



INSIDE



Tuscaloosa's Calvary Baptist adopts 108th family after April 2011 tornadoes

◆ Page 3



The Alabama Baptist sponsors trip to Holy Land

◆ Pages 4-5



Southern Baptists reach Muslim communities in Bangladesh

◆ Page 11

'Sticky faith'

How can we help teenagers remain faithful to God, committed to church?

A 2007 LifeWay Research study found that 70 percent of young adults who attended church in high school subsequently stopped attending church for at least a year during their college years.

Perhaps just as alarming, only 20 percent of those who left the church had planned on doing so while in high school.

For most, the decision was not considered far in advance.

LifeWay's data is not unique. Surveys by Barna and Gallup have found similar dropout rates, leaving youth and teens experts wondering: What can be done?

A new longitudinal study of 500 youth group graduates may provide some answers. Conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., the study followed the graduates through their years in college or vocational school. The results are compiled in a book, "Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith In Your Kids" (Zondervan).

Some of the suggestions aren't surprising (for instance, the level of church involvement by parents plays a key role in a teen maintaining his or her faith walk). Other suggestions, though, may surprise Christian leaders.

Baptist Press asked Sticky Faith co-author Kara E. Powell — executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute

— about the research. Following is a transcript:

Q: What do you mean by "sticky faith"?

A: Sticky faith, in our context, is faith that lasts beyond high school — a vibrant relationship with God as well as with the faith community.

Q: Your book includes multiple reasons why teens leave the church when they move out or go off to college. What would you say are the top two or three?



sxc.hu

A: Our research didn't rank reasons, so it's challenging for me to choose the top two or three from a research perspective. Having said that, as we've shared our research with students and gotten their feedback, the top two or three are, No. 1, their view of

the gospel is a very truncated view of the gospel.

It's very similar to what Dallas Willard calls the gospel of sin management, where the gospel has been distilled to a list of do's and don'ts. Part of what we need to do is reframe the gospel as God's transforming us from the inside out.

No. 2, as youth ministries become more professionalized — which is a step I applaud on many levels — it has become separated from the rest of the church.

And so the typical youth group graduate leaves high school and they know their youth leader but they don't know the overall church, they don't know adults in that church. We've done ourselves a disservice by having youth ministries so silo-ized from the rest of the congregation. We (See 'Family,' page 7)

More than 500 people find Christ; gospel shared with 3,744 at Daytona Bike Week

Would you trade three minutes of your time for a chance to win a black 2012 Harley Davidson Road Glide motorcycle?

That was the question posed to bike lovers ambling along Beach Street during the 2012 Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Fla.

Tattooed and leather-adorned bikers strolled down the sidewalks to ogle the latest bike accessories in equipment and clothes as vendors hawked their wares and services.

Stopped by "catchers" wearing Faith Riders T-shirts, the onlookers considered the request: three minutes of their time. Some left, but most were enticed by the potential prize — unaware that those three minutes could make a difference in where they spend eternity.

With a baby strapped in a carrier on his chest, Stephan and his wife pushed a second child in a stroller along Beach Street. Once inside the Faith Riders' tent, the young African American began talking to Clayton Reeves, a biker from Harmony Grove Baptist Church, Blairsville, Ga.

Holy Spirit working

Stephan was reluctant when Reeves began sharing his personal testimony, but the Holy Spirit was working.

When it came to the question, "If [you] died today would [you]



BP photo

STRONG WITNESS — F.A.I.T.H. Riders share the gospel during Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Fla.

go to heaven?" Stephan answered that he was a good man. "I explained to him that I was a good man," Reeves said, "but good ain't gonna get you in heaven."

Reeves continued sharing the plan of salvation as massive motorcycles cruised along the road, vibrating the ground and sending gas fumes into the air. At the conclusion, Stephan prayed to receive Christ under the Faith Riders tent.

"After he prayed, he didn't look like the same man," Reeves said. "His whole demeanor had changed. You could see it in his (See 'Bike,' page 10)



BP photo

TIME FOR PRAYER — Faith Rider Jimmy May (left), associate pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Ardmore, Okla., prays with two bikers during Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Fla.

COMMENT

What Do the Numbers Say About Alabama Baptists?

Alabama Baptists are noted for their careful record keeping that documents life in the churches and in the denomination. Occasionally the gathered information causes some to boast about the important role Alabama Baptists play in the kingdom of God in this area and in the life of the state. However, the numbers taken from the 2011 Annual Church Profile (ACP) paint a picture that is causing some observers to question the direction Baptist churches appear headed.

Total membership of cooperating churches is still large — 1,135,606, according to statistics provided by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. That means almost one out of every four (23.6 percent) of Alabama's 4,802,740 citizens in 2011 were members of an Alabama Baptist church.

However, when one delves below the total number, the picture is not as encouraging.

Resident membership — members who live in the community of the church of which they are a member — stood at 792,630 at the end of 2011 or about one in six of every state resident (16.5 percent). That means slightly more than 30 percent of Alabama Baptist church members live in communities away from the church of which they are a member. Most of these may be called inactive members and churches may have lost contact with many of them. Still, one in six is a sizable portion of the state's population.

Worship attendance also reflects dwindling participation. On any given Sunday in 2011, the average worship attendance reported was 380,528 people. That is slightly less than half the resident members (48 percent) and one-third (33.5 percent) of the total membership.

From one out of four state residents who are members of Alabama Baptist churches, one now has eight out of 100 who worship in an Alabama Baptist church on any given Sunday. That is quite a difference.

Bible study participants continue the downward trend. Average Sunday School attendance was reported at 281,613. That is 35.5 percent of resident members and six out of every 100 state citizens.

Unfortunately, resident membership, worship attendance and Bible study averages are all lower than 2010 numbers.

Alabama is noted for the number of Baptist churches in the state. That is only part of the picture. In 2011, Alabama Baptists reported 3,238 cooperating churches. That was down from the previous year, in part, because 15 churches disbanded. Of the more than 3,000 only 108 reported average worship attendance of more than 500 people. Only 34 of those reported worship attendance of more than 1,000.

On the other end of the spectrum, 2,113 churches reported average worship attendance of



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

100 or fewer. Thirty-nine percent of cooperating Alabama Baptist churches (1,262) reported worship attendance of 50 or fewer. The median attendance for all Alabama Baptist churches was 59.

Bible study participation through Sunday School shows a similar picture. The number of churches with 100 or fewer in average attendance was 2,341 or 72.3 percent of all cooperating churches. Only 69 churches average more than 500 in Sunday School participation. Last year the number was 71. Only 19 churches averaged more than 1,000 in Sunday School in 2011.

Generational change

A generation ago Sunday School was the door to the church and attendance always topped worship participation. No longer. Now people come to worship first and every size church has trouble getting people to participate in Bible study through the Sunday School.

Among smaller membership churches, 39 percent (1,262) average 50 or fewer in worship attendance. For Sunday School attendance, that number was 1,725 or 53.3 percent of all Alabama Baptist churches. Among the largest churches, 34 average more than 1,000 in worship attendance but only 19 of those report Sunday School participation of more than 1,000.

Churches averaging between 501 and 1,000 in worship attendance numbered 74 in 2011 but only 50 could report an average Sunday School attendance between 501 and 1,000.

The number of baptisms reported by churches also dropped. In 2010, churches reported 20,948 baptisms. Last year the reported number was 20,077 for a drop of 4.16 percent. Also the number of churches reporting no baptisms increased from 719 to 727. The ratio of baptisms to resident members increased from 1 to 38 in 2010 up to 1 to 39 for 2011.

In 2010, 50.3 percent of all baptisms were of people age 18 and above; 36.2 percent of those were age 30 and above. In 2011, those more than 18 years of age made up 42.2 percent of baptisms. Those age 30 and above composed 28.2 percent.

The plurality of baptisms continued to come from middle-school and high-school age categories.

This group composed 41.4 percent of all baptisms in 2011. Those ages 9–11 accounted for 3,867 baptisms while the 12–17 age category accounted for 4,434 baptisms. Alabama Baptists also reported baptizing 268 children under age 5.

The median number of baptisms by church was three.

When baptisms are examined by the age of the church, an interesting picture emerges. Churches less than 10 years of age accounted for 4.9 percent of reported baptisms. Churches older than 50 years accounted for 76.7 percent of baptisms. In terms of numbers, churches 10 years old or younger reported 983 baptisms. Churches more than 50 years of age reported 15,390 baptisms.

Financially, the ACPs confirmed what was already known from experience. 2011 was a difficult year. Total receipts for Alabama Baptist churches were down about \$11.5 million. Undesignated receipts were down about \$4 million.

Churches gave less money to missions causes through the Cooperative Program (CP) — \$40,613,997.30 for the 2011 church year compared to \$41,286,543.15 for 2010. The percentage of undesignated receipts contributed by cooperating Baptist churches through the CP fell from 7.3 percent to 7.2 percent.

In terms of size, worship participation, Sunday School attendance, the number of people reached or missions support through the CP, 2011 was not a good year for Alabama Baptists. The April 27 tornadoes may have had something to do with that. Certainly that natural disaster — the greatest in Alabama Baptist history — impacted the life and work of churches and families alike. And these numbers are not set in stone because not every church completed the ACP.

Still the numbers are reliable and provide a picture reflecting the directions of Baptist life. They tell us clearly that this is not time for boasting. Rather it is a time for pondering the future of Alabama Baptists — both in our churches and our corporate life — to determine how God wants to use this body of believers to reach others, to grow people in Christian discipleship and to reflect the kingdom of God in this area.



"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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Commemorative 'tornado' issue coming soon

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Hours turned into days. Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. And here we are about to mark the first anniversary of the April 2011 tornadoes that stunned our state from top to bottom.

For some the chaos calmed down by summer and life returned to normal. But for many the nightmare still stares them in the face every day as they steadily continue rebuilding efforts.

While the tornadoes will forever be part of Alabama's story, they also showcased the heart and hands of Alabama Baptists at a level few have experienced.

The Alabama Baptist staff has had the privilege of sharing the countless stories across the state almost weekly since the deadly events occurred. And the plan is to continue with updates going forward.

But the staff could not let the one-year anniversary go by without something special focused solely on the events that changed life forever for Alabama citizens and Alabama Baptists. What started as a "what if" conversation in mid-January turned into an all-out, all-hands-on-deck project for the state Baptist paper staff by mid-February.

And at the time of this writing, the staff was only days away from releasing the 56-page commemorative issue depicting "A story of rescue, response, recovery and rebuild" to the press to be printed and mailed in time for the April 22 special day of remembrance in many Alabama Baptist churches.

The special issue is in addition to the routine weekly papers and will be available through Alabama Baptist churches. Nearly 250,000 issues are being printed and mailed to the churches for distribution. The plan is for every family in Alabama Baptist life to receive a copy of the issue.

The Alabama Baptist is able to provide this as a gift to the churches because of the generous support of the sponsors noted below.

For more information about the issue, call 1-800-803-5201.

Thanks to our sponsors



God's provision

Tuscaloosa's Calvary Baptist adopts 108th family after April 2011 tornadoes

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

After a powerful EF4 tornado with 190 mph winds tore through Tuscaloosa on April 27 and destroyed entire areas of the city, Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, adopted 25 families displaced by the storm. And what began as an outreach to those families has significantly increased in its impact since last year.

When the tornado obliterated about half of the Rosedale Court public housing complex, church members knew quickly it was an area for them to assist. They had ministered there previously through Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox's Hope Initiative.

As displaced residents moved into new housing units, Calvary Baptist Sunday School classes and small groups came alongside 25 of those families and committed to furnish interiors with both new and gently used items. In the process, meaningful relationships were established.

"We didn't want [those who received assistance] to feel some sort of obligation to us," explained Kendra Watson, Calvary Baptist's communications coordinator and ministry assistant. "We just wanted them to know that people cared about them and it was a no strings attached gift from us."

Word about the church's effort spread in the community and additional donations resulted. Other churches partnered with Calvary, paving the way for the adoptions to continue.

The church assisted the 108th family on March 15. Watson said the journey was an "all hands on deck" effort — from church members donating furniture to cleaning, organizing and making deliveries.

Once the church received word that a family was ready for its furniture delivery, Watson said "the Calvary" was called and people arrived with trucks and trailers.

One church member involved in the moving efforts since the beginning, Billy Hatmaker, grew up in Rosedale Court and moved



Photo courtesy of Calvary Baptist Church

FURNISHINGS — Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, keeps furniture in its annex building and organizes it in room sets much like a store would.

back to Tuscaloosa for retirement. He said when the tornado came through, "it brought people together in a way that many in the city had not seen before."

'Amazing things'

God's provision throughout this ministry endeavor has been so evident to Hatmaker, he began writing down the "amazing things" God has done.

Hatmaker said many people volunteered to help after the tornado, but those numbers soon dwindled as people returned to work. "It came down to just a handful of folks helping," he shared.

One particular day, furniture was ready to deliver but not enough workers were present to make the deliveries. Hatmaker said a prayer asking God to provide. Moments after finishing that prayer, he received a call

from The University of Alabama School of Law. The caller said a group at the school attending an alumni convocation wanted to help with relief efforts. When Hatmaker said he needed 15 people, the group was ready to work within minutes.

According to Watson, Calvary Baptist is different because of this ministry effort, and the church is examining ways it can have a continued physical presence in the community.

One example of that continued presence is through the church's Rehab/Repair Ministry, which was already in place before April 27.

The ministry consists of men from Calvary Baptist and other Tuscaloosa-area churches who receive referrals and make repairs to homes and other buildings. "That ministry was born out of realizing what needs ... were out there," Watson noted.

The Alabama Baptist says goodbye, hello to staff members

Kathleen Penton has left her position as copy editor for *The Alabama Baptist* to join national Woman's Missionary Union as an assistant editor.

Penton served with the state Baptist paper for seven years and was a major part of the reason it annually receives awards of excellence from national competitions, said Bob Terry, president and editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.

"Kathleen's work improved the quality of *The Alabama Baptist*. Her fact checking, copy editing, proofreading and attention to detail kept us at the highest professional level," he said. "Her work ethic was a challenge to us all. Every part of the state Baptist paper was better because of her."

Penton, a graduate of the University of Alabama (UA), first worked with *The Alabama Baptist* while interning at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center during college. After graduation she worked as a correspondent for four months before joining the staff as the editorial assistant and later advanced to copy editor. Her last day was March 30.

At WMU Penton will work with *Missions Mosaic* and *Missions Leader*.

As the staff said goodbye to Penton, it also



PENTON



PAYNE

welcomed Julie Moore Payne as a news writer April 2.

Payne holds a bachelor of arts degree in telecommunication and film from UA and was a member of several honor societies while in college. She previously worked as an intern for ABC 33/40, an anchor and reporter for WVUA Channel 7 in Tuscaloosa and a communications specialist for Central Alabama Women's Business Center in Birmingham.

From 2006 to 2010, she served as editor and primary writer for several The Christian Family Publication, Inc. magazine markets.

Payne has worked as a part-time news writ-

er for *The Alabama Baptist* since April 2011.

Along with writing articles, she has helped maintain the paper's regular columns, processed and edited wire copy, produced video packages for the online edition, created and produced promotional videos for the paper and assisted with local edition production.

Payne had been a part of *The Alabama Baptist* team two days when the April 27 tornadoes ripped through the state in 2011. She jumped right into the chaos that became life for many weeks at the paper and bonded instantly with the team.

"Julie brings a variety of communications skills to the task of sharing what God is doing among Baptists in Alabama and around the world," Terry said. "During her 11 months as a part-time employee, she demonstrated how valuable she will be on a full-time basis. All of us are grateful the Lord prepared her to step right in when the opportunity presented itself."

Payne's new position also will encompass some of what the copy editor position previously did in an attempt to streamline resources during a down economy. The staff will bring in a part-time proofreader to assist with some of the other responsibilities. (TAB)

HOLY

Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash



Experiencing the Dead Sea — large salt clusters, filmy water, no life



Nazareth Village — A reenactment of what a carpenter might have looked like and done during Jesus' day



The group met with national Christians and Baptist representatives working with Jews and Palestinians.

A 10-day journey through the Holy Land with 50 people, a tour guide and a camel may sound like the beginning of a joke, but it was a real-life, life-changing experience sponsored by *The Alabama Baptist* in March. Participants are saying their faith has deepened and their Bible reading enhanced.



Visiting the ruins of the coastal city of Caesarea — the site of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles for the first time and the ancient Roman capital of Palestine.



Sitting on the southern steps to where the temple stood in Jesus' day — realizing we truly were walking where Jesus walked

Land

2012



Prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane



Panoramic view of the 'Old City' of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives — looking at the eastern gate and where the temple once stood



Time to reflect and think about Jesus during a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee



Garden Tomb



After each person had opportunity to go inside the Garden Tomb, Bob Terry led the group in an Easter-themed worship service complete with communion.



Visiting the Garden Tomb was one of the group's favorite moments.

Interested in next year's tour?

March 15–24, 2013

Leader: Bob Terry, president and editor of *The Alabama Baptist*

For information, call 1-800-803-5201 or email holyland@thealabamabaptist.org.

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► **Vestavia Hills Church** will host HymnFest, the 5th annual Shepherd Memorial Concert, April 29 at 6 p.m. The concert will feature hymns for choir, orchestra and congregation celebrating the ministry of Betty Sue Shepherd who was an organist at Vestavia Hills. Music will be performed by the Vestavia Hills sanctuary choir and the Vestavia Hills High School honor choir. For more information call 205-979-5920. Gary Furr is pastor. ► Former members of **West End Church, Birmingham**, will have a reunion April 20 at First Church, Trussville, 6-9 p.m. For more information call June Harrell Murray at 205-680-0868. ► **First Church, Birmingham**, will host a men's breakfast fellowship April 21 at 8 a.m. with Bobby Humphrey, former University of Alabama and Denver Broncos player. For reservations call 205-870-3888 by April 16. Stan Lewis is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Church, Holly Pond**, will hold a third Sunday night singing April 15 at 6 p.m. with Blue Grace of White Oak. For more information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

CHEROKEE

► **Pine Grove Church, Centre**, will host a Priscilla Shirer simulcast May 4 at 6-8:30 p.m. and May 5 at 8-11:30 a.m. Doors will open one hour prior to event start time. For more information call 256-927-3214 or visit www.pinegrovebc.com.

org. Ricky Pollard is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Westview Church, Sylacauga**, will host the third annual spring cruise-in May 5, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. There will be a 50-50 drawing, door prizes, music and food. Rain date is May 19. For more information visit www.wherethefriendsbecomefamily.com. Jimmie Roberts is pastor.

ESCAMBIA

► **Brooks Memorial Church, Atmore**, will hold a Revival of Hope: Find It Here on April 29-May 2. Services will be held Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Week-day services will be at 6:30 p.m. Mike Shaw, pastor of First Church, Pelham, will speak. Corey Stringer, minister of music at Brooks Memorial, will lead worship Sunday and Monday. Luke Tolar, minister of music at First Church, Bay Minette, will lead worship Tuesday and Wednesday. Robert Heard is pastor.

SALEM-TROY



MANION

► **Chadwick D. Manion** is the new pastor of **Salem Church, Brundidge**. He previously served at Bethel Church, Fayette. He received his master of

divinity with biblical languages from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. Manion and his wife, Melissa, have three children.

SARDIS

► **Mount Carmel Church, Coffee Springs**, will hold a spring revival April 15-18 with guest speaker Nathan Carroll. Services will be at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday and 7 p.m. weeknights. James Preachers is pastor.

SHELBY

► **North Shelby Church, Birmingham**, will host a community baby shower for Sav-A-Life Shelby on April 22, 1:30-3 p.m. Please bring baby items to donate. Allan Murphy is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Daviston Church** will celebrate homecoming April 22. Cedar Creek gospel singers will perform at 10 a.m. Jack Womack will speak at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow in the fellowship hall.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Chapel Hill Church, Northport**, will hold the second annual Cruisin at Chapel Hill on April 14 at 9 a.m.-2 p.m. There will be food, drinks and door prizes. Big Daddy will perform. For more information call 205-339-4071 or visit www.chapelhillbc.org. James Nichols is pastor.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Florida megachurch, blogger lawsuit settled

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — A defamation lawsuit against a Florida Baptist megachurch has been settled under confidential terms, according to the formerly anonymous blogger who filed the complaint in 2009.

First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, pastor Mac Brunson apologized at the close of the April 1 morning worship service for once labeling former longtime church member Tom Rich "obsessive-compulsive" and a "sociopath," the *Florida Times-Union* reported April 2.

"Mr. Rich is not obsessive-compulsive and is not a sociopath," Brunson said in a statement quoted in full on the FBC Jax Watchdog blog started anonymously by Rich in 2007, a year after Brunson moved from First Baptist Church, Dallas, to replace retiring First, Jacksonville, pastor Jerry Vines. "I regret making those statements. I want to apologize to Mr. Rich and his family."

The Watchdog's criticism of Brunson's leadership led to Rich's identity being exposed after a police detective serving on the church's security detail got a subpoena and he and his wife being voted out of membership.

In 2010 the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office paid Rich \$50,000 as part of a settlement in another lawsuit saying their investigation violated the First Amendment.

Endowed dean's chair granted at Truett Seminary

WACO, Texas — An endowed dean's chair has been established at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, thanks to a gift in excess of \$3 million from the estate of former ExxonMobil executive Charles DeLancey.

Baylor officials said the Charles J. and Eleanor McLerran DeLancey Endowed Chair will enhance the university's ability to attract and retain leading faculty for theological education.

Eleanor McLerran attended Baylor University from 1935 to 1938, receiving her bachelor's degree in journalism and Spanish. She married Charles DeLancey, a University of Texas graduate and exploration geologist with Humble Oil and Refining Co., in 1949.

The family made Houston their home in 1959, where DeLancey enjoyed a long career with ExxonMobil before retiring in 1985. They were members of Tallowood Baptist Church, Houston.

Throughout their lives the DeLanceys were generous supporters of Baylor.

Former Southern Baptist Foundation president dies

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. — Mike Weeks, president of the Southern Baptist Foundation from 2002 to 2007, died March 17 in Brentwood, Tenn., after an extended battle with cancer.

At the time of his death, Weeks, 63, had been chairman of the Union University Foundation since 2010. He was chairman of Union's board of trustees from 2002 to 2005.

"All of us here at the Southern Baptist Foundation mourn the passing of Mike Weeks and unite in honoring the exemplary legacy of a man of faith," said Warren Peek, who was named as the foundation's president after Weeks' retirement in June 2007.

In addition to his wife, Trish, Weeks is survived by two sons, a daughter and 10 grandchildren.

April declared Easter Seals Awareness Month


NASHVILLE — The National Baptist Convention, USA, and Easter Seals are teaming up in April to raise awareness about children under 5 at risk of autism, developmental delays and disabilities.

National Baptists, the nation's oldest and largest historically African-American denomination with an estimated membership of 7.5 million, have declared April 2012 as Easter Seals Awareness Month.

The emphasis is part of National Baptists' Health Outreach and Prevention Education (H.O.P.E.) program launched last year to improve health and well-being for African-Americans, who suffer disproportionately from preventable diseases.

CP dollars exceed year-to-date budgeted goal

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee are \$4,764,590.68, or 5.12 percent, above the year-to-date budgeted goal, and are 0.75 percent behind contributions received during the same time frame last year. As of March 31, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget totaled \$97,764,590.68, or 105.12 percent of the \$93,000,000 year-to-date amount. March's CP allocation receipts for SBC work totaled \$16,142,489.90.



Someone You Should Know

BESSIE MARIE WOODFIN

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

FAVORITE VERSE: Psalm 23
FAVORITE HYMN: "It Is Well With My Soul"
HOBBIES: Reading and cross-stitching

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 52 years of marriage to Billy; three children, John, Harold and Phyllis; six grandsons; and six great-grandchildren

Bessie Marie Woodfin, 83, has been a member of First, Athens, for 67 years. She has taught Sunday School for 50 years. She was Woman's Missionary Union director at First, Athens, for 20 years and a two-term board member for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. She also is a former board member for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?
A: A revival preacher (in 1945) preached that "all have sinned and come short," and I finally realized


that "all" included me. I was about 15.

Q: How did you become involved in teaching Sunday School?
A: I remember the man who called me and asked me if I would teach. I had been in a church training class. He asked me if I would teach a group of senior girls. I started teaching senior girls and then I started teaching single adults.

Q: What is the most rewarding aspect of teaching Sunday School?

A: It's amazing how many people come up to me now [and say] "Do you remember me? You taught me years ago." It's seeing the results in the lives of people, I think, [that] means the most to me and knowing that I'm where I'm supposed to be — that I'm doing what I'm supposed to do.

Q: What difference has Jesus made in your life?
A: I just don't understand how you survive in the world we live in without having the hope that Christians have. That hope is not "iffy" — that hope is definite eternity with the Lord.



WOODFIN

Family, church vital in helping teens keep faith

(continued from page 1)

need to create more inter-generational worship and relationships.

And No. 3, their families are not vibrant hubs of faith. A lot of parents these days are what we call dry cleaner parents — parents who think they can bring their kids all dirty to church Sunday morning and then pick them up 75 minutes later all clean.

A lot of parents are thinking they can outsource the spiritual formation of their kids to the church. And the reality is, the best combination is a family and church working in partnership for the long-term benefit of the faith of the child.

Q: You say that teens who feel the freedom to express doubts about their faith tend to keep their faith. How can parents and churches help facilitate that?

A: Some of the parents and leaders who are most effective at engaging students in discussion about doubts share their own doubts — they don't understand why God would allow this natural disaster or why God would allow a divorce in the family next door. As parents and leaders share their own big questions about God, that tends to create a climate where that's more OK. I think the other thing that comes to mind is for parents and leaders to be OK not having a definitive answer [to every question], because we can't understand everything about God.

God is beyond our intellect and our ways. It's good for a parent or leader to say, "That's

a good question and I don't know. Here's what I do know about God."

Q: Would you say, though, that there are questions that do have legitimate answers, and teens just don't feel comfortable asking them?

A: Sure. Absolutely. There are some questions that we can, using Scripture and reason and the help of good apologists, have well-reasoned answers for students.

Q: In one chapter of the book you say that it benefits a teen's faith to have adult mentors other than their parents. How does that help?

A: As powerful as a parent is, there are just some life truths that a young person is going to absorb or hear better from somebody else other than their parent.

The ideal is to form a constellation of caring adults around a kid with other small group members, neighbors, church members, coaches, boy and girl scout leaders, teachers, etc., who are all caring for kids and praying for them and showing an interest in their life.

In the book we tell a story that I love about Tony Dungy. He was trying to encourage his son, who was a high school student playing football, to have a bigger breakfast. Dungy told his son this week after week, and his son kept saying, "No, Dad, I'm OK."

Well finally the son starts eating breakfast, and he's making himself some toast and some

eggs. Tony said, "I see you're making a bigger breakfast." And his son says, "Yeah my coach at the high school said that I should." Here this son is living with an amazing NFL coach, but it's the high school coach down the street that he listens to about breakfast.

God has designed us to live in community, and God has designed our families to live in community. So ideally we have multiple voices reinforcing the messages to our students.

Q: How do parents have a role in choosing these mentors?

A: I think it depends on the age of your child. For younger children, you can be pretty strategic in whom you invite over to dinner or whom you invite to your kid's soccer game, etc. As kids get older, I think they need to be more involved in this process.

Parents of teenagers can ask their kids, "What adults do you look up to? Whom would you want to spend time with? What adults do you like?"

The kids answer those questions, and the parents have a mental list of adults to try to connect with. This is not something we need to keep secret from our kids. My kids are 11, 9 and 5, and I asked them, "Who were the

adults you feel like you could go to for support?" Our kids had a great time listing off the friends and the neighbors and the family members and the church members.

Q: How can churches that are located near colleges help facilitate the transition from high school to college and help teens stay in their faith?

A: I think it's really simple things. If you see a college student who shows up at your church, introduce yourself to them.

Find out if there's anything they need help with in their community — do they have a way to do laundry? Have they found the right grocery store? Do they have a way to come back to church? — because a lot of students don't have a car. An adult could offer to be a vocational mentor.

If a college student walks into your church and you find out that she's studying to be an engineer, how wonderful would

it be if you could pair her or introduce her to another adult in the church who is an engineer and talk about how faith informs the engineering work they do? Vocation is a real avenue for connecting college students with specific adults. (BP)

"The best combination is a family and church working in partnership for the long-term benefit of ... the child."

Kara E. Powell
Fuller Youth Institute

Parents of international missionaries to gather for retreat at Shocco

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Though 25 years have passed, Harrell Cushing still remembers the anxiety he felt as his daughter, son-in-law and 6-month-old grandson boarded the plane for their first international missions assignment in Africa.

"There were so many questions about the circumstances of where they would live and how they would survive," said Cushing, who as a retired pastor and state missionary himself was no stranger to the demands that a call to full-time Christian service requires.

"No matter how much orientation you've been through, the fact is that

you still have concerns," he said.

Now Cushing helps other parents of Southern Baptist representatives cope with their concerns in his role as coordinator of the Alabama International Parents Fellowship (IPF), a group dedicated to meeting the emotional and practical needs of those with family members serving on the international missions field.

Prayer support

The first Missionary Parents Fellowship was organized in Mississippi in 1995. Alabama IPF (formerly Alabama Missionary Parents Fellowship) began in 1999 through the efforts of Allen and

Laurelle Stoudenmire and Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU).

Allen Stoudenmire said the greatest strengths of the IPF involve prayer support and sharing the concerns that all missionary parents feel. "It's an opportunity to talk with people that you know understand your feelings," he said.

He recalled an early meeting where a mother in attendance shared her grief that her daughter had left for the missions field. The mother continued to be part of the group. She eventually came to understand that most parents felt the same way at one point but had come to not only accept God's call on the lives of their children but also to see it as an honor that God chose them for service, he said.

Candace McIntosh, executive director for Alabama WMU, said mixed emotions are common for the families of missionaries.

Parents miss their children, and grandparents may miss the birth of a grandchild or the milestones that mark the years in a child's life, she said. Talking with others in the same situation can help them cope with both the sadness and the joy.

"The fellowship group gives parents and grandparents a place to share their hearts, to talk openly and safely about what their children are doing," McIntosh said.

Alabama IPF meets in the fall and spring each year. Every two years, the National Missionary

Parent Fellowship Retreat brings missionary parents from around the country together for a time of worship, celebration and support. This year, Alabama IPF is hosting the national event April 27-29 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

The program for the retreat focuses on the needs and concerns of parents of missionaries, McIntosh said. The speakers include Tom Elliff, International Mission Board (IMB) president; Tom Williams, IMB vice president for global personnel; and Terri Willis, director of the IMB national relations office.

Strengthening roles

Willis said, "Gatherings like this for the parents of IMB field personnel are significant times for connecting with each other and strengthening the roles they have as they

prayerfully support family members serving all over the world."

The retreat program features several informational sessions and time for parents to meet with other parents who have children serving in the same area of the world as well as for state fellowship groups to meet.

The retreat also provides an opportunity for missionary parents to worship and pray together as well.

"Worshiping under the leadership of furloughing missionaries, spending time in prayer for our children and hearing IMB staff members talk about what God is doing in the world gives us all new awareness of what our missions support can be and ought to be," Cushing said.

For more information, contact Alabama WMU at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 225, or visit www.alabamawmu.com/IPF.

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Former Ala. pastor Nail dies

Eugene "Gene" Roberts Nail, former Alabama pastor, died April 2. He was 83.

A Birmingham native, Nail served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

He graduated from Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He was pastor of Green Valley

Baptist Church, Hoover, from April 1978 to August 1990.

He served in several other Alabama pastorates, including 16 months as interim pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, as the church was starting in 1993.

He also served as pastor of churches in Maine and Texas.

Nail was preceded in death by his wife, Emily. He is survived by his daughter and granddaughter. (TAB)

‘Putting Power into Healthcare’

Baptist Health System Hospitals Helping Cut Infection Rates

Ben Franklin’s quote, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is still relevant in the 21st century. And being proactive, particularly in the case of one’s health, can yield high rewards. Even something as elementary as hand hygiene can make a huge impact.

measures when and how often badged employees and healthcare professionals wash their hands. BHS and other participating hospitals have installed the system in patient rooms and other places where patient care is provided.

Study at Princeton Baptist

“Hand washing seems like such a simple thing, yet it is the most important action a caregiver can take to protect a patient from infection,” said Dr. Rich Embrey, chief medical officer of Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham. “The nGage System finally provides a way for our caregivers to know they are providing this lifesaving action for each and every patient they touch.”

Dr. Embrey and a team at Princeton Baptist conducted a seven-month study to determine whether increased hand-washing prompted by the nGage System could reduce infection rates. The results were significant: during the study period, infection rates dropped 22 percent in the unit where the system was installed. That translated into 159 fewer patient days and estimated health cost savings of more than \$133,000.

Baptist Health System’s four medical centers – Princeton, Shelby, Walker and Citizens – are among 27 hospitals in the state partnering with Alabama Power and Proventix Systems, Inc. in a new hand hygiene initiative.



Scan the QR code to see a video.

The “Putting Power into Healthcare” initiative (PPHI) focuses on increasing hand hygiene in hospitals, which studies show can help reduce healthcare-associated infections. These infections can complicate a medical condition, extend the time a patient stays in the hospital and boost the costs of health care and health insurance.

How it works

The Proventix’s nGage System uses radio-frequency badges worn by hospital personnel and a compliance monitoring system. The system



Princeton Baptist Medical Center nurse manager Gloria Deitz demonstrates how the Proventix nGage system is used.

First of its kind initiative

Harvey Nix, Proventix’s chief executive officer, board chairman and founder, said Putting Power into Healthcare is the first initiative to use a sophisticated, data-backed network to encourage and track hand-washing across multiple hospitals in a single state.

“PPHI is part of a bigger vision that goes beyond merely improving hand hygiene,” Nix said. “We have an opportunity to improve the delivery of care through collaboration among healthcare workers and standardized processes. This effort is focused not only on infection prevention, but on quality care driven through effective communications.”

Alabama Power lends helping hand

Alabama Power understands the importance of this program and

the positive effect it will have in the community. The company is providing “seed money” to help the participating hospitals implement the hand hygiene monitoring system in their facilities.

Charles McCrary, Alabama Power president and CEO, said the program is a natural extension of Alabama Power’s health and wellness programs, which have played a role in keeping employees healthier, reducing sick days and improving productivity.

“Healthcare-associated infections can affect us all, through personal experience, or the experience of a loved one,” said McCrary. “No one wants to be sick, and no one wants to go to the hospital. This program doesn’t just help our employees who face a hospital stay. It will benefit everyone who steps inside these healthcare facilities.”

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ON THE PAST
90 YEARS



AND LOOK
AHEAD TO
THE NEXT 90.





Photo by Louise Barbour

NEW FOUR-LEVEL BUILDING — Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, holds a dedication and celebration for its new Edgar M. Arendall Children's Building on March 4.

Dawson adds children's wing

So the next generation will know." That was the theme, goal and sentiment at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, on March 4 as it dedicated its new Edgar M. Arendall Children's Building, located next to the sanctuary.

In February 2011, Dawson Memorial Baptist began construction on the new four-level children's education building which houses 27 classrooms. It is fully accessible for people with disabilities and connects to the old education building and sanctuary.

"We are not only dedicating our new building," Pastor Gary Fenton wrote in the celebration's bulletin. "[M]ore importantly, we are dedicating ourselves to be used for God's glory in these ministries and in every dimension of our life as a church and as individuals." (TAB)



Photo by Louise Barbour

GENERATIONS — Preschoolers explore the multipurpose room featuring a wooden play platform designed and built by a team of granddads from Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Bike Week sees lives 'changed for eternity'

(continued from page 1) eyes." Given a New Testament Bikers edition, Stephan grabbed Reeves before he left.

"He hugged me and everybody else. He wouldn't let go. He kept saying he couldn't thank me enough for taking the time to talk to him," Reeves said.

"He left here a changed man." Stephan's name and phone number would be forwarded to Reeves to make contact within a week. His name also will be sent to a Baptist church near his home for follow-up.

As Stephan filled out a card indicating his spiritual decision, a bell loudly clanged within the tent

and a roar erupted from nearly a dozen Faith Riders staked out there, cheering as another life had been changed for eternity.

During the weeklong effort, the bell tolled more than 500 times — as many as 20 times within an hour — for those who prayed to receive Christ as their Savior. In all, the gospel was shared with 3,744 bikers.

Now in its second year of ministry at the World's Most Famous Beach, the March 10-17 outreach, sponsored by the Florida Baptist Convention and Faith Riders Motorcycle Ministry, drew 145 volunteers from at least 10 states — Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Teenage abortion bill would give parents say

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 in order 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 not more than one year in prison or a fine.

Of the 28 states that enforce parental involvement laws, 22 require only one parent to grant permission for the abortion.

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 — at 28 weeks of gestation or less — and suicide," said Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., the subcommittee's chairman.

Since 1998, the bill — in various forms — has received approval from the House but has gained passage in the Senate only once.

The House and Senate approved different versions of the legislation in 2006, but Democrats blocked a negotiated bill from receiving a vote on final passage.

Foxworthy to host game show on Bible knowledge

NEW YORK — Add to the list of television viewing options a new game show that will test participants' knowledge of the Bible.

Hosted by comedian Jeff Foxworthy, "The American Bible Challenge" is set to debut on GSN, formerly the Game Show Network, and a pilot was filmed in late March.

Questions for the studio-based show will be designed to acknowledge and celebrate the Bible's continuing importance in contemporary life and culture, according to a GSN news release.

Contestants will share their life stories and each team will compete for a faith-based organization.

"I am excited to be hosting a show about the best-selling book of all time," said Foxworthy, who is widely known for his redneck jokes.

"It will be interesting to find out what people really know and an opportunity to present the Bible in a fun and entertaining way." ❧

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Plentiful Harvest

Southern Baptists reach Muslim communities in Bangladesh

As youths, Qahir Hamad and his Bangladeshi friends beat a group selling Bibles and Christian literature and threw the wares into a pond.

Consumed with guilt over what he'd done, Hamad hardly slept that night. Having secretly saved four books to read later, he found someone after weeks of searching to tell him what the books meant.

He learned about how Jesus would save him.

Now Hamad is the pastor of a house church in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with a vision to see Muslims in the city find lasting peace like he has found in Christ. Bangladesh, he believes, should be a Christian nation.

This is also the vision of Travis and Madison Strauder, Southern Baptist representatives who minister among Muslims and Muslim background believers in Dhaka.

"Our vision is a vast multitude from Dhaka city knowing and worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ," Strauder said.

Strauder sees Dhaka as a strategic place for outreach. Thousands of Bangladeshis move to the city of 15 million people looking for jobs, education and a better life.

"We'd like to see people from all over the country coming into Dhaka and hearing the gospel and then being able to take it back to the villages with them," he said.

Bangladesh, with roughly 158 million people, is one of the world's most densely populated countries. It'd be the same as if roughly half of the population of the U.S. lived in Arkansas.

Strauder is helping equip Hamad's house church to reach Muslims more effectively.

Hamad's house church started with three people: Hamad, his wife and his daughter. Now 35 people gather to sit on the floor of Hamad's house to worship and learn more about God.



BP photo

WORSHIP — Two Christians express their heart with raised hands during prayer in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Christians face threats and persecution but continue to worship openly in homes and buildings throughout the city.

These 35 believers are taking part in a church planting and discipleship training widely used throughout southern Asia.

In the training, believers are challenged to write down the names of people they can share with what they learned that week.

Many of the believers invite these friends to come to a house church with them.

"Our desire is that churches would start in their homes and that everything they learn through these trainings they would pass on to others and there'd be multiplication and that

soon Dhaka would be filled with churches full of believers worshipping God," Strauder said.

Their desire is being fulfilled. In December, Hamad baptized some 20 new believers in his bathtub — 19 of whom came to faith through the training Strauder and Hamad hosted.

"If we want to see the growing of Christianity, we have to build the leadership and delegate the leadership," Hamad said. "If you don't do this, Christianity will not grow."

Recent statistics list Christians as 0.05 percent of the population of Bangladesh.

Investing in leaders and sharing the gospel has its consequences. Hamad and the new believers expect persecution.

"I am always ready for persecution be-

cause Jesus was also persecuted," Hamad said. "When I took baptism, persecution came into my life."

Hamad's family has ostracized him. He was beaten and tied to the pillars of a mosque for selling Christian literature.

"If [my friends] found me, they would kill me," he said.

However, many Christians are afraid to acknowledge their faith for fear of the repercussions from their Muslim communities, Hamad said.

As Bangladesh celebrates the 40-year anniversary of its liberation from Pakistan in 1971, Hamad and Strauder are praying for Bangladesh's next 40 years.

"In the next 40 years, you can pray for our nation," Hamad said. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. You can pray for workers."

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



BP photo

MUSIC SELECTION — Qahir Hamad (right) and his daughter, Moon, choose Bangla-language worship songs and hymns for their weekly house church services in Dhaka.

"We'd like to see people from all over the country coming into Dhaka and hearing the gospel and then being able to take it back to the villages with them."

Work yourself out of a job by teaching others

I was having a conversation with one of my children recently. We were disagreeing about something, and I said, "It is my job to make sure when you leave for college that you have all the skills and resources to go and be successful and live life." Sitting there, I realized I was saying that basically it is my job to work myself out of a job.

A day or so later I was sitting in a meeting, and we were discussing what our goal was in our work. After a moment, we started talking about how our goal was to replicate ourselves so that others could carry on the work and teach others.

A few days following that, I was sitting with a woman in my church who is leading our missions efforts, and we identified success as people internalizing the call to minister to others so it would become second nature, rather than something someone had to lead them to do.

It seems to be a theme — at home, at work, at church. I have to ask myself if there is really any realm in our lives where we are tasked with creating dependency on us. It seems that rather than

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



making people need us, our goal is to empower others to be successful without us.

Our children must be independent. Our coworkers must be able to succeed without us. Our churches should be able to build upon what we did. No one should be weaker once we are no longer present.

Yes it is nice to be needed. It feels good to be the expert, and it is affirming and reassuring when others look to us for guidance. But feeling affirmed and good about ourselves is not our task. Our task is to create independence.

Are you doing that?

At work, are you empowering those around you and educating

them so they are able to make informed decisions? Or are you caught up in the busyness of your work that you have become the person who makes all the decisions?

At home, are you working with your family and creating opportunities for them to develop skills necessary to be successful in life?

At your church or in your Sunday School class, do others make decisions, organize events and teach?

In your friendships, are you encouraging others and spending time talking about what is going on in their lives or does the conversation drift to what is happening with you and your family?

The beauty of God is that He takes our humility and takes our service and uses it to make a difference. It becomes His glory that our lives count for something rather than our task to make ourselves feel needed.

A Takeaway Value . . .
Work yourself out of a job!

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

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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 resumés by mail to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive, 3200 Mt. Olive Road, Mt. Olive, AL 35117, or email resumés to: sheila@fbcmo.org.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: West Highland Baptist Church in the Bessemer/Hueytown area is seeking a bivocational pastor. You may email resumés to: thobson.whbc@hotmail.com or mail to: WHBC, ATTN: Pastoral Search Committee, 4839 W. Highland Church Road, Bessemer, AL 35023.

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 resumé 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 resumés to: jobs@sixthstreetbaptistchurch.com.

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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 resumés to: Bethlehem Baptist Church, c/o Personnel Team, 416 Bethlehem Road, Midland City, AL 36350, or to: pastorpaul@bbcdothan.com.

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

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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 resumés to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 914, Cullman, AL 35056.

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MISCELLANEOUS

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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.

Meaning of family redefined

Should religious freedom take back seat to sexual liberty, experimentation?

By Glenn T. Stanton
Focus on the Family

U.S. Rep. Barney Frank infamously asked a question earlier this decade that has become one of the central questions surrounding the same-sex 'marriage' debate: "How will my same-sex 'marriage' harm your marriage?"

It gets asked constantly and is meant to be a discussion-stopper. But the problem is that it sees marriage as purely a private relationship, hermetically sealed off from all other parts of community life. It reveals a complete lack of understanding of what marriage actually is — not just in our country, or for people of faith, but across all human cultures. Marriage is what anthropologists call a "human universal" because it is found in all human cultures throughout time. And it exists as a heterosexual institution throughout the world and history.

But the real answer to Congressman Frank's question is quite simple: "Your same-sex 'marriage' will do nothing to impact my marriage. But your 'marriage' is not what we're debating in our nation. We are debating whether it is wise to radically and permanently redefine marriage in our nation for everyone. And

that is quite significant indeed."

First, same-sex "marriage" not only redefines marriage wholesale for everyone, but it actually deconstructs humanity itself. That's a very strong and consequential assertion, but that is exactly what it does. Same-sex "marriage" essentially creates genderless marriage by saying 1) the fundamental male and female nature of humanity doesn't matter in any way, and 2) the different parties to a marriage are wholly interchangeable. Male and female as the basic foundation of family — as well as society — simply become preferential, like your taste for Rocky Road or Butter Pecan ice cream. Solely a matter of personal taste.

But the way this really deconstructs humanity is that it says that you as a husband or father, or you as a wife or mother, have no real meaning or significance in your fundamental humanity — a humanity which always reveals itself as either male or female. In fact, same-sex parenting says your essence as a man or woman is found only in your reproductive material. What does a lesbian couple ask from a man in order for them to become parents? Only his sperm. In fact, this fact has been clearly admitted by lesbian activists in products they can purchase

for the babies. A T-shirt or infant onesie proudly declares, "My Daddy's Name is Donor." No joke. And two men who want to become parents must go next door and borrow only an egg from the female half of humanity. "Want any help mothering your child?" the woman might ask. "No, we just got everything we need from motherhood thank you!"

'Wholly genderless'

Same-sex "marriage" and parenting reduces male and female/fatherhood and motherhood to microscopic reproductive material.

And because same-sex "marriage" declares humanity wholly genderless, it also redefines the family.

If male and female are merely sentimental ideas with no essential qualities for family, then family and parenting radically change.

An important 1996 essay in the gay magazine *OUT* makes this clear, admitting that legalizing same-sex "marriage" is "a chance to wholly transform the definition of family in American culture. ... Our gay leaders must acknowledge that gay 'marriage' is just as radical and transformative as the religious right says it is." They go on to say that same-sex "marriage" will be "one of the great social experiments in this nation's history." This will ensure that "[r]ather than being transformed by the institution of marriage, gay men — some of whom have raised the concept of the 'open relationship' to an art form — could

simply transform the institution itself, making it more sexually open, even influencing their heterosexual counterparts."

Same-sex "marriage" would redefine parenting, transforming it from a biological into a legal institution. Even today, saying a child has a right to a mother and father has been deemed hate-speech.

But same-sex "marriage" is also threatening religious liberty. Activists have tried to comfort religious folks by saying, "Your pastor will never be forced to perform same-sex weddings" — as if that is as far as religious faith goes. But there is a growing list of real-life ways that citizens' and organizations' rights are being trampled. Here are only a few.

► Catholic Charities had to shut down their large-scale adoption work in Massachusetts and Washington D.C. because they refuse to place children in same-sex homes and because they believe orphaned children should get a mother and father.

► Wedding photographers in New Mexico were charged with violating state anti-discrimination laws because they refused to photograph a lesbian commitment ceremony.

► The Salvation Army in San Francisco lost a \$3.5 million contract providing important social services to the poor because it refused to provide domestic-partner benefits.

► Churches in Canada have been threatened because they refuse to allow same-sex wedding parties to use their social halls.

► A lesbian couple filed a discrimination complaint against a Methodist facility in New Jersey because it denied their request to use the group's boardwalk pavilion for their commitment ceremonies. The couple won.

Chai Feldblum was recently appointed by President Obama as a commissioner of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). When asked what she thought about the intersection of religious freedom and gay rights, she bluntly said, "I'm having a hard time coming up with any case in which religious liberty should win." She stunningly elaborated, "Sexual liberty should win in most cases. There can be a conflict between religious liberty and sexual liberty, but in almost all cases the sexual liberty should win because that's the only way that the dignity of gay people can be affirmed in any realistic manner."

Same-sex "marriage" is not just about one's personal marriage. It is fundamentally about how we define and understand marriage, family and humanity itself. And for the first time in the history of our nation, religious freedom is being asked to move to the back of the bus. And the reason is to make room for sexual and familial experimentation. (BP)

"How will my same-sex 'marriage' harm your marriage?"

U. S. Rep. Barney Frank
Massachusetts

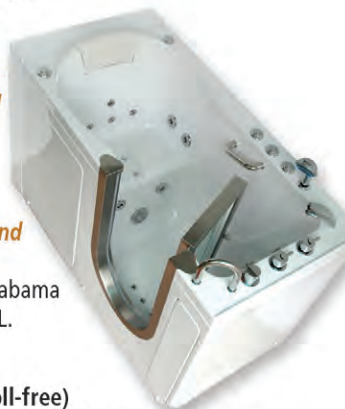
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 15

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

CHRISTIANITY 103: MEET NEEDS Luke 9:10-17, 37-43

Feed the Hungry (9:10-17)

From their first mission the disciples returned with glowing reports. That they "told" Jesus all they did means they "related their stories from beginning to end." Jesus led the Twelve to a deserted place near Bethsaida Julius, a city on the northeast side of the Galilee. The crowds followed. Jesus did not send them away but spent the day preaching the "kingdom of God" and healing the ill.

To submit to the authority of God as revealed in Jesus Christ was to enter the kingdom of God. The Jews looked for the kingdom to come way out at the end of history. Jesus said it had arrived in a real but limited sense when He came. No one has to wait until the end times to get into it. The kingdom of God is available here and now. Of course, Jesus also taught that the kingdom of God is still yet to come in its final and full sense when the King comes back.

When the day drew to a close the Twelve asked Jesus to send the throngs away so they could find hospitality, i.e. places to stay and food to eat, in that isolated place. "You give them something to eat," He told the disciples. This plan did not seem workable. All they had at their disposal was five loaves (each about the size of a silver dollar pancake) and two fish (each about the size of a sardine), just enough lunch for a hungry boy (cf John 6:9). It would take more than that to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children. To go find and buy food for this mob would have been expensive and difficult at this late hour, to say nothing of the logistical problem of getting the supplies back to this out-of-the-way location.

Jesus ordered the disciples to seat the people in groups of 50, then took the little lunch, blessed it and broke it for the throng to eat. The disciples served everyone. All ate till they were full and the Twelve gathered up a dozen baskets of left-over fragments.

That this is the only one of Jesus' miracles all four Gospels record shows its great importance. The miracle functioned on three levels.

First, the feeding demonstrated Jesus' compassion on hungry people and suggested Jesus' ability to supply men's needs and more.

Second, the event hinted that Jesus was the Messiah. On the basis of certain Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Ps. 132:15, 17b), the Jews looked for a messiah like Moses who would feed Israel again in the desert with bread from heaven as in the Exodus. On this day Jesus fed the crowds supernaturally with bread in the desert, as Moses had. In fact, Jesus outdid Moses. No one could keep manna (Ex. 16:19) but the bread Jesus gave could be left over.

Third, the miracle suggested Jesus is God. Every year seed is sown and there is increase. Pagans credited the harvest to Ceres or another Corn-King. Every year fish reproduce by laying and fertilizing eggs. Pagans said Genius and Poseidon multiplied fish through "natural" processes. But one day in one year only the incarnate God sped up the "process of nature" to show it is He who multiplies bread through the annual harvest and multiplies fish through reproduction. He, not the gods of the heathen, is in charge of nature.

Deliver from the Dark Lord (9:37-43)

After the glorious experience on the mount of transfiguration (9:28-36), Jesus and the inner circle — Peter, James and John — descended into the valley where a large crowd met them. One of the men in the crowd begged Jesus to cure his demonized son. The lad cried violently, convulsed and foamed at the mouth. The evil spirit gave him little rest. "Torturing" him may also be translated "bruising or crushing" him, i.e. damaging him by throwing him to the ground. To make the matter more serious, the rest of the Twelve had been unable to cast out this demon. Previously they had great success but that power seems not to have been maintained.

The Lord rebuked and cast out the unclean spirit and returned the boy to his father. All were astonished at the mighty power of God.

Jesus is the Stronger Man with power to bind the Strong Man (Satan) and take back the booty (demonized men and women) the Dark Lord has seized (Matt. 12:29).

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

JESUS LIVES IN BELIEVERS Galatians 2:19b-21; Romans 6:1-7; John 15:1-5

We Are Crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19b-21)

The phrase "I have been crucified with Christ" points to a decisive act of faith when Paul had committed his life and destiny to Christ. Paul's representative "I" is not just an expression of Paul's personal piety but speaks for all Christians. God acted to end the power of sin, the law and death and included all people in this cosmic victory. The death of Christ meant the death of the old world.

Paul identifies with Christ in His death, a fact symbolized in baptism as described in the Romans passage below. Christ died the death that Paul was condemned to die for sin; when he confessed faith in Christ, Paul died with Christ. Paul does not "set aside the grace of God." This is what the Galatian Judaizers were doing by supplementing faith in Christ with observance of the law. But there can be no such thing as grace plus additional requirements. Paul's understanding of grace is problematic for those who want to do something themselves to be assured of God's acceptance.

We Are Raised with Christ (Rom. 6:1-7)

Having elaborated on justification by faith in previous chapters of Romans, Paul now proceeds to defend this doctrine against the charge that it is incompatible with morality. The objector might ask, "If more sin means more grace, why not continue to live in sin?" Paul's reply to this question centers on the fact of the believer's union with Christ. This mystical relationship with the Savior is set forth here for the first time in the epistle. Paul uses the rite of baptism to explain his thought, referring to the mode of baptism that John the Baptist employed with Jesus — immersion.

Paul highlights the three actions of immersion that symbolize the means to the mystical relationship: into the water represents death, under the water represents burial, out of the water represents resurrection. For Paul, bap-

tism is not a mere ritual of initiation but a dynamic signal — an event in which God is active. The Christian is "united with Him" in baptism, "fused together," so the story of Christ becomes the Christian's story.

Paul makes it clear that the believer cannot deliberately live in sin since he or she has a new relationship because of his or her identification with Christ. The believer has died to the old life; the believer has now been raised to celebrate a new life. And, to paraphrase a popular 20th century preacher, the believer does not want to go back into sin any more than Lazarus wanted to go back into the tomb dressed in his grave clothes.

We Are Productive with Christ (John 15:1-5)

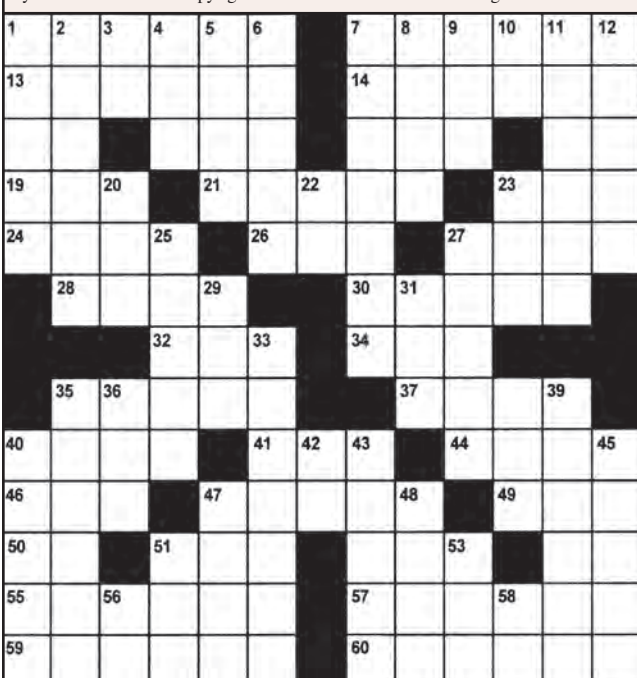
It is not clear from John's account here where Jesus was when He gave this teaching on the vine and the branches. If John 14:31 marks the point of departure from the upper room, it is possible that Jesus and His disciples were passing by a vine which was then used as an illustration.

Like Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12), the metaphor of vine and branches is organic. Membership in the people of God is not names on a list but living branches of a living vine. As Christ is the whole body in Paul's image, so Christ is the whole vine in John's. Jesus is not the stem or trunk to which branches are attached; Jesus is the vine into which people are incorporated. Jesus' invitation to "abide in me" asserts that Christianity is never an individualistic experience. Jesus lets us know that discipleship in Him involves one's essential incorporation into the Christian community. The individual branch has its life-giving connection not only in the personal relationship with God through Christ, but also in relation to all the other branches that comprise the vine with which Christ identifies Himself. To be connected with Christ is to be organically related to His church.

James Barnette is the teaching pastor of Brookwood Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

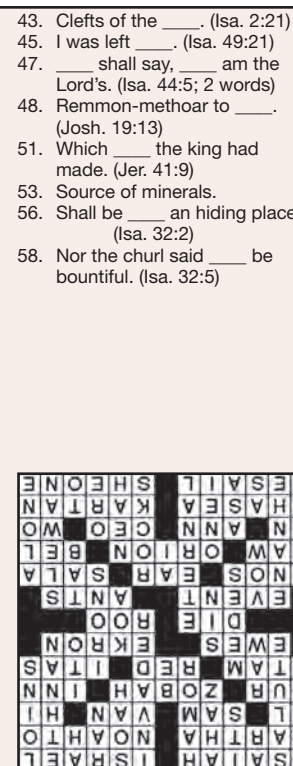


Across

- the son of Amoz. (Isa. 1:1)
- doth now know. (Isa. 1:3)
- Jesus loved _____. (John 11:5)
- Thus did ____; according _____. (Gen. 6:22; 2 words)
- The going up to _____. (2 Kings 9:27)
- Hadarezer king of _____. (1 Chron. 18:3)
- Brought him to an _____. (Luke 10:34)
- Beth-lehem, and _____, and Tekoa. (2 Chron. 11:6)
- Though they be _____ like crimson. (Isa. 1:18)
- _____ is desolate, _____ over-thrown. (Isa. 1:7; 2 words)
- The _____ great with young. (Ps. 78:71)
- _____ shall be rooted up. (Zeph. 2:4)
- Tomorrow we shall _____. (Isa. 22:13)
- Kanga's baby son.
- _____ happeneth to them all. (Eccles. 2:14)
- The _____ are a people not strong. (Prov. 30:25)
- Seth lived after he begat _____. (Gen. 5:7)
- Give ye _____, and hear.

Down

- A graven _____. (Isa. 44:9)
- _____ every saint in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:21)
- _____ of Moab is laid waste. (Isa. 15:1)
- Groweth of _____ own accord. (Lev. 25:5)
- _____ said, I will not ask. (Isa. 7:12)
- _____ the father of Shechem. (Josh. 24:32)
- One who invades.
- _____, _____ would we have it. (Ps. 35:25; 2 words; reverse order)
- And _____ unto him. (Dan. 8:6)
- _____ sinful nation. (Isa. 1:4)
- Zereth, and Jezoar, and _____. (1 Chron. 4:7)
- Loose the _____ of kings. (Isa. 45:1)
- _____ flesh appeareth in him. (Lev. 13:14)
- It shall _____ eaten up. (Isa. 5:5)
- _____ shall come to pass ... _____ ye children. (Isa. 27:12; 2 words)
- Stir up the _____. (Isa. 13:17)
- His skin with barbed _____. (Job 41:7)
- Bare the _____ of many. (Isa. 53:12)
- Pekod, and Shoa, and _____. (Ezek. 23:23)
- An _____ excellency. (Isa. 60:15)
- Five _____ goats ... Ahira the son of _____. (Num. 7:83; 2 words)
- Vow a _____ unto the Lord. (Isa. 19:21)
- He _____ Egyptian. (2 Sam. 23:21; 2 words)
- _____, and Accad. (Gen. 10:10)
- Bethel and _____. (Ezra 2:28)





Christians arrested to discourage church attendance

ISFAHAN, Iran — In a rare crackdown on a concentrated area, Iranian authorities have arrested Christians living in the country's third largest city in what is seen as a tactic to discourage Muslims and converts to Christianity from attending official churches. Since February, officials have arrested about 12 Christian converts in Isfahan, 211 miles south of Tehran.

Authorities have arrested leaders and members of churches meeting in buildings, as well as some from underground churches, according to Mohabat News.

The targeted arrests started Feb. 22 when intelligence officers arrested approximately seven Christians at their homes between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m., Mohabat News reported.

The Christian Iranian news service identified those detained Feb. 22 as Hekmat Salimi, pastor of St. Paul Anglican Church, a convert of 30 years and author of theological books; Giti Hakimpour, a female pastor of St. Luke's Anglican Church; Shahram Ghaedi, an actor; Maryam Del-Aram; Shahnaz Zarifi, a mother of two and Enayat Jafari. Another Christian, house church member Majid Enayat, was arrested the same day at his workplace. Of those arrested, Mohabat News reported that authorities released Hakimpour on Feb. 25. On March 2 authorities arrested another convert in Isfahan, Fariborz Parsi-Nejad.

None of those arrested in Isfahan in February has been officially charged.

Though religious freedom monitors in Iran said it was not clear what triggered authorities to target Christians in Isfahan, one Iranian Christian outside the country said it may be yet another tactic to stop converts from attending Farsi-speaking meetings in official church buildings.

"The government is very sensitive in Isfahan, which is the only city apart from Tehran with official church buildings," the source said on condition of anonymity. "Now the government is focusing on the church buildings to scare the people so they don't go."

4 Muslims and a Baptist questioned, fined

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — In two separate cases in February, in different regions of Uzbekistan, courts have ordered religious literature confiscated from four Muslim women and a Protestant destroyed. All five also were fined — Muslims Nasiba Ashirmatova, Mahsuma Rahimkhujayeva, Iroda Mirzukurkova and Mohinur Kholmatova being fined five times the minimum monthly wage and Odiljon Solijanov, a Baptist, being fined 20 times the minimum monthly wage.

The four Muslim women work together in a kindergarten and would sometimes during lunch breaks discuss religious subjects such as how to pray. This led to National Security Service secret police and ordinary police harassment, culminating in a raid, literature confiscations and a fine.

The police prevented the women from attending the original court hearing. An appeal was rejected and it is likely that all four women will be closely watched by the authorities. Solijanov was asked by the judge in his court hearing, "Is it true you were distributing literature harmful to our state?"

He answered, "The Word of God is not harmful to anyone, and we are called in the gospel to spread the good news."

Azerbaijan church could fall victim to Religion Law

BAKU, Azerbaijan — Azerbaijan's State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations has moved to close down Greater Grace Church in Baku, the capital, for failing to regain the compulsory re-registration. This is thought to be the first attempt to compulsorily close a religious community through the courts since compulsory re-registration was imposed by the harsh 2009 Religion Law.

If successful, the church would lose the legal right to exist. The unregistered exercise of religion or belief is illegal under the Religion Law, against international human rights standards. Church members rejected the suit, insisting that "illegal liquidation" of its legal status — which it has had since 1993 — would violate the "constitutional rights to freedom of religion" of members.

Judge Tahira Asadova will hand down her decision April 12, her assistant told Forum 18.



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College to Sponsor Ministers' Golf Tournament:** Judson College will hold its 50th annual Ministers' Golf Tournament on May 14-15. The tournament will be played at the nearby Marion Military Institute golf course and is open to all ministers serving Alabama Baptist State Convention churches or agencies.

Golfers of all skill levels are invited. Fifty percent of all attendees win tournament prizes.

"We welcome ministers from across the state and look forward to a time of fellowship, good golf and moments to share news about Judson College," President David Potts said.

Registration fee includes meals, lodging, linens, green fees and carts. Registration is available for the first 72 players.

For registration, visit www.judson.edu or call 334-683-5109.

► **Tenants Exhibition Displayed at Judson College:** The exhibition Tenants, the artwork of Chicago-based painter and sculptor Brett Douglas Davis, will be on display in the Marian Acree Tucker Gallery at Judson College through April 15.

Originally from rural northwestern Pennsylvania, Davis studied at the competitive Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Visual Arts. He also studied at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland, and received his bachelor of fine arts in painting from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. In 2008 he was the coordinator of the Distillery Residency, an eight-month studio residency program that builds a bridge between fine arts in the academic realm and the career develop-

ment as an individual artist. Davis' work was featured in the 2009 mid-Atlantic edition of "New American Paintings."

Images of the work may be viewed at www.brettdouglasdavis.com.

For more information, contact Jamie Adams at 334-683-5251.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford University's Healthcare Ethics and Law Institute (HEAL) to Hold Conference:** HEAL will examine "Moral Distress at the Bedside: A Role for Hospital Ethics Committees" during its annual conference April 13. The conference — sponsored by Samford's McWhorter School of Pharmacy — is designed to help Alabama institutional ethics committees at all levels of development and expertise with some of today's most pressing health-care ethics and law issues and problems. It will meet in Brock Forum of Dwight Beeson Hall at Samford from 8:25 a.m. until 3:45 p.m.

For information and registration, contact www.samford.edu/heal or Ilaina Andrews at isandrew@samford.edu or 205-726-2820.

► **Samford University's Cumberland School of Law to Celebrate 50 Years in Birmingham:** Samford University's Cumberland School of Law will celebrate its 50th anniversary in Birmingham with special events April 13-14.

Events begin Friday with classroom demonstrations, trial advocacy exhibitions and a kickoff reception. Saturday's schedule will start with an on-campus alumni breakfast for classes of 1971 and earlier. After lunch a brief history of the school will be given by longtime profes-

sor Howard Walthall, followed by photo sessions in the moot courtroom; tours of the law library, law building and university campus; and visits with Cumberland Dean John Carroll and Samford President Andrew Westmoreland. Reunions are planned for the Cumberland Black Alumni Network and classes ending in "2" and "7." For information and registration, go to <http://www.cumberland.samford.edu/alumni/reunion-weekend-2012> or call 1-800-888-7248.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **UMobile Center for Leadership to Launch Prayer Initiative:** The University of Mobile Center for Leadership launched Pray Gulf Coast, a 50-day prayer initiative for Mobile and Baldwin counties, April 8. The initiative, which will last from Easter to Pentecost, calls for residents of the areas to unite in daily prayer for specific needs in the churches, schools, businesses, families, government and individuals in the community.

Individuals, churches and ministries are invited to get involved in Pray Gulf Coast by signing up for a day to pray via an online calendar at www.twelve23.org, registering for daily emails, requesting a bookmark to guide daily prayers or "liking" the Facebook page www.facebook.com/praygulfc coast.

Joe Savage, director of the Center for Leadership, said, "God is at work in Mobile and Baldwin counties. It's time we take full responsibility for the condition of our community by first calling out to God on its behalf."

For more information, call 251-442-2555 or email awright@umobile.edu.

Human Relations Conference 'a must,' says state missionary

With spring comes a multitude of conference and workshop opportunities, but the upcoming Human Relations Conference is one Ronald Davis claims is a must.

The conference — with the theme Alabama Baptists: Celebrating Race Relations Past, Present and Future — is set for noon to noon April 27-28 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

"While the ministry of reconciliation was not easy in the past nor is it now, Alabama Baptists have been a pacesetter in race relations," said Davis, state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Alabama Baptists have remained faithful to their call in giving, missions and the ministry of

reconciliation in spite of challenges.

"But the ministry of reconciliation must continue to be a priority for [all] leaders and laity," he said. "Reconciliation is vital to any strategy of church planting or ministry. ... Every leader must maintain this priority above status, respect of person or livelihood. Whether it is an African-American or an Anglo pastor, all have a responsibility to prioritize reconciliation. We must never yield to the temptation of valuing the position, culture, tradition or denomination over preaching the truth and challenging others toward racial reconciliation."

For more information or to make reservations, contact Shocco at 1-800-280-1105. (SBOM)

Ala. pastor speaks out in TV ad

A Baptist pastor is featured in a new television commercial opposing Alabama's immigration law unveiled by a group of Alabama clergy April 3.

Steve Jones, pastor of Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, is one of about two dozen faith leaders from across the state in the group opposing Alabama's HB 56, widely regarded the nation's strictest law against undocumented immigrants.

The ad spot is sponsored by Faith Leaders for a Welcoming Alabama. (ABP)

Creative outreach

Declining century-old church rejuvenates existence, fills need

After two years of wandering during construction, a Washington, D.C.-area Baptist congregation returned March 4 to the site where it was organized more than a century ago. But now it is in a new facility designed both for outreach to a busy urban community and to reinvigorate a congregation formerly in decline.

Rising above the original First Baptist Church, Clarendon, building in Arlington, Va., is a 10-story structure topped by condominiums, most of them designated as affordable housing.

"We've been homeless for two years and now we once again have a stable place of ministry," said David Perdue, interim senior pastor of the renamed Church at Clarendon.

The church is in the first two stories of the complex, which retains the original building's steeple and pillared façade. The eight floors above it contain 116 upscale apartment units, about 60 percent of which meet Arlington County's affordable housing designation for low and moderate income households.

Behind the tower, the church's original education building — not torn down but extensively remodeled — houses offices and classrooms of the John Leland Center for Theological Studies.

Housing is a critical issue in Arlington, especially in its increasingly expensive Clarendon neighborhood, a popular mix of trendy shops, bars and restaurants about five miles from the White House. The church sits on a triangular piece of land in the heart of the community, a block from the Clarendon station of Washington's Metro rapid transit system.

It's a far cry from the small Virginia community in which the church began in 1909. Clarendon was only nine years old when the town's First Baptist Church was organized, but it was well on its way to becoming Arlington County's "downtown." By the end of World War II, suburban growth made it popular with Washington's commuters and by the 1980s, when Metro's Orange Line opened, Clarendon was a densely packed, highly urbanized maze of apartments, condominiums and office blocks.

First, Clarendon, struggled with that transition, Perdue said.

By 2000, the church "was in deep decline and was struggling with a vision," he said. The building needed a major renovation, a cost the church couldn't afford. About that



Photo courtesy of Religious Herald

CHURCH 'COMPLEX' — The Church at Clarendon in Arlington, Va., has eight floors of affordable housing apartments above its sanctuary.

time the church called Alan Stanford as interim pastor and a path forward for the congregation emerged.

"As we talked about how we could get people excited and do something meaningful for the community, the idea of affordable housing kept coming up," said Perdue, who was hired as a staff minister during Stanford's tenure. "Housing was seen as a way to minister to the community at large and as a way to reinvigorate our congregation."

It also represented a significant commitment to the Clarendon neighborhood, Perdue said. "The church had other options. At one point the property was valued at \$13 million. We could have moved to the suburbs. But we wanted to do something for the community."

With limited resources, the church found a creative way to finance the project. It leased its air rights for 99 years to the Bozzuto Group, a development and real estate services firm, allowing them

to build the eight-floor vPoint boutique apartments. In compensation, the Bozzuto Group constructed the first two floors for the church's sanctuary and office and classroom space. Two levels of parking below the church are reserved for apartment residents.

Ground was broken in the fall of 2009. During the project's more than two years' duration Clarendon worshipped at First Baptist Church, Ballston, another Arlington community. The Leland Center — which began meeting at Clarendon in 2003 — moved to space offered at no cost by Columbia Baptist Church in nearby Falls Church, Va., where Leland first held classes. The seminary also rented space across the street.

Leland returned to the Clarendon location last September.

More than 300 people worshipped in Clarendon's two Sunday services March 4 — the first in the new building.

To involve the community in its celebration, the church sponsored a float in Clarendon's annual Mardi Gras parade Feb. 22 and distributed hot cider outside the Clarendon Metro station in the days prior to the opening. (ABP)

World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to retire

LONDON — Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said March 16 he will step down at the end of 2012, setting the stage for the unique process of government officials appointing the new leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Williams' surprise announcement stunned the religious world, even as the short list of prospective successors swiftly began to circulate. Williams, 61, has led the Church of England and the world's 77 million Anglicans since 2002.

While Queen Elizabeth II is the supreme governor of the Church of England and formally appoints the archbishop of Canterbury, the decision is based on the final determination of the prime minister. That process could be dogged by controversy. In the recent past, some Church of England reformists have cast doubt on whether a political figure should be involved in picking a spiritual leader for 77 million Anglicans around the world. The odds-on favorite, according to numerous observers, is Uganda-born John Sentamu, the current archbishop of York and the No. 2 official in the Church of England. Sentamu, the sixth of 13 children, fled his homeland and its dictator, Idi Amin, in 1974.

Sentamu has gained a reputation in some circles as a "cleric of the people" for his actions, including cutting up his clerical collar on live television in 2007 to protest the rule of Zimbabwe strongman Robert Mugabe.

Religion of 'nonbelief' growing in England

LONDON — Christianity is waning in England and could be outnumbered by nonbelievers within 20 years, according to a new study. The study conducted by the British Parliament showed there were 41 million Christians in Britain, down nearly 8 percent since 2004. Meanwhile, the number of nonbelievers stood at 13.4 million, up 49 percent over the same period. Researchers at the House of Commons Library concluded that Christianity had declined to 69 percent of the population while those with no religion increased to 22 percent. "If these populations continue to shrink and grow by the same number of people each year," the study said, "the number of people with no religion will overtake the number of Christians in Great Britain in 20 years."

The research was based on the government Office for National Statistics' annual labor force survey, considered authoritative because it examines a sample size of 50,000 people.


The "Religion in Great Britain" survey also found that from 2004–2010, the number of Muslims in Britain grew by 37 percent, to 2.6 million. England's Hindu population rose by 43 percent, to 790,000, and Buddhists by 74 percent, to 340,000. The numbers of Jews and Sikhs were reported down slightly, at 270,000 and 340,000, respectively.

Religion growing in China despite opposition

BEIJING — Violations of freedom of religion or belief in China have continued, yet religious communities of all kinds have been growing rapidly. The Chinese Communist Party's attitude toward religion has reflected the views of Chinese political elites from the 19th century onward that religion is "superstition" and a barrier to modernization. This allows the state to retain the will and power to control religious communities. The managerial approach in today's China is more practical and flexible than the ideologically oriented approach of the Cultural Revolution. It leaves room for religious believers and communities to maneuver and even grow. The long-term impact this may have on freedom of religion or belief and related human rights remains to be seen. But the future of religious freedom in China is not necessarily bleak.

Pope denounces shift toward gay 'marriage' in US

VATICAN CITY — On March 9 Pope Benedict XVI denounced the "powerful political and cultural currents" that are working to "alter the legal definition of marriage" in the United States.

The pope's condemnation of same-sex "marriage" came in an address to a delegation of bishops from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, headed by Archbishop John Nienstedt of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Maryland legalized gay "marriage" March 1 and Minnesota will be one of five states to vote on the issue in the coming months. Minnesota's bishops are campaigning for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex "marriage." Benedict stressed that "sexual difference cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of marriage," and called on the church to continue its "reasoned defense of marriage." 

"Housing was seen as a way to minister to the community at large and as a way to reinvigorate our congregation."

David Perdue
Church at Clarendon