, more than a million of Manila's squatters have heard of Christ. Each month, when the pastors share ministry reports, countless people have heard of Christ, joined the church or been baptized.

"The day of a man just sitting in his chair in church is over," Fern said. "We're out to make disciples." (BP)

Papal visit to Cuba could 'change the conversation'

Pope Benedict XVI ended his three-day visit to Cuba on March 28 with an appeal for more religious freedom for the Catholic Church, ahead of a highly anticipated meeting with the island's historic leader, Fidel Castro.

And while he stopped short of openly criticizing the island's Communist regime during the trip, Benedict nonetheless said Cuba needed "change" and a "renewed and open society."

Catholics weren't the only ones glad to see Pope Benedict XVI preach in Cuba, however. His visit benefited local and visiting Christians across denominations, said American Protestants involved with Cuban missions work.

Benedict's presence boosted improvements for Cuban Christians and missionaries that have been ongoing for years, said Alvin Padilla, a Presbyterian minister and dean of Hispanic Ministries at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston.

The scope and rate of missions work in Cuba began to escalate in the 1990s, when the Soviet bloc collapsed, and has improved in spurts since. The Obama administration has also made it easier to get to Cuba, some missionaries said.

Statistics bear witness to the changes. Echo Cuba, a Miami-based humanitarian aid group, reported about 201,000 Cuban Protestants in 1989 and around 460,000 a decade later. According to the U.S. State Department, that number hit 550,000 by 2009, the most recent year for which it has numbers.

Most are Baptists followed by

various Pentecostal groups then Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, government statistics show.

Catholics, however, still hold sway. About 60 percent of the island's 11.4 million people were Roman Catholics in 2009.

And many of them will continue to benefit from the pontiff's visit well after it's over, Padilla said.

"When the pope goes there, people realize they don't have as much to fear from the Christian church as they once thought," he said of Communist leaders.



CULBRETH

That could be, but Southern Baptist Tim Maynard doesn't expect Cuban missions work to become a cakewalk any time soon. Maynard is the pastor of Fruit Cove Baptist Church, a northeast Florida congregation heavily involved in missions work in Cuba.

He was on a Cuban missions trip two years ago and found Christians continuing to struggle with decaying churches and burdensome religious restrictions.

Benedict's visit will likely contribute to the success of all missions groups in the long run, said Craig Culbreth, lead strategist for the Missional Support Group of the Florida Baptist Convention.

While in Cuba in late March, Culbreth said he found Communist officials much more willing than usual to discuss religious restrictions because the pope was about to arrive.

Faith had become a part of the daily conversation in Cuba, he added. "For me, if you can change the conversation, then you can change people." (ABP)



ABP photo

SHARING A SMILE — Pastor Tim Maynard of Fruit Cove Baptist Church, in northeast Florida, visits and laughs with a girl in Cuba during a 2008 missions trip.