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BP photo

Young Tunisians walk along Avenue Bourguiba in the heart of downtown Tunis, Tunisia, where demonstrations brought down the old regime. It remains the site of ongoing protests as secularists, Islamists and others debate the new constitution and the nation's future.

Political revolutions result in disappointment for some, opportunities for Christians

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

The sight inspired the world: Millions of Egyptians standing proudly in line at countless polling stations, determined to vote for their new president.

The two-day vote in May — to be followed by a runoff between the top contenders in late June — was the first time in their very long history that Egyptians have had the opportunity to choose a leader in free elections. The

word “historic” has been devalued by overuse, but this event was historic. And it brought back, for a moment, the sense of hope and euphoria people felt in Egypt and beyond as the “Arab Spring” protest movement swept across the region in 2011.

In the Arab world, however, there's the seen and the unseen — the roiling surface and what flows beneath.

Since early 2011, protests and full-scale revolts have brought down governments in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and shaken others in Yemen, Bahrain and beyond. Syria slides toward all-out civil war. But has real freedom arrived anywhere — even in the Arab societies that have experienced relatively peaceful transitions toward some form of democracy?

The two candidates who made it to the Egyptian election runoff were Mohammed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, and Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister to serve under former President Hosni Mubarak, the person-

ification of oppressive control whom the “Arab Spring” protesters risked so much to overthrow. Mubarak was sentenced to life in prison June 2 for his role in approving violent measures to stop the demonstrations. More than 800 protesters died during the street battles in Cairo and other cities.

Different expectations

What happened to change and freedom? One candidate represents hard-line Islamists, who were dominating Egypt's parliament before a court ordered to dissolve the parliament June 14 due to election irregularities. The other candidate comes from the old order detested by so many Egyptians. Both promise to advance the aims of the revolution and respect the rights of religious minorities — particularly the nation's original Christians, the Orthodox Copts, who comprise at least 10 percent of Egypt's population. Whoever wins, however, the young idealists who sparked Egypt's revolution would seem to be the losers.

“We expected something to be different,” said a 23-year-old Christian who participated in the demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square last year that helped topple Mubarak, Egypt's ruler for three decades. “But the army is still in control. It's not fair. I love the revolution and I believe in the revolution, but the people who should protect it stole it.”

He sees three groups — the Muslim Brotherhood, the even more extreme Salafist Muslims and the holdovers from the old Mubarak regime — negotiating control, while the zealous but disorganized young revolutionaries look on from the sidelines.

A Muslim taxi driver who misses the fares he used to get from foreign tourists wishes Mubarak were still in charge. “There's a lot of fear” about what the Islamists will do next, he said, as he steered through Cairo's chaotic traffic. “If I don't want to pray [in the mosque], will they make me pray?”

(See ‘Freedom,’ page 4)

COMMENT

All the Sheep or Some of the Sheep?

If practice indicates what one believes then most Baptist churches have a roaring debate going on over what Jesus meant when He told Peter, "Take care of my sheep" (John 21:16). Did Jesus mean "take care of all of my sheep" or did He mean "take care of some of my sheep?"

Most Baptists would probably say Jesus meant for Peter and those who came after him to care for all the sheep. But according to the way most Baptists do church, it seems Jesus meant take care of some of my sheep.

An observation made about a hundred years ago continues to hold true today. Generally speaking, 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. Study the giving records of a church and that pattern will likely hold true. Study the leadership of a church and one is likely to see 20 percent of the people providing 80 percent of the congregation's direction. Normally it is the same 20 percent who provide the financial support.

What church leader has not heard the proverb that if you want something done, give the task to a busy person? And we do. In most churches those who make up the 20 percent who provide leadership carry more than one responsibility.

Acting like businesses

In that way, churches frequently act like businesses. In the business world about 20 percent of one's clients typically provide about 80 percent of one's sales. That is why businesses concentrate on their best customers or their wealthiest clients. That way they can get maximum returns for a minimum of cost or effort.

But is the goal of the church the goal of a business? Is the church concerned about all the sheep or just some of them? Is the goal of the church to create a community of active disciples of Jesus Christ or a list of people who treat church mem-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

bership as if they have purchased some kind of eternal fire insurance?

The answer to that question is important. Hebrews 13:17 reminds us that pastors and other church leaders "must give an account" to God for the way they care for God's sheep. The apostle Paul, writing to the elders of the church at Ephesus, wrote, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer" (Acts 20:28).

Paul's words seem to warn against a church concentrating on where it can get the "most bang for its buck." Instead the church is challenged to be concerned about the guy who joined the church but has not participated in any way for more than a year. How can the church care for such a sheep and others like him?

Caring for spectators

How can the church care for those who attend about once a month but act like spectators rather than members? Spectators observe what goes on around them but seldom react or participate. They are content, and perhaps even prefer, to let others do the work of the church. Active discipleship is an alien concept to spectators. Their

names are on the church roll and that is enough.

What plans does the church have to move the minimally active or underinvolved members into the category of active disciples?

Churches may respond by continuing to do the things they have always done and pray for the day the Holy Spirit will convict the inactive or spectators or minimally involved members to change their ways. Certainly no one should underestimate the power of prayer and the role of God's Spirit in changing lives. After all, it is not gimmicks or manipulation that change people's lives; it is the power of God.

But that is no excuse to do nothing. Just as churches plan for certain outcomes in a Bible study program, youth program, evangelism program, etc., churches can plan ways to move people from sitting to serving.

Reaching everyone

To do so means a church must decide to care for all the sheep and not just some of the sheep. Practically speaking, it means the church must plan to impact the lives of the marginal members and not just the lives of the involved 20 percent.

What specific actions to take to make that goal a reality will vary from congregation to congregation, but a recent study by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird in conjunction with Leadership Network offers a foundational principle. The study found that "if you pay attention to the less involved people (in your church), they will become more involved."

Added to that was the discovery that the church must have a process that guides people from less involvement to more involvement. Churches must help motivate people to involvement and churches must show people how to become involved.

For the 20 percent who are active disciples, becoming involved may seem simple. But after a series of in-depth interviews in more than a dozen churches, Thumma and Bird reported, "What the staff told us was nothing like the actual process people experienced in getting involved at their churches."

Getting people involved in the church is important. It is a step toward developing that community of active disciples of Jesus Christ for which churches strive. Also, the greater the percentage of engaged members, the more likely the church is to be vital, thriving and spiritually healthy, the report said.

Like the Good Shepherd in Jesus' story recorded in Luke 15, the church must value all the sheep, even the wandering prodigals. That value is expressed in a plan to reach out to the 80 percent not currently active disciples and a clearly communicated process that can lead them to the safety of the fold.

Letters to the Editor

INVOLVING ALL AGES

Thank you for your stewardship of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper. Every Baptist church should buy copies for each family. There is no other venue that adequately or properly communicates biblical truths and facts about our great denomination. We will do God's will collectively as we follow the Baptist Faith and Message; or we will all fall separately, going in whatever direction is the flavor of the month.

As to churches needing to have more ministries to the elderly: first, let me qualify myself. I am 73 years old, married for 51 years June 10, have raised three grown sons and have 12 grandchildren, have been an active Baptist deacon and Sunday School teacher since 1967, am a former Scoutmaster, and on and on.

A wonderful ride and still holding on, although it gets harder and harder to get back on the horse.

The older folks do not need a ministry for them; they are an integral part of the church and should be included in all decisions and ministries and missions to others. Of course the mentally, emotionally and physically impaired should be accommodated and given the highest priority. But guess what: I know as many emotionally and mentally impaired people under 50 years old as over 50.

Now for the solution to the problem. We have too many individuals, groups or other factions ruling each church because of the way deacon and committee members are selected today. The old way that was used by most Baptist churches for 100 years is the only way to be sure the entire church's

age groups, cliques or other distinctive groups are proportionally represented on the deacon board and committees.

1. Place all active members of the church over 20 years old on a nomination sheet.

2. Let the church vote for the rotating vacancies each year.

3. The top vote-getters become the new members (subject only to a biblical-qualification review by the outgoing deacons).

This is a simple solution to a complex problem, but it works and ensures that the board and committees represent all areas and age groups in the church. Then the church can make decisions to minister to its members, but more importantly, to people outside the church.

Ron Travis Sr.
Birmingham, Ala.





**"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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Strategic advantage

Ethnic Christians have easier access to own people groups

Churches composed primarily of first-generation immigrants to the United States often face obstacles — linguistic, financial and cultural — in terms of fitting into an Anglo-dominated society. But they may possess a strategic advantage in fulfilling Christ's Great Commission.

"God has put people next door to us who can reach back home with the gospel in ways we cannot," said Tom Billings, executive director of Union Baptist Association, serving the Houston, Texas, area.

"There is no one who can reach them like their own people," said Buddy Brents, a North American Mission Board church planter in Mobile working through Mobile Baptist Association.

Expatriates have connections to their homelands and share a common culture, language and background that give them a head start in building relationships and sharing the gospel, some pastors of non-Anglo congregations agreed.

Phi Vo, pastor and founder of New Life Vietnamese Baptist Church, Mobile, said, "It's just something about hearing and speaking the mother tongue of a person. They feel like it is my people reaching out to me. It's special. I'm not saying if you are not Vietnamese don't reach out to the Vietnamese, but it sure makes a difference."

Twice a year, Vo travels to Cambodia and Vietnam to help train pastors and leaders to share the gospel.

Sanjay Purushotham, pastor of Asian Indian Baptist Fellowship, Carrollton, Texas, noted, "We don't have the same barriers to cross. It's easier to reach out to people."

The Carrollton church supports three missionary pastors serving distinct ethnic groups in different parts of India. Each pastor served three to five years at Asian Indian Baptist Fellowship while studying at Dallas Baptist University.

Asian Indian Baptist Fellowship also supports the Kapaar Kachoung Orphanage and educational ministry in Manipur, India. Six staff members at the orphanage care for 40 children who lost their parents due to tribal, ethnic and religious conflicts or to diseases such as AIDS. Strong ties to a homeland and a sense of stewardship motivate some first-

generation American Christians to share the gospel with people in their country of origin.

"I am a beneficiary of the American missionary movement," said Ernest Howard Dagohoy, pastor of First Philippine Baptist Church, Houston.

His parents were converted to Christianity through the efforts of American Baptist missionaries, and he was named in their honor, he said.

Dagohoy noted many of his church members share his desire to "give back" by ministering in the country where they were born and where many still have family.

"We have a sense we have not just been sent here (to the United States) to seek greener pastures, but we have been sent here to be missionaries. It's payback time for us," he said.

John Nguyen agreed. Nguyen, pastor of Vietnamese Baptist Church, Garland, Texas, became a Christian in South Vietnam thanks to the witness of missionaries there.

He later reconnected with some of the same missionaries who disciplined him in Vietnam during the two months he spent at a Fort Chaffee, Ark., refugee camp after he fled his homeland, and they helped him resettle in the United States.

'Win ... so they can win'

"One thing I always tell people is that you don't have to go on an airplane to reach the world," Brents said. "The Lord is sending the world to us. ... The goal is to win someone so they can win their own people. The international community is already climbing mountains. They have so many barriers to overcome such as learning how to live, shopping, working an ATM machine, calling 911 (and) going to the hospital. ... The person that is going to help them the most is a servant of the Lord who knows their language and their culture."

One Mobile area church, Hope of the

Nations, is reaching the 66 people groups in the area that are too small in number to start stand-alone congregations, according to Brents.

"Three Sundays out of the month they meet in cell churches, and one Sunday out of the month they meet together for a celebration service," he said.

Nguyen, president of the National Vietnamese Baptist Fellowship and the Vietnamese Baptist Fellowship of Texas, has led his congregation to become involved in missions not only locally and in Vietnam, but also in other cultures.

The church supports missions work in Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Taiwan, and every two years church members participate in a missions trip. Last year, some church members served in Europe. "We care about Vietnam because it is where we came

from. But our concern for people outside the United States is not just limited to Vietnam. It's all over the world," Nguyen said.

Dagohoy voiced a similar sentiment. His congregation has sent small groups to Honduras and Brazil as part of a missions project spearheaded by a Christian radio station in Houston.

Every two years the church sponsors a major missions trip to the Philippines. Last summer about 40 members of First Philippine Baptist — one-third of the congregation — spent a week building houses in Manila and participating in a pastors' conference, treating 200 patients at a free medical clinic and feeding more than 100 impoverished children in Biga, Cavite province.

Hope of the Nations is also sending its members on missions trips to their own countries and around the world, according to Brents. "One couple from the Vietnamese church was appointed international missionaries to Cambodia, which is in the same region as Vietnam."

(ABP, Sondra Washington contributed)

**"The goal is to
win someone so
they can win their
own people."**

**Buddy Brents
North American Mission
Board church planter**

Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary – 2011

Item/Statistic	2011	2010	2011-2010 Numeric Change	2011-2010 Percent Change
State Conventions	42	42	0	0.00%
Associations	1,174	1,175	-1	-0.09%
Churches	45,764	45,727	37	0.08%
Total Membership	15,978,112	16,136,044	-157,932	-0.98%
Baptisms	333,341	331,008	2,333	0.70%
Ratio of Baptisms: Total Membership	1:48	1:49	—	—
Primary Worship Attendance	6,155,116	6,195,449	-40,333	-0.65%
Church-type Missions Operating ⁽¹⁾	4,952	5,011	-59	-1.18%

⁽¹⁾Some state conventions no longer use the designation of church-type mission to categorize congregations which are not self-determining, self-sustaining and self-propagating. This practice has impacted the number of churches and church-type missions.



BP photo

Social media played a key role in spreading the ideas that sparked the 'Arab Spring' revolutions. Young Arabs like these Jordanians are increasingly connected, and their awareness of the wider world sparks their exponentially higher expectations. Whether governments change or not, information has been shared and democratized.

Freedom allows Christians, Muslim seekers to connect

(continued from page 1)

A young Coptic Christian who practices law in Cairo takes a more analytical view: "I'm angry, but not because the revolution failed. What makes me unhappy is that people put too many dreams on this revolution." Unrealistic dreams. Dreams that cannot be fulfilled without plenty of patience and struggle in an overwhelmingly poor nation where the first order of business is survival.

A similar sense of disillusionment can be found in much smaller Tunisia, which sits on the Mediterranean coast on the other side of Egypt's western neighbor, Libya. This land of 11 million people birthed the first "Arab Spring" movement after a fruit seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in December 2010 to protest official corruption.

The resulting demonstrations brought down the long dictatorship of Tunisian President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali and spread quickly to other Arab lands. But moderate Islamist parties won subsequent elections in Tunisia and now contend with secularists and Muslim hardliners over the shape of the new constitution.

And the new economic opportunities Tunisians expected "didn't happen," said one observer. The Islamists "have the perfect image of how things should be, but when it comes to the day-to-day work of handling taxes and fixing roads, they couldn't care less."

Prices have gone up and job opportunities have gone down. Thousands of Tunisians have left the country looking for work. Disgruntled demonstrators talk about the need for a "second revolution."

"I have a master's degree in engineering, and I'm pumping gas," one despairing service station attendant told a foreigner recently. "I want out. Can you help me?"

Yet these, too, are passing waves on the surface of the vast Arab ocean. Deeper, stronger currents of change are flowing. "The amazing thing was to see Tunisians lose their fear," said a Christian leader in Tunis, the capital city, where much of the 2011 "Jasmine Revolution" unfolded.

'I'm so proud of Tunisians'

"The groups marched past the end of our church on their way to demonstrate. There were lawyers, there were women, there were children. There were 100,000 on the Avenue Bourguiba, and whether they were shot at or tear-gassed, they came. Suddenly, overnight, you lost that fear and were able to say anything. I'm so proud of Tunisians. They did this without violence, without bombs."

The new freedom to speak also applies to followers of Christ.

"Before, you were very careful what you said and to whom," the leader said. "If you made a joke and the wrong person heard it, you could be in trouble. Nearly all of the Tunisian believers who are part of this fellowship had run-ins of some sort with the state apparatus. Now, believers are not being harassed by the state. This is unbelievable. It's totally new that they're not watching over their shoulder because the secret police are on to them or calling them in or beating them or whatever."

Something else is new: People walk into this Christian

leader's church courtyard off the street and say things like, "Excuse me, I'm a Muslim. I really want to know what the Christian faith is about. I've never been in a church before. Can I look at your church?" Some of them have had dreams about Jesus, perhaps many years before. Many are young.

"They're looking for spiritual reality," he said.

Another Christian worker in Tunisia sees the new fearlessness among both seekers and believers. He senses an undercurrent among Muslims looking for God. He witnesses scenes he never imagined would happen in Tunisia: Believers openly reading their Bibles in public, talking about Jesus and passing around evangelistic DVDs.

"When Christ does a work in them, they literally don't care" about the potential consequences of their boldness, he

"When Christ does a work in them, they literally don't care" about the potential consequences of their boldness. "They just go out and talk about Jesus to whoever they want."

— Christian worker in Tunisia



BP photo

Miriam, a Christian student in Cairo, is not afraid as she looks ahead. In fact, she's optimistic. 'It's all in God's hand, no matter what president takes the rule,' she says.

marvels. “They just go out and talk about Jesus to whoever they want. ... They’re almost like, ‘Bring it on, we’re ready for it, because we know what we’ve found is the truth and [Tunisians] need the truth.’”

Did the revolution make all this possible?

“I don’t know how you could see it any other way,” the worker said. “God is in control of all of this. I’m not saying it’s all roses, but this is the climate we are in. A lot of the believers are beginning to realize now is the time. I had a believer tell me we have about a two-year window, and we’ve got to get as much done as we possibly can. He thinks [persecution] is going to come back and probably be worse than it was. That’s one guy’s opinion, but his idea is: Let’s take however much time God gives us, get out there and get it done. I think it is something that God is orchestrating for His own glory.”

The way to make the time count, he stresses, is to encourage believers, train them, give them the simple, reproducible tools they need — and get out of the way. That’s understandably hard for churches in the Arab world, which have long struggled with persecution and fear. Their coping mechanisms often include careful self-regulation of ministry activities.

What’s needed now, the worker said, is “more of a wildfire versus a controlled burn. I’m looking for no one to control this except the Spirit of God, because that’s the only hope we have. If you do a controlled burn, then the government also can control. The religious folks can come in and control. Where it’s out of control and God’s in control, nobody can stop that. ... We’ve got to let it go. We’ve got to let God do what He’s going to do.”

Higher stakes

Back in Egypt, by far the largest and most pivotal nation in the region, the stakes are even higher.

Christians, particularly Copts, have long suffered attacks by militant Islamists. In the chaotic and crime-ridden months after Mubarak fell in February 2011, fear pervaded churches. Some closed their doors for a time in the face of threats. People feared to go into the streets or to their jobs, much less attend worship. Many Christians, opting not to wait for what might happen if Islamists consolidate government control, left Egypt altogether.

“The sad thing is that those who can leave Egypt are those who have qualifications, those who have money, those who can get visas,” said an Egyptian Baptist leader. “This is a kind of evacuation from the church of the leadership positions.”

It is sad, he added, because the believers left behind need encouragement to face the days ahead. It is also sad because of the new opportunities that have arisen to stand for the gospel in Egypt.

“Life has been uncertain,” said the leader, who admits he was caught off guard by Mubarak’s downfall. “They say when nothing is certain everything is possible. That summarizes our feeling throughout the whole year, because we didn’t know what was going on. [But] as a church, we think this is the golden time for us. In this status of uncertainty, people lose faith in everything. That’s our time to present them real love and acceptance and tell them that the Bible teaches about a way to be certain about the future. That’s something we can do.”

It is something evangelical churches are doing, such as a small Baptist congregation wedged into a poor, conservative Muslim district of Cairo packed with 1.5 million people. After weathering the storm of the first difficult months after the revolution, church members have begun to reach out to spiritual seekers and to serve their neighbors in practical ways, such as free medical clinics. They are making new friends in the community.

“The members here spent 12 years afraid that anyone would know this is a church,” the pastor said. “Today, the Muslims are the ones who are happy that there is a church here. That is a transformation we didn’t expect. ... Something really big is happening.”

A pastor in a different part of Cairo is leading similar ministries to aid needy people in his church’s community — and getting similarly positive responses.

“If the church closes, which is a possibility, we will meet in homes,” he vowed. “A lot of Muslims are coming to Christ right now, so all the churches will have to decide [what to do if] that time comes. I’m not leaving, and I’m not afraid.”

That is the kind of commitment needed for the days ahead in the greater Arab world, where conditions for believers might get more difficult before they get better. The “evacuation” of traditional Arab Christian communities targeted by militant Islam is an ongoing reality, and continues a trend un-

“If expectations continue not to be met, we’ll see another (political) earthquake. But this is a really good time for anybody who wants to discuss ideas. ... For the gospel, we need to be in the conversation.”

— Christian missions leader

der way for many years. Islamic Sharia law might be imposed in more places. But does that mean Christianity itself will disappear from the region? No.

“What is emerging is something quite different,” observed a Christian missions leader in the region. “It is not cultural Christianity. Those who emerge as followers of Christ in this part of the world [will be] a vibrant group of people the Spirit is drawing to Himself. It’s His mission. He’s still directing it.”

The primary object of His mission: millions of young Arabs searching for something more. Freedom, yes. Prosperity and decent jobs, yes. And something else they cannot quite define — but which they are determined to find. Many of them now feel free at last to seek and ask questions, and they will no longer accept being intimidated into silence.

The population of the Middle East has doubled in the last generation. In Egypt alone, a million more people are born every nine months, according to one estimate. Sixty percent of all Egyptians are under age 25. The total population of the Middle East and North Africa combined surpassed 430 million in 2007; it is expected to top 700 million by 2050. One in every three people in the region is between the ages of 10 and 24.

And young Arabs are connected. They have smartphones and iPads. They use social media. They absorb ideas from all directions. Whether governments fundamentally change or not, information has been democratized.

“We’re sitting on a tectonic plate that is shifting,” the missions leader said.

“If expectations continue not to be met, we’ll see another (political) earthquake. But this is a really good time for anybody who wants to discuss ideas. The marketplace of ideas has changed radically.

“For the gospel, we need to be in the conversation.” (CDN contributed)



BP photo

Shamal has a personal goal he believes is God-given: to disciple 100 leaders who will in turn train others to make disciples. ‘That’s my main vision,’ he states. ‘And I’m not going to give up on it.’



BP photo

After decades of fear and silence, freedom permeates the air in Tunisia as believers can be seen openly reading their Bibles in public or, as pictured here, young men enjoy speaking their minds at a sidewalk coffeeshop in a Tunisian city.

Across Alabama's Associations

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **Patsburg Church, Luverne**, will celebrate homecoming June 24, 10:30 a.m. Lunch will follow. Revival services will be June 25–27, 7 p.m. Burney Enzor will speak. Wayne Webber is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Westmont Church, Minor**, will hold Freedom Fest July 1, 11 a.m. The choir will present the patriotic musical “Stars and Stripes Forever.” A barbecue and covered-dish lunch will follow. C.B. Scott is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Scottie Tarvin** is the new pastor of **Carlisle Church, Boaz**.

He previously served as pastor of New Hope Church, Glencoe. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in Christian ministry from Leavell College in New Orleans. Tarvin and



TARVIN

his wife, Andrea, have two children.

EAST LIBERTY

► **Happy Valley Church, Lanett**, will hold a hamburger and hot dog sale June 24 and a yard sale June 30. The events will help raise funds for a parsonage. For information call 334-576-8600. John Samanie Jr. is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Alberta Church, Tuscaloosa**, will host a Here's Hope Celebration at Jaycee Park in Alberta City June 24–27, 7 p.m. Jeff Crook, pastor of Blackshear Place Church, Flowery Branch, Ga., will speak. Daniel Crews will be the guest singer. The 120-voice choir of First Church, Atlanta, will sing each evening and conduct outdoor Bible clubs Monday through Wednesday. Larry Corder

is pastor. ► **Unity Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold revival June 24, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m., and June 25–27, 6:30 p.m. Larry Draper will speak. Gene Dockery Sr. is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Pepperell Church, Opelika**, will hold an Independence Day celebration picnic at Lazenby Farms July 1, 5–7 p.m., with Christian humorist/musician Brother Billy Bob Bohannon. Roy Aldridge is pastor. ► **Society Hill Church, Opelika**, will hold revival July 8–11. Services will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and nightly at 7. Bill King, director of missions for Tuskegee Lee Association, will speak. Pam Kenney, music director for Farmville Church, Auburn, will lead music. Mark Carlock is pastor.

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue July 5. Submit your church announcements for the July 12 issue by July 2. Email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 1-800-803-5201, Ext. 112.

Welcome Hill Baptist stirs hearts of children

An ordinary Wednesday night at Welcome Hill Baptist Church, Fort Payne, became extraordinary when five children prayed to receive Christ

following the evening service. Ranging from age 8 to age 11, the children were stirred after youth pastor Jerome Manley led a devotional about the Second

Coming of Christ. Manley said the devotion that “got them to thinking” came from Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Siblings J.J., Shana and Shalaine Ayres accepted the Lord in the church directly after hearing the devotion, while brother-sister pair T.J. and Elizabeth Mullins came to Christ on the church bus on their way home from the service, said James Maples, pastor of the Lookout Mountain Baptist Association church.

Manley said he was “very excited” and surprised when not one, but five young people accepted Christ on May 9. This night was especially encouraging for the youth pastor of 23 years because he “hadn’t gotten to pray with anyone [to receive Christ] in a long time.”

The church is working toward buying each of the children their own Bible so that each child can flourish in their newfound faith.

“We want to keep them coming to church, encourage them to come on Sundays and get into the Bible,” Manley said. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Westmont Baptist Church

WESTMONT ORGANIST RETIRES AFTER 40 YEARS

Cathy Holcomb Key (left), organist for Westmont Baptist Church, Minor, retires after 40 years of service. Key presented a piano concert and was honored with a certificate of appreciation and a new keyboard May 20. Pictured with her is Minister of Music Tim Shivers. C.B. Scott is pastor.

— Correction —

In the “Alabama Acts 1:8 Connections offers full-circle partnership” article in the June 14 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, Frank Gingrich was incorrectly noted as pastor of Faith Baptist Church, Vinemont. He is a member of the church, but Jeff Steele is the pastor.

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Culbreth named Alabama's 2012 Teacher of the Year

Suzanne Culbreth, a geometry teacher at Spain Park High School in Hoover, was named Alabama's 2012 Teacher of the Year during the 2012 Alabama Stars in Education Awards ceremony in Montgomery on May 9.

According to the Alabama Department of Education, Culbreth assumes the role of official spokesperson for Alabama teachers for the next year.

Culbreth, who earned her undergraduate degree from Auburn University and her master's degree from The University of Montevallo, is a national board certified teacher. She has taught a total of 29 years and is currently in her fourth year at Spain Park High School.

She said her overall goal as a teacher is to instruct students on how to think and how to learn. “I think part of it is working hard to improve every single day and trying to meet the needs of my students where they are ... not being complacent.”

Culbreth is married to James, minister of education at Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham. “The support of my family and my church family has been very important,” she noted, adding she believes her teaching success can be attributed to having that support and encouragement. (Julie Payne)



CULBRETH

Huffman adult pastor marks 25 years of ministry

Larry Smith, adult pastor of Huffman Baptist Church, Birmingham, was honored May 20 during a reception celebrating his 25 years of ministry at the church.

Smith earned a degree in religion and church recreation from Samford University in Birmingham while serving as youth minister at Adamsville Baptist Church. He later completed his master's degree in religious education from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's extension center in Birmingham.

He served Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, as minister of recreation and senior adults before arriving at Huffman Baptist in the same role. He later assumed the role of adult pastor at the church and has served in that capacity for about 10 years.

Though his positions have somewhat changed throughout his ministry service, one constant has remained — his ministry to senior adults. “I just love that ministry with them,” he shared.

Smith said one of the greatest blessings is when one has the opportunity to grow with people and build relationships like he has been able to do at Huffman Baptist. “It's been a blessing to serve all those years,” he noted. “The 25 years at Huffman have been especially good.”

Smith and his wife, Linda, have three sons. (Julie Payne)

Semmes' Cornerstone pastor receives Shofar Award

University of Mobile President Mark Foley presented this year's Shofar Award to David L. Hudson, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, Semmes. The award goes to an Alabama Baptist State Convention minister who might not be recognized elsewhere.

Hudson said the “surprise phone call” from Foley was one of the many blessings he has received in his 48 years as a full-time pastor.

A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., Hudson attended Tennessee Temple College (now Tennessee Temple University) in Chattanooga and served as a youth pastor for Clifton Hills Baptist Church, Chattanooga. He then served churches in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Hudson suffered a stroke in June 2003 and had to retire from active ministry. After two years of recuperation he became a missions volunteer with the North American Mission Board and served as evangelism coordinator for Mobile Baptist Association.

In the last five years Hudson has served five churches in the Mobile area as a volunteer pastor and is currently pastoring his sixth. His aim is to restart churches that are dying and lead them back to fruitful ministry. He and his wife, Delphia, have two daughters. (Maggie Walsh, TAB intern)



HUDSON



'Cupbearers' for the King

By Sammie Jo Barstow
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Tuscaloosa's Forest Lake Baptist opens coffeehouse to reach college students

In the spring of 2011, Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, was in a time of decision-making, but little did they realize what challenging decisions they would face after the April 27 storms caused \$2 million in damage to the church structures.

Three years earlier, Pastor Donald Payne told the congregation that he felt God leading the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church to boldly reach out to the numerous college students in the neighborhoods surrounding the church. He envisioned a coffeehouse where students and others in the community could socialize, study and enjoy a cup of gourmet coffee in a relaxed, friendly setting.

"The church embraced the vision, but we sat on it for more than a year in disobedience. We hadn't followed through with that step of faith," Payne said. They also faced staff changes and financial challenges, so the plan seemed stalled.

In March 2011, the church purchased an adjoining piece of property with a small, older house. The congregation discussed remodeling the existing structure into a coffeehouse. One month after the closing date, it was destroyed in the April tornado.

"We were told that if we didn't rebuild on the property we would lose a significant amount of the insurance money," Payne said. "Our folks rose to the occasion and made sacrificial commitments. Those commitments, coupled with the insurance proceeds, helped us construct Nehemiah's Coffeehouse."

Jim Swedenburg, director of the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, assisted the church in developing a fundraising campaign.

Though the final result looked nothing like the original plan, the vision for the coffeehouse became a reality. The modern 3,200-square-foot brick structure includes the coffeehouse area on the first floor and a three-bedroom apartment for the college minister, Aaron Barnes, and his wife, Leesa, on the second floor.

Shortly before the church was damaged, the congregation had interviewed Barnes for the position of minister to college students. When plans to build the coffeehouse were initiated, they moved quickly to call the young couple to fill that position.

Even the choice of the name for the new ministry fit perfectly with the circumstances. Before the storm, Payne had been preaching a sermon series on Nehemiah. The following Sunday, as they met in temporary facilities, he felt led to continue that study about the Old Testament prophet God called to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.

Payne laughingly credits Barnes with observing that Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days, but it took 52 weeks to build the coffeehouse and repair the damage to their church.

A dedication service was held April 29, 2012, followed by a "soft" opening to provide time for training the 40 volunteers who work the coffeehouse. Volunteers are called "cupbearers" because Nehemiah was a cupbearer for the king.

A grand opening celebration was held June 2. It included a ribbon cutting and special drawings for a Nook reader and gift cards for Nehemiah's. At the celebration, Payne quoted Nehemiah: "the God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build" (Neh. 2:20).

Longtime church member and Nehemiah's volunteer Linda Wright is excited about the impact the coffeehouse will have.

"I think it is going to be such a wonderful outreach to the community, especially the students," Wright said. "I also see it bringing the church family together more as people come here and get to know each other better."

'I wanted to be part of that'

Priscilla Martin joined the church the Sunday after the grand opening. She said the coffeehouse demonstrated to her that "these people had a vision and they were doing something about it. I wanted to be part of that."

But the main goal for Nehemiah's Coffeehouse is not to sell coffee or even to provide a comfortable atmosphere for visitors. Payne and Barnes call the coffeehouse a "low-pressure zone," meaning the emphasis will be on building relationships with the ultimate intention of telling visitors about Jesus.

"Our church mission statement is 'To Love God and Love People to Jesus,' and that's what we intend to do at Nehemiah's Coffeehouse," Barnes said.

Barnes is looking forward to the students' return to campus in August.

"We'll definitely be open on game days so people can gather here and watch the game, and we'll plan some tailgating parties for the front lawn, too," he said.

"We have a community that was devastated a year ago, and we lost some of our cohesiveness," Payne said. "We need a chance just to come together and build relationships, and that's what Nehemiah's Coffeehouse will provide."

Payne said the congregation has learned some valuable lessons through this difficult time.

"If we'll be faithful, God will do what He promised to do, and His way is far better than anything we do," he said. "A lot of times, we know that mentally and perhaps even emotionally, but it's different to know it practically in how you live day to day. That's what we learned — day-to-day dependence on God."

The church welcomes visitors passing through Tuscaloosa to visit Nehemiah's on the corner of 18th Street and 1st Avenue in the Forest Lake neighborhood. ☛



Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, holds a grand opening for Nehemiah's Coffeehouse on June 2. The ministry's main focus is to reach out to the numerous college students in the neighborhoods surrounding the church. It offers a place to socialize, study and enjoy a cup of gourmet coffee in a relaxed, friendly setting.

Photos courtesy of Forest Lake Baptist Church

Statement on Calvinism by longtime SBC leaders draws debate

A group of current and former Southern Baptist leaders has signed a statement affirming what they call the “traditional Southern Baptist” understanding of the doctrine of salvation, with the goal of drawing a distinction with the beliefs of “New Calvinism.”

The statement (see story, this page) was posted May 31 at SBCToday.com and includes a preamble and 10 articles, along with signatures from two entity presidents (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Paige Patterson and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s Chuck Kelley), five state executive directors (Georgia’s Bob White, Florida’s John Sullivan, Mississippi’s Jim Futral, Louisiana’s David Hankins and Alaska’s Mike Procter) and in addition to Patterson, five other former Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) presidents (Bailey Smith, Jimmy Draper, Jerry Vines, Morris Chapman and Bobby Welch).

The document was titled, “A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation.”

‘A radical alteration’

“For the most part, Southern Baptists have been glad to relegate disagreements over Calvinism to secondary status along with other important but ‘nonessential’ theological matters,” the document reads in the preamble. “The Southern Baptist majority has fellowshiped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself. And, to their credit, most Southern Baptist Calvinists have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard. We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this long-standing arrangement.”

The document further asserts that the “vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life.”

“We believe it is time to move beyond Calvinism as a reference point for Baptist soteriology,” the statement reads. Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation.

Each of the 10 articles includes a statement of what the signers affirm and what they deny. For instance, on the article about the grace of God, the document says “we affirm that grace is God’s generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.”

The statement then adds “we deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation.”

Eric Hankins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford, Miss., wrote an introduction to the statement at SBCToday.com. He is a signer of the statement.

“The concern of the developers of this statement was that the viewpoint of this majority was not well represented by the

term ‘non-Calvinist’ and that an instrument was needed by which that majority might articulate positively what they believe vis-à-vis Calvinism,” Hankins wrote. “Its purpose is to engender a much needed convention-wide discussion about the place of Calvinism in Southern Baptist life.”

Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee, said he chose not to sign the statement.

“Southern Baptists have always found a way to work together, within the framework of historical Christian faith and Baptist doctrine, to support and promote our cooperative enterprises of global missions, theological education and benevolent ministries,” Page said. “While I fully affirm any group of Southern Baptists to express their deeply held convictions about doctrinal matters, especially a matter as important as the doctrine of salvation, I would prefer that any collective document to which I affix my signature be a consensus statement, developed jointly with those of various soteriological persuasions, that expresses our core commitments to those matters we hold in common. The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) is such a document.”

At the same time, Page also said he believes the convention needs a “consensus accord,” and said he will announce at the SBC annual meeting in June plans for putting one together.

“Given the depth of the fracture lines around the issue of soteriology across the convention,” Page said, “I sense a need to assemble a representative group of Southern Baptists who can hammer out such a consensus ‘accord’ that will enable the majority of Southern Baptists to work together for the Kingdom purposes which initially bound us together, an initiative I plan to announce at this year’s annual meeting.”

The “Traditional Southern Baptist” document was widely discussed on Baptist-centric blogs in the hours and days after it was released. A post at SBCVoices.com quickly collected more than 200 comments. The comments section at SBCToday.com surged past 500.

Brent Hobbs, pastor of Severn Baptist Church, Severn, N.C., wrote at SBCVoices.com, “As a Calvinist, I barely recognize the theology they claim is Calvinism.”

‘Agree to disagree’

David Rogers, son of the late Adrian Rogers and senior editor at the Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute, wrote at SBCVoices.com that he does not know which group he’d fit in and that Southern Baptists are “likely never going to come to full agreement” on these issues.

“For the good of the work, the glory of the Lord, and the edification of the body of Christ, though, I believe we need to agree to disagree over some issues, while constantly affirming that our agreement on the essentials trumps whatever disagreement we may have on more

secondary (or tertiary) issues,” Rogers wrote.

Others, though, applauded the statement. “Eric, thank you for your leadership, thoughtfulness and wisdom,” Brad Whitt, co-pastor of Abilene Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga., wrote at SBCToday.com. Whitt signed it. “This statement clearly expresses what I, and many other Southern Baptists, believe about the doctrine of salvation.”

David Worley, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Greenfield, Tenn., also signed the statement.

“I love my Calvinists, Reformed Brothers and Sisters in Christ,” he wrote at SBC-

Today.com. “I can work alongside of them and worship with them in the SBC. I do not want them to be kicked out or left out of SBC life. But I do agree with this document, and I think it’s a step in the right direction for SBC life.”

Jon Akin, pastor of Fairview Church, Lebanon, Tenn., wrote at BaptistTwentyOne.com that he does not consider himself part of the “New Calvinism” and that he agrees with much in the statement. But Akin said the document is fighting “straw men,” such as implying that “‘New Calvinists’ believe that a person can be saved apart from personal repentance and faith.” He did not sign it.

“I don’t know a single Calvinist in the SBC alive who would argue that a person can be saved apart from repentance and faith,” wrote Akin, who added he believes the statement is divisive.

Theology of ‘New Calvinists’

The statement, he wrote, “inaccurately and unfairly describes the theology of the ‘New Calvinists.’” It implies that double predestination is the standard Calvinist position when it is “in reality” a minority position, Akin wrote.

“The SBC is big enough to include Calvinists and non-Calvinists,” Akin wrote. “We agree on far more than we disagree on, so let’s unite and fight a common other.”

Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board (IMB), and Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), released a joint statement about the document. It read: “As the heads of the two SBC mission boards (IMB and NAMB), we and all our personnel have already affirmed the BF&M 2000 as prerequisites for employment. We do understand the sentiment behind the proposed statement, but we believe the BF&M 2000 effectively conveys the doctrinal positions traditionally held by Southern Baptists. While alternate doctrinal statements may occasionally arise, it is both our role and our intention to consistently lead in a manner that reflects those doctrines approved by the convention we serve.” (BP)

A Statement of

Preamble

Every generation of Southern Baptists has the duty to articulate the truths of its faith with particular attention to the issues that are impacting contemporary mission and ministry. The precipitating issue for this statement is the rise of a movement called “New Calvinism” among Southern Baptists. This movement is committed to advancing in the churches an exclusively Calvinistic understanding of salvation, characterized by an aggressive insistence on the “Doctrines of Grace” (“TULIP”), and to the goal of making Calvinism the central Southern Baptist position on God’s plan of salvation.

While Calvinists have been present in Southern Baptist life from its earliest days and have made very important contributions to our history and theology, the majority of Southern Baptists do not embrace Calvinism. Even the minority of Southern Baptists who have identified themselves as Calvinists generally modify its teachings in order to mitigate certain unacceptable conclusions (e.g., anti-missionism, hyper-Calvinism, double predestination, limited atonement, etc.). The very fact that there is a plurality of views on Calvinism designed to deal with these weaknesses (variously described as “3-point,” “4-point,” “moderate,” etc.) would seem to call for circumspection and humility with respect to the system and to those who disagree with it. For the most part, Southern Baptists have been glad to relegate disagreements over Calvinism to secondary status along with other important but “nonessential” theological matters. The Southern Baptist majority has fellowshiped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself. And, to their credit, most Southern Baptist Calvinists have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard. We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this long-standing arrangement.

We propose that what most Southern Baptists believe about salvation can rightly be called “Traditional” Southern Baptist soteriology, which should be understood in distinction to “Calvinist” soteriology. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is articulated in a general way in the Baptist Faith and Message, “Article IV.” While some earlier Baptist confessions were shaped by Calvinism, the clear trajectory of the BF&M since 1925 is away from Calvinism. For almost a century, Southern Baptists have found that a sound, biblical soteriology can be taught, maintained, and defended without subscribing to Calvinism. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is grounded in the conviction that every person can and must be saved by a personal and free decision to respond to the gospel by trusting in Christ Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. Without ascribing to Calvinism, Southern Baptists have reached around the world with the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Baptists have been well-served by a straightforward soteriology rooted in the fact that Christ is willing and able to save any and every sinner.

New Calvinism presents us with a duty and an opportunity to more carefully express what is generally believed by Southern Bap-

Traditional Southern Baptist

Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation

tists about salvation. It is no longer helpful to identify ourselves by how many points of convergence we have with Calvinism. While we are not insisting that every Southern Baptist affirm the soteriological statement below in order to have a place in the Southern Baptist family, we are asserting that the vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life. We believe it is time to move beyond Calvinism as a reference point for Baptist soteriology.

Below is what we believe to be the essence of a "Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation." We believe that most Southern Baptists, regardless of how they have described their personal understanding of the doctrine of salvation, will find the following statement consistent with what the Bible teaches and what Southern Baptists have generally believed about the nature of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Articles of Affirmation and Denial

Article One: The Gospel

We affirm that the gospel is the good news that God has made a way of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for any person. This is in keeping with God's desire for every person to be saved.

We deny that only a select few are capable of responding to the gospel while the rest are predestined to an eternity in hell.

Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2:1-12; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; Luke 19:10; Luke 24:45-49; John 1:1-18, 3:16; Romans 1:1-6, 5:8, 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 4:4-7; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Hebrews 1:1-3, 4:14-16; 2 Peter 3:9

Article Two: The Sinfulness of Man

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will or rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned. While no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, we deny that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the gospel.

Genesis 3:15-24, 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5, 7:15-16, 53:6; Jeremiah 17:5, 9, 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Romans 1:18-32, 3:9-18, 5:12, 6:23, 7:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, 6:9-10, 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-15

Article Three: The Atonement of Christ

We affirm that the penal substitution of Christ is the only available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

We deny that this atonement results in salvation without a person's free response of repentance and faith. We deny that God imposes or withholds this atonement without respect to an act of the person's free will. We deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved.

Psalms 22:1-31; Isaiah 53:1-12; John 12:32, 14:6; Acts 10:39-43, 16:30-32; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10-14; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-20; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:12-15, 24-28, 10:1-18; 1 John 1:7, 2:2

Article Four: The Grace of God

We affirm that grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.

We deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation

Ezra 9:8; Proverbs 3:34; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 19:16-30, 23:37; Luke 10:1-12; Acts 15:11, 20:24; Romans 3:24, 27-28, 5:6, 8, 15-21; Galatians 1:6, 2:21, 5; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 3:2-9; Colossians 2:13-

17; Hebrews 4:16, 9:28; 1 John 4:19

Article Five: The Regeneration of the Sinner

We affirm that any person who responds to the gospel with repentance and faith is born again through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a new creation in Christ and enters, at the moment he believes, into eternal life.

We deny that any person is regenerated prior to or apart from hearing and responding to the gospel.

Luke 15:24; John 3:3, 7:37-39, 10:10, 16:7-14; Acts 2:37-39; Romans 6:4-11, 10:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20, 6:15; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 3:18

Article Six: The Election to Salvation

We affirm that, in reference to salvation, election speaks of God's eternal, gracious, and certain plan in Christ to have a people who are His by repentance and faith.

We deny that election means that, from eternity, God predestined certain people for salvation and others for condemnation.

Genesis 1:26-28, 12:1-3; Exodus 19:6; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Matthew 24:31, 25:34; John 6:70, 15:16; Romans 8:29-30, 33, 9:6-8, 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Ephesians 1:4-6, 2:11-22, 3:1-11, 4:4-13; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9-10

Article Seven: The Sovereignty of God

We affirm God's eternal knowledge of and sovereignty over every person's salvation or condemnation.

We deny that God's sovereignty and knowledge require Him to cause a person's acceptance or rejection of faith in Christ.

Genesis 1:1, 6:5-8, 18:16-33, 22; 2 Samuel 24:13-14; 1 Chronicles 29:10-20; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Joel 2:32; Psalm 23, 51:4, 139:1-6; Proverbs 15:3; John 6:44; Romans 11:3; Titus 3:3-7; James 1:13-15; Hebrews 11:6, 12:28; 1 Peter 1:17

Article Eight: The Free Will of Man

We affirm that God, as an expression of His sovereignty, endows each person with actual free will (the ability to choose between two options), which must be exercised in accepting or rejecting God's gracious call to salvation by

the Holy Spirit through the gospel.

We deny that the decision of faith is an act of God rather than a response of the person. We deny that there is an "effectual call" for certain people that is different from a "general call" to any person who hears and understands the gospel.

Genesis 1:26-28; Numbers 21:8-9; Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 2 Samuel 24:13-14; Esther 3:12-14; Matthew 7:13-14, 11:20-24; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 9:23-24, 13:34, 15:17-20; Romans 10:9-10; Titus 2:12; Revelation 22:17

Article Nine: The Security of the Believer

We affirm that when a person responds in faith to the gospel, God promises to complete the process of salvation in the believer into eternity. This process begins with justification, whereby the sinner is immediately acquitted of all sin and granted peace with God; continues in sanctification, whereby the saved are progressively conformed to the image of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit; and concludes in glorification, whereby the saint enjoys life with Christ in heaven forever.

We deny that this Holy Spirit-sealed relationship can ever be broken. We deny even the possibility of apostasy.

John 10:28-29, 14:1-4, 16:12-14; Romans 3:21-26, 8:29, 30, 35-39, 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 1:6, 3:12; Colossians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:19, 3:2, 5:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 13:5; James 1:12; Jude 24-25

Article Ten: The Great Commission

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news of salvation to all people to the ends of the earth. We affirm that the proclamation of the gospel is God's means of bringing any person to salvation.

We deny that salvation is possible outside of a faith response to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 51:13; Proverbs 11:30; Isaiah 52:7; Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:6; Acts 1:8, 4:12, 10:42-43; Romans 1:16, 10:13-15; 1 Corinthians 1:17-21; Ephesians 3:7-9, 6:19-20; Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Time to talk about 'the elephant in the room,' says former SBC president Vines

A former president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) called the rising influence of Calvinism "the elephant in the room" that must be addressed in order to preserve unity in the nation's second-largest religious body.

Jerry Vines, the retired longtime pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., and SBC president in 1989-1990, wrote in a blog June 6 that he has long enjoyed fellowship with Calvinists including Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler, regarded as a leader in the rising theological movement described with terms like "New Calvinism" and "Young, Restless and Reformed."

But Vines said he is now concerned about "a new kind of Calvinism among us."

"[T]here are some, not all, new Calvinists who are hostile, militant and aggressive," Vines said. "This kind of Calvinism is troubling our churches, hindering evangelism and missions and disrupting the fellowship of our convention. I would hope that men of goodwill, whether Calvinist or not Calvinist, would repudiate that kind of Calvinism."

Vines is one of six former SBC presidents who signed a statement posted May 31 on the SBC Today group blog affirming a "traditional Southern Baptist understanding of God's plan of salvation."

Signed by prominent leaders, including two seminary presidents and executive directors of six Baptist state conventions, the document upholds tenets of Calvinism including the penal-substitutionary view of atonement and "once-saved-always-saved," but denies aspects like God's predestining certain people for salvation and others for condemnation and Jesus' dying only for the elect.

Its publication set off a wave of blogs and counter-blogs about the subject. Mohler weighed in June 6, saying he agreed with much of the document but that it appeared "to affirm semi-Pelagian understandings of sin, human nature and the human will."

Pelagianism is the name given to a fifth-century heresy that denied original sin and taught that humans possess the free will to obey God without divine aid.

Vines said he does not desire for any Calvinist to feel unwelcome in the SBC, but that Southern Baptists should be able to affirm their theological positions without trying to force them on others who hold different views "within the framework" of the Baptist Faith and Message.

"It is now clear that this is not an issue that is going to go away," Vines said. "I have no stomach for a battle. I have been in enough battles for two lifetimes. I have no desire for a battle with friends I love. But, the time has come to admit we have a problem, seek God-honoring solutions and move forward to do our part as Southern Baptists to fulfill the Great Commission."

"It is no longer possible to deny the elephant is in the room. Let's talk about it."

Frank Page, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, said he believes Southern Baptists need "a consensus accord" about the doctrine of salvation and that he intends to announce plans for putting one together at the upcoming SBC annual meeting in New Orleans. (ABP)

Community transformation

Southern Baptists reach people of New Orleans through compassion ministries

Sue Yocum thought the man was crazy. He had approached her in Washington Square Park during one of her daily strolls with her daughter, Lena, who was only seven months old.

"Your baby is very pretty," the man had said. The proud mother thanked him, but his next comment took her by surprise.

"Can I buy her?" he asked. "Can I buy your baby?"

Yocum recalls, "It didn't click. I asked, 'Excuse me?'"

The stranger repeated his question.

Assuming him to be insane, Yocum quickly returned to Baptist Friendship House across the street, a Southern Baptist mission and her home since a boyfriend deserted her after their child was born. There, staff members explained to Yocum what had really happened. The man had asked to buy her baby as his property.

Unable to support herself and her baby, Yocum's circumstances placed her in two groups the Friendship House works diligently to help: the homeless and those vulnerable to human trafficking.

"To know that underaged girls are bought, obtained, prepared, packaged and distributed like products into strip clubs, online pornography and prostitution breaks my heart," said Kay Bennett, Baptist Friendship House executive director. "God has given me a passion to reach out and help women, one at a time."

Yocum temporarily found work in Birmingham for six months, but returned to New Orleans in March to reunite with Baptist Friendship House, the only family she knows. The mission allowed her to clear her head, encounter God and learn anew how to pray. The home, she said, is providing for all her needs.

"One of the biggest things that Baptist Friendship House did was give me the ability to pray and be a stronger person," Yocum said. "This is my extended family."

About 10 miles away at Celebration Church, Metairie, a New Orleans suburb, 34-year-old Andrea Robertson considered hers a lose-lose situation. Facing her husband's infidelity and alcoholism, she was ready to end their marriage. "There was no doubt I was done. I was at the end of my rope," Robertson said. "If I leave him, I lose, and if I stay, I lose."

She and her husband, Eddy, enrolled in counseling at Hope Center, a ministry of Healing Hearts for Community Development (HHCD), a nonprofit arm of Celebration Church. Hope Center helped Andrea Robertson deal with the "paralyzing pain" of betrayal. Eddy enrolled in Celebrate Recovery, a

sister ministry at Celebration Church incorporating 12 Christ-centered steps and eight biblical recovery principles. Eddy Robertson has been sober and faithful for the past six years.

Today, Andrea and Eddy Robertson are still married and providing a loving home for their four children, ages 7 to 18.

Southern Baptist churches and ministries are fighting numerous social ills in a city known for good times and easy living.

"Most of our current church attendees are people who have been won to faith in Christ through our compassion ministry efforts following Katrina," said Dennis Watson, pastor of Celebration Church. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina permanently displaced 60 percent of Celebration's congregation, plunging weekly attendance from 2,500 to 800, the pastor said. He now counts weekly attendance at 4,000, higher than pre-Katrina numbers.

Compassion essential, not optional

"We have rebuilt our congregation through compassion ministry," Watson said.

David Crosby, pastor of First Baptist Church, New Orleans, calls it the "care effect," pointing to a three-pronged benefit of compassion ministry blessing the giver, the recipient and the community.

"Jesus said it's more blessed to give than receive," Crosby said. "We believe that compassion is essential, not optional. When the church fails to be a people of compassion and caring, we actually cut the legs out from under the gospel."

"We authenticate the good news of the gospel by loving those in trouble."

Baptist Friendship House, Celebration Church, First Baptist and Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, among many others, are modeling the love of Christ in ministries improving the lives of people who are homeless, hungry, poor, elderly, sick, fatherless and vulnerable. Each ministry uses available resources to reach various populations in need. Ministries range from the sophisticated to the seemingly

simple; some utilize hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding while others are done for the cost of a prayer.

At the outset of his pastorate at Franklin Avenue Baptist, Fred Luter began reaching the community by hosting gatherings at his home for up to 25 men to watch pay-per-view boxing matches.

"That was one of the hooks we used to get guys to the church," Luter said. "The guys love sporting events."

In those early days more than 20 years ago, Luter would not hand out tracts or hold Bible study during the gatherings, but the sporting events drew the men to Sunday services, much to the delight of their wives.

"I just feel that if you save the man, the man will save his family," Luter said.

More recently, since the construction of the church's Family Life Center, sporting events include prayer. Basketball games break every 20 minutes for 10 to 15 minutes of prayer and a Bible devotion.

"It's amazing how that never was a problem for the men," Luter said. "They wanted to play basketball. It's a good way of reaching them."

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Kay Bennett (left), Baptist Friendship House executive director, enjoys swinging with Lena and her mother, Sue Yocum, in Washington Square Park.



Napolean Williams leads a devotional for men participating in Franklin Avenue Baptist Church's basketball ministry in New Orleans on April 9.

s, evangelism, church planting

Franklin Avenue has a variety of missions initiatives, including ministries to the elderly, the sick and the shut-in and worship services in nursing homes.

"We take the service to them," church member Brenda Bowman said. "We're just there to remind them we're serving the same God, even though they're not at home."

'We can go with a prayer and a word'

It's a ministry that doesn't require a large budget, Bowman said.

"We may not be able to go out with money, but we can go with a prayer and a word," she added.

At Celebration Church, HHCD practices compassion through mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment. It was through HHCD's Hope Center that Andrea and Eddy Robertson were able to save their marriage.

"We're very grateful for the Hope Center and especially (for) Michele," Andrea Robertson said, referring to Michele Louviere, Hope Center's clinical director and a former North American Mission Board missionary.

"We sit in really dark [psychological] places with people,"

Louviere said. "They naturally want hope. I personally have had clients who were not saved, but in the course of counseling accepted Christ."

Hope Center provided 12,000 hours of direct services last year, impacting clients from 10 parishes (counties). The center uses 40 counselors, including 25 master's-level students from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The parent organization, HHCD, has an \$800,000 operating budget this year, drawing from grants, a sliding fee scale and fundraisers, said Freddie Landry, HHCD executive director. The organization's Christian foundation draws many to its programs, he said.

"Most of our clients do come to us looking for the faith-based counseling, but we don't require that," Landry said. "We are always encouraging our clients to go to church, either at our church or another church. Our goal is to bring hope and healing to the hurting people in our community."

Deploying 100 volunteers weekly in a wide spectrum of ministries, First, New Orleans, brings hope and healing through its Care Effect initiative.

Through its Baptist Crossroads project in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, First, New Orleans, has built 71 homes

in New Orleans, utilizing volunteer labor. Baptist Crossroads was created before Hurricane Katrina with the hope of providing 40 homes to low-income working families. Crosby's vision expanded after the storm, which destroyed 90,000 housing units in the metro area.

Another Care Effect ministry is Fuel the Future, in which First, New Orleans, gives backpacks of groceries to 200 low-income students at four area schools on weekends and during holiday breaks, supplementing the free lunches students receive during the week. "We have significant childhood hunger in Louisiana and particularly here in New Orleans," Crosby said. "We try to feed them over the weekend when they don't have breakfast and lunch provided at school."

These New Orleans churches have watched as their city has struggled to come back after the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. They have been there walking alongside residents before and after the storm. New Orleans Baptists want to see their city flourish. But most of all they want to see their city know Christ and make Him known. Demonstrating God's love by meeting significant human need while sharing Christ is key to this kind of community transformation. (BP)

Starting a new church is a great challenge and a great blessing. It is often the most difficult, yet rewarding experience that a Christian leader will ever face. Some leaders will refuse the challenge and the blessing as well, believing that they are not equipped to plant a new church.

BASIC TRAINING JOURNEY FOR CHURCH PLANTERS

Your State Board of Missions believes that God doesn't just call the equipped, but that He equips the called. That's why we are inviting church planters and their mentors to the Basic Training Journey for Church Planters workshop, **August 23-25**, at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center.

During this workshop, church planting teams will explore the spiritual foundations for church planting, learn to cast a vision for the congregational identity of the new church, and discover how to actually launch and grow a new church plant.

This workshop is a chance to learn about the nuts and bolts of planting a new church. Even more, it is a time for church planters and their mentors to pray and think about the details of how

this new congregation will reach new people for Christ's kingdom. It is also an opportunity to network with other church planting teams and discover how they have overcome similar challenges in their settings.

This year, it is even more exciting because it will be held as a part of this summer's Missions University. The Missions University is an effort to bring together missional workers from all over Alabama to a synergistic training event. It will be a wonderful time of equipping and networking!

Because this event is supported by gifts of Alabama Baptist churches to missions through the Cooperative

Program, the cost for this challenging training event is only \$25 per person!

To register, go online to www.alsbom.org/missionsuniversity or contact Ministry Assistant Brenda Niblett at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 244, or (334) 613-2244, bniblett@alsbom.org.



By Otis Corbitt
State Missionary

For more information about training for church planters, contact State Missionary Otis Corbitt in the Office of Associational Missions & Church Planting: 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332, or (334) 613-2332, ocorbitt@alsbom.org.



Alabama Baptist Convention
State Board of Missions

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering shy of goal but ahead of previous year

Extremely grateful." That's what International Mission Board (IMB) President Tom Elliff is saying about Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions, which reached \$146.8 million last year — the fourth-highest total in the offering's 123-year history.

Though short of the \$175 million goal, the 2011 offering is a \$1.2 million increase over the \$145.6 million Southern Baptists gave in 2010.

The largest Lottie Moon offering in history was given in 2007, totaling \$150.4 million, shortly before the 2008 global economic recession.

"These are the greatest days of opportunity ever faced by the Christian church in its 2,000-year history," Elliff said.

"That opportunity comes because hearts across the world are plowed up by need — physical need, emotional need, social need. God is at work stirring hearts; He is changing lives. It would be a tragedy if we did not effectively take the seed of the gospel and sow that seed into the furrows of troubled hearts all over the world — hearts that would eagerly embrace the gospel if they could only hear it."

Faithful giving

"That's why I'm extremely grateful for Southern Baptists' faithful giving and praying to undergird the thousands of missionaries they've sent from their churches, through IMB, to the farthest corners of the earth. And all for a single, eternal purpose — making disciples in the name of Jesus," Elliff said.

When the first Lottie Moon offering was collected in 1888 (though it was not yet known by that name), the \$3,315 raised by Southern Baptist churches was

HIS HEART HIS HANDS HIS VOICE



2011 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®

National Goal: \$175 million
Total Gifts: \$146.8 million



enough to send three more single female missionaries to help Moon in China.

The 2011 Lottie Moon offering totaled \$146,828,116.05. Today, in conjunction with the Cooperative Program, it helps support a network of nearly 5,000 Southern Baptist missionaries serving around the globe, providing salaries, housing, medical care and children's education. The cost averages about \$49,800 per year for each missionary.

"Missions offerings represent one of the unique aspects in Southern Baptist life," said Wanda Lee, executive director of national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU).

"As a former missionary, it was a great comfort to my husband and me knowing we could truly focus on the ministry God had called us to without concern about financially supporting our family. As Southern Baptists, it is our collective responsibility and privilege to remember those who have committed their lives to following the Great Commission so that the gospel may be proclaimed among all people."

"The faithfulness of Southern

Baptists to give more to support international missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering as compared to last year is to be commended. WMU is grateful for churches that continue to keep missions education and involvement at the forefront and for members who understand we have been called to sacrificially give of our resources so that all may know the true source of hope and peace."

2.2 million people

According to the IMB's most recent statistical report, that support enabled missionaries and their national partners to present the gospel to more than 2.2 million people, baptize 333,823 new believers and start 28,873 new churches.

"I think that when people look at these statistics, Southern Baptists have every reason to rejoice," Elliff said.

"And it ought to be a sign that we could certainly accomplish much, much more if more was given. We could send out more missionaries, we could partner with more nationals — there definitely would be a direct impact in terms of evangelism and church planting." (BP)



Should bankruptcy be an option for Alabama's local governments?

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Maybe a better question is, "Why should the finances of a city or county ever get so bad that it can't pay its bills and has to seek protection from its creditors?"

Alabama is one of only 12 states that allows local governments to file for bankruptcy without any kind of approval beforehand. Fourteen states allow filing but have restrictions that may include preventive steps and even outside supervision. Bankruptcy is not possible in 23 states that have no law on the subject, and Georgia actually prohibits local governments from filing for bankruptcy.

There have been 10 local-government bankruptcies in Alabama since 1990. The most significant is Jefferson County's 2011 filing, which has been called the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history and is affecting the credit of other governments in the state.

The interesting thing is that only a block from the Jefferson County Courthouse stands the headquarters of the Birmingham Public Schools, which currently is subject to state financial oversight. That oversight, designed to prevent any of Alabama's 132 local school systems from becoming financially unstable, enforces state rules that require such things as balanced budgets and adequate fund balances. In extreme cases the state assumes control of the school system until it returns to financial health.

Although Alabama law since 1939 has allowed the state to investigate county finances, nothing has ever been done to create oversight that would keep counties from veering off track financially.

Which method better promotes sound local governance — the oversight that the state gives to local school systems or its lack of involvement in county finances?

'Home rule'

Some would argue that the state violates the "home rule" principle if it interferes in any way with county affairs, but the privilege of making decisions at home should be enjoyed only by local governments that act responsibly. Others rightfully are subject to corrective supervision.

The old saying "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is sound advice for maintaining good local government in our state.

In Jefferson County's case, the state legislature has been faulted for repealing a tax and denying revenue to the county. However, Jefferson County still has revenues that are comparable to other large Alabama counties. Too little attention has been paid to how it uses the money it has.

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

Bullock-Centennial Association holds its 1st Ascension celebration

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As Baptists, following the liturgical calendar is not always at the top of the list. So when Bullock-Centennial Baptist Association Director of Missions Gene Bridgman heard that an association member was interested in celebrating Christ's ascension following Easter, Bridgman thought it was a wonderful idea.

The only problem was no one in the association seemed to know what an Ascension celebration was supposed to look like.

Importance of the Ascension

"Keith (Pugh, a 40-plus year member of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Union Springs) called me one day and said, 'We celebrate Easter, but no one ever thinks about how important it was that Jesus as-

cended,'" Bridgman said. "I said, 'Great! Let's have an Ascension service. How do we do it?' And he said, 'I don't have a clue.'"

But that didn't slow down the process. On the morning of May 20, Bullock-Centennial Association's first Ascension Sunday celebration was held at First Baptist Church, Union Springs.

The event — which was for men only — garnered about 60 attendees.

"We made this event for men to encourage them to take a much stronger leadership role in the church and the home," Bridgman said.

"It was encouraging that many fathers brought their sons to see how men can be involved in their churches and communities."

The men came together to fellowship and shared a biblical breakfast of baked fish, flat bread and water. As a nod to the

current culture, coffee was also served.

"The breakfast was meant to represent (not necessarily replicate exactly) the meal Jesus and His disciples shared after His resurrection," said Dale Huff, the speaker at the event and director of the office of Leadership and church administration for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "I doubt there were catfish in the Sea of Galilee, but that's what we had."

During his message, Huff focused on Jesus' ascension as documented in Acts 1. As Christians, we are responsible to be busy until Jesus comes again, Huff said, and so the talk focused on that fact and the reminder that Jesus will return in the same way He ascended.

"This was truly a unique way of focusing on the gospel of Jesus' ascension and promised return, and I think it was an instruc-

tional session for everyone," Huff said. "I think there's value in having some expanded awareness of the Christian calendar."

Future plans

Because the event was so positively received this year, Bridgman said plans are already in the works to hold the celebration again next year.

He's not sure if it will remain an event exclusively for men or if it will morph into a family event next year, but it will indeed happen again.

"All of our churches were represented at this year's celebration, and I think now with the pastors who saw what was going on, we'll build it to be even better and stronger," Bridgman said.

"We plan to promote it more heavily next year, too."

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Shorter University fires homosexual librarian

ROME, Ga. — A gay librarian at Shorter University who refused to sign a statement rejecting homosexuality has been fired.

Michael Wilson, 50, off-campus librarian for professional studies since 1998, returned his employment contract May 3 along with a redacted copy of Shorter's new "personal lifestyle statement" striking the sentence, "I reject as acceptable all sexual activity not in agreement with the Bible, including, but not limited to, premarital sex, adultery and homosexuality."

Wilson, a tenured faculty member, also wrote a letter asking Shorter President Don Dowless to reconsider his stated intent to dismiss anyone who does not agree with provisions of the statement that was adopted by the university's board of trustees.

Three weeks later Wilson received a two-sentence letter from Provost Craig Shull accepting his "resignation" effective May 31.

Wilson replied that he had not resigned and had "no intention of doing so."

Dowless responded that what Wilson submitted was not "a valid, fully executed contract for continued employment."

"Since you have not returned a valid contract, you do not have a contract for the upcoming academic year," Dowless explained.

Trustees of Shorter, a private Christian school in Rome, Ga., adopted the lifestyle statement and a new statement of faith last fall.

So far, 63 faculty and staff have resigned rather than sign the statement, the Save Our Shorter site reported June 5. The school's faculty usually numbers about 100 full-time members.

Wilson said no one at Shorter asked him about his sexual orientation when they hired him 14 years ago, but school officials probably knew he was gay when they gave him tenure in 2006.

LifeWay chooses amusement park theme for VBS 2013

NASHVILLE — LifeWay Christian Resources will use an amusement park theme for its 2013 Vacation Bible School (VBS) material. Colossal Coaster World: Facing Fear, Trusting God will be built around the verse, "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love and sound judgment" (2 Tim. 1:7).

"Professions of faith made during VBS consistently equal about 25 percent of the number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention," said Jerry Wooley, LifeWay's VBS specialist.

Nearly 3 million children, youth and adults register for VBS at more than 25,000 Southern Baptist churches each year and report nearly 90,000 professions of faith in Christ.

In the 2013 VBS theme-park world, participants will be challenged to tap into God's promise to give them the courage to face their fears by trusting Him. Whether this sense of fearfulness comes from changing the familiar to the unfamiliar, speaking up when it's the right thing to do or making the ultimate decision to follow Jesus and trust Him as Savior, they will learn they can trust God for the spirit of power, love and sound judgment.

Wooley said the focus on trusting God despite fear will resonate with kids. "They have a lot to be afraid of these days, but we want them to learn that whatever it is that scares them, they can trust God to be with them and help them be brave. This is an important lesson."

For more information, visit LifeWay.com/VBS and facebook.com/LifeWayVBS.

Military forbids use of official emblems on Bibles

WASHINGTON — A group that monitors religious freedom violations in the armed forces claimed victory June 11 after the Pentagon announced that LifeWay Christian Resources can no longer use official emblems of the four military branches on Bibles sold at military installations around the globe.

In an exchange of letters with the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, Defense Department officials said permission granted in 2003 to the Southern Baptist Convention publishing house to use military emblems on four Holman Christian Standard Bibles titled the Soldier's Bible, Sailor's Bible, Marine's Bible and Airman's Bible was revoked when the military revamped its trademark licensing regulations in 2011.

The Albuquerque-based foundation learned through a Freedom of Information Act request that the Army gave LifeWay permission on March 13, 2003, to utilize the Army emblem on books published for commercial sale. Lawyers claimed it violated the Establishment Clause by giving appearance of a government stamp of approval on the Bibles.

Military officials responded that LifeWay was notified it may no longer use military insignias on the Bibles, but could sell already-printed copies until the stock was depleted.

'What's in a name?'

SBC pastors split on new descriptor, survey shows

More than half of the pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) do not intend to use the name "Great Commission Baptists" (GCB) in communication about their churches, according to a recent survey by LifeWay Research.

The survey also reveals more than 70 percent of pastors agree the name "Southern Baptist Convention" should continue to be used.

LifeWay Research conducted a random survey of more than 1,000 SBC pastors in April and May 2012 in light of the task force appointed by SBC President Bryant Wright to study a possible name change for the 167-year-old convention. The report of the task force, delivered February 2012 to and approved by the SBC Executive Committee, recommended the convention maintain its legal name but adopt "Great Commission Baptists" as an informal, nonlegal name for churches and entities that want to use it.

Legal name-change?

LifeWay Research asked the question, "Do you agree that the Southern Baptist Convention should continue to be the name for this convention?" and found 72 percent of pastors agree (strongly or somewhat) the name should continue to be used. Twenty-three percent disagree and 5 percent "don't know."

The percentage of pastors who agree with the statement increases with age and church size. Sixty-one

percent of pastors under 45 agree, while 82 percent of pastors over 65 agree.

Pastors of smaller churches (under 50 in attendance) are most likely to "strongly agree" (64 percent) with the retention of the name "Southern Baptist Convention."

And, pastors in the West (45 percent) are less likely to "strongly agree" than pastors in the South (57 percent).

"Southern Baptist pastors strongly affirm the current name for the Southern Baptist Convention," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research. "While more than one in five pastors indicate they are ready for a change in the name of the convention, across all subgroups measured the majority of pastors agree the current name should continue to be used."

When pastors were asked if they agree "that a nonlegal name like 'Great Commission Baptists' would be acceptable for use by those who would find it beneficial," an equal number of pastors agree and disagree (46 percent) with the statement.

Responses to this question also vary by church size and pastor age. Only 36 percent of pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance agree the nonlegal name would be acceptable compared to 61 percent of pastors of churches with attendance more than 250.

There is also a split in responses between younger and older pastors

about the new name. The majority of pastors age 18-44 agree (59 percent), while the majority of pastors age 65 and older disagree (60 percent).

Pastors were also asked if their churches intend to use the tagline "Great Commission Baptists" in some or all of their communication about the churches.

Using the new tagline

More than half (54 percent) say they will not use the nonlegal moniker although more than a third (35 percent) have not discussed it. Four percent responded they will use both SBC and GCB in their descriptors, and two percent indicated they will use GCB exclusively in their church identifications.

Pastors in the West are more likely than those in the South to select "Yes, we will use it exclusively." Eight percent of those in the West compared to 1 percent of those in the South gave this response.

"Of course, churches have complete control over the names of their own churches, but messengers to the SBC annual meeting will decide whether to grant cooperating churches the latitude of using an alternative descriptor when they refer to the convention itself," McConnell said. "Pastors in this polling sample who have an opinion are much more comfortable with the current SBC name than proposing a nonlegal name for churches that would benefit from it." (BP)



By Christine Kapurch
Correspondent, TAB

Someone You Should Know

BETTIE HOUSTON

*Chulafinnee Baptist Church, Heflin
Cleburne Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: Psalm 100:1
FAVORITE HYMN: "Blessed Assurance"
HOBBIES: Sewing and gardening
FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 59

years of marriage to Charles; four children, Charles, David, Marie and Julie; 10 grandchildren; and 8 great-grandchildren



HOUSTON

Q: What led you to serve your church's Woman's Missionary Union?
A: I thought I wanted to be a missionary and (then) I got married at 17 and had children right away so I didn't have the opportunity. This was where I felt called.

Q: Why have you continued your ministry service through the years?
A: Well I feel like God has a purpose for everyone's life, and I feel like mine is to serve in the choir and to help other people.

Q: What does the ministry demand?
A: Being obedient to Christ and serving others.

Q: How do family members support you?
A: They've always supported me. They are all there to help when I need it.

Q: What do you get from serving in ministry?
A: I have a peace and a comfort that whatever comes my way God will be with me. Seeing all of my children be Christians. ... It's just a joy to serve.

Q: How do you see yourself involved in ministry work in the future?
A: As long as I am physically able I plan on going to church and serving in any way I can. I like to encourage people.

Q: What difference will this ministry service make for you in the future?
A: Just the joy and satisfaction that I receive from trying to do God's will.

So ... you want to be a minister?

By Bill Wilson
Columnist, Associated Baptist Press

The landscape of hiring and managing staff is rapidly changing for congregations. What are the implications for the men and women who desire to serve in those congregations?

What does this dawning of a new era in congregational life mean for those who feel called to a life in ministry? Specifically, what can a man or woman who wants to serve God in the context of local church ministry expect with regard to finding a job, keeping a job and enjoying a job?

Recently, our son graduated from divinity school.

The world he faces is very different from the one I entered in 1980. It is rapidly changing and difficult to navigate.

When I think about my advice to him at the beginning of his life in ministry, it goes something like this:

1. Living out of a sense of call is more important than ever. If you are not deeply and divinely called to the life of a minister, you will quickly find that the aggravation, financial arrangements and general work environment will quickly dissuade you from any romantic notions about making the ministry a career. Even with a strong dose of call, many of us find it is difficult to live out that call in the current culture.

2. Prepare to be underwhelmed by the free call process that is standard in many Protestant traditions. Economic priorities dictate that very few people in churches anywhere devote their full time to placement concerns. That leaves a patchwork network that is heavy on relationships and short on logic. It will probably drive you crazy.

3. Take care of your spiritual life. What

is at the heart of you matters more than any other single factor when thinking about a life in ministry. You must cultivate a profound sense of connection to Christ, the Scriptures and the leadership of the Spirit. That is the rock upon which to build your life. Resist the lure of a ministerial life built on the sand of methodology or metrics or trying to please others.

4. Take care of all of you. Your family, your body and your mind matter to God and to your life in the church. Spend quality time with them, take time off, eat well, rest, exercise, read, think, go to concerts and movies, play. In short, live an abundant life.

5. Have a life outside the church. I hope you will always have hobbies, friends, interests and experiences that transcend the boundaries of the local church. You will be a better minister and person if you do.

‘Escape hatch’

6. What is your “escape hatch”? That’s what one friend calls your avocation. That is, the thing you would do if your primary vocation were taken away from you. Think about that and prepare for that.

7. Remember that your congregants really want to know two basic things: Do you love God and can you love them? Spend most of your time focused on these two things. The majority of that will happen between Sundays, by the way.

8. Can you spell entrepreneur? Can you be an entrepreneur? I hope so. The life of a minister in the future will require it.

9. Remember, EQ (emotional intelligence) usually trumps IQ.

10. Learn multiple skills. The chances are that you will be asked to do a multitude of jobs, whatever your title may be. Expect it and embrace it. No whining. The era of specialists is

closing, and the most valuable clergy will be those who love the whole church, not just their silo.

11. Consider what you will do when you find it necessary to be bivocational. This is going to be the standard experience for many in your generation.

12. Take an interest in anything that teaches you how to be a more effective leader. That is the skill congregations and organizations are yearning for. Read about it. Think about it. Watch good leaders in any field and learn what makes them effective. Learn from the failures as well, for they will teach you invaluable lessons. Study Jesus the Leader. He’s the finest model available.

13. Pay attention when professors, books, articles or conferences speak to the leadership required to lead the transition from programmatic models toward missional models. You’ll be glad you did.

14. Live simply. Salaries for ministers have never been high and they may have peaked. The future looks lean in terms of pay and benefits.

For every ministerial author who writes eloquently about leaving church, there are thousands of women and men who serve congregations diligently and faithfully across a lifetime. Remember, for all the pain and aggravation, the life of a minister is the finest and highest calling one could hope for.

Your grandfather loved every day of his life in ministry. Your dad can say the same thing with enthusiasm. I pray the same will be true for you.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Bill Wilson is a former Baptist pastor and president of the Center for Congregational Health in Winston-Salem, N.C. (ABP)

Want to know God?

Pastor Fred W. Karthaus III
First Baptist Church, Andalusia

One of the many blessings we have from God is our house — the literal structure in which we live. In many ways our houses should be reminders to us of God’s continued love, care and provision for our lives.

In Deuteronomy 6:4 we read, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” These words were a challenge and a reminder of the greatness of God. The people were also reminded that they should write these words “on your doorposts and on your gates” (Deut. 6:9) to help them remember. When we think about it, our houses can become a daily symbol for us of God’s blessings.

For example, our doors can remind us of the description Jesus used of Himself in John 10:7: “I am the door.” And in Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Behold I stand at the door and knock.”

The windows in our houses can remind us of God’s words through the prophet Malachi. “Bring all the tithe to the storehouse ... try me now in this ... if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10).

The foundations of our houses remind us that God has laid “in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame” (1 Pet. 2:6) and that our lives are supported by our trust in Jesus (Matt. 7:24-25).

In every house there are furniture and decorations that are arranged to bring beauty to the house, just as God fills the Christian’s life and creates beauty with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

The dining room can help us recall the words of Jesus when He said, “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20) and of the parable that Jesus told of the “great supper” (Luke 14:15-24).

Our bedrooms, places of rest, can help us to remember the call of Jesus, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Everywhere we turn in our houses, we can be reminded of God’s love, care and provision. May we always praise Him for His many blessings. God is good all the time! 🙏

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As a pastor I love receiving *The Alabama Baptist* paper in the mail each week. It keeps us updated on church happenings around the area and around the state.

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The Across Alabama's Associations section also gives pastors and ministers opportunities to learn about outreach efforts that are going on in other churches and even revivals that are in process or coming up.

Another area I really like is the Sunday School lessons section that covers both of the main LifeWay curricula. It is great for us because we have classes that use

Explore the Bible and classes that use Bible Studies for Life. I encourage the members of our congregation to be sure and check this out each week to get even more familiar with the Sunday School material.

Still, there is one other area I like about *The Alabama Baptist*.

Once a month we receive our associational newsletter



Pastor Jason Dunlap
Sharon Heights Baptist Church, Birmingham

on the back of the paper. This gives our people information about the association happenings and possibilities for service.

Also, once a month we have the newsletter from our church on the back of the paper as well. That really impresses our people as they read about the happenings in our church.

The Alabama Baptist paper is a balanced paper that gives all folks opportunities to respond and provide input into certain debatable issues as well. I look forward to the next issue.

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'Get in line'

Military gay policy threatens Christians' religious freedom

The military's revised policy on homosexuality has definitely produced stress for chaplains and service members, Southern Baptists' lead chaplain told a Washington audience.

An increasing intolerance toward religion appears to be a by-product of the ongoing controversy over religious expression in the armed services, said Douglas Carver, executive director of chaplaincy services for the North American Mission Board.

Speaking at a conference sponsored by the American Religious Freedom Program, Carver addressed the effect on freedom of religion and conscience brought about by the lifting of the ban on open homosexuality in the military.

"I can assure you that a tension exists in this area," Carver told participants.

"For example, the Department of Defense no longer considers homosexuality a moral issue. [To the department,] it is an amoral issue. To them, it's a concern of human dignity, respect, discipline and professionalism. However, a number of our chaplains and troops believe that homosexuality is a moral issue."

Policy changes

The policy change has increased tensions, he said, regarding:

► "[G]overnmental authority versus religious authority and sacred Scriptures."

► "[R]eligious diversity and religious practices."

One of the results, Carver said, has been "a confusion, especially among some of our commanders, over religious freedom protocol."

He added, "There is a growing

concern over political correctness and how it may inhibit freedom of religious expression, especially while in uniform."

"Due to the negative press on religious issues, there appears to be a growing intolerance to even discussing religion at all — an intolerance to religion," said Carver, who retired in September as the Army Chief of Chaplains after 38 years in the service. "And perhaps that is one of the greatest threats that we are all facing — intolerance to religion which can lead to the absence of religion in the public marketplace, which can lead to silencing our voices about religious issues, which can lead to prejudice and violence, etc."

That intolerance, or inhibition of religious free exercise, has manifested itself in several ways. Ron Crews, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, cited some examples at the conference:

► Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, briefed special forces soldiers at Fort Bragg in North Carolina after President Obama announced his intention in 2010 to repeal the military ban known as Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT). Based on what was shared by witnesses, Crews said,

a young chaplain asked Mullen, "Sir, if this policy is repealed, will those of us who hold biblical views that homosexuality is a sin still be protected to express those views?" Mullen pointed a finger toward him and said, "Chaplain, if you cannot get in line with this policy, resign your commission."

► Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick, the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel, provided a September 2010 briefing on DADT for troops at European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. According to *The Washington Times*, Bostick said, "Unfortunately, we have a minority of service members

who are still racists and bigoted and you will never be able to get rid of all of them. But these people opposing this new policy will need to get with the program, and if they can't they need to get out."

Those comments from Mullen and Bostick had a "chilling effect" on the religious liberty of chaplains and troops, said Crews, who served 28 years as an Army chaplain.

Service members who have come out as homosexuals since DADT's reversal often are quoted in news stories, but those who hold views opposed to the repeal are not permitted to speak to reporters, Crews said. (BP)

"Due to the negative press on religious issues, there appears to be a growing intolerance to even discussing religion at all."

Douglas Carver
North American Mission Board

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Become an 'unleader' to lead

I was reading "Upside-Down Leadership" by Taylor Field recently. His book is about leadership and those leadership principles that on the surface appear to oppose common sense. He made an interesting statement. He said that in order to be a good leader, a person has to become an "unleader."

He then goes on to talk about ways in which we can become "unleaders."

One of his statements is that in order to be a good leader, we must know how to be good followers.

I must confess, I don't know that I am a good follower. I am one of those people who frequently expresses her opinion and wants to be in the thick of solving problems. I am that way at work and at home.

Still, it is an interesting thought. What would happen if I did not always jump into the middle of things?

Perhaps someone else would have the opportunity to voice his or her opinion on a matter. Perhaps a better solution than one I would suggest would be discovered and implemented. Perhaps I would

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



have the opportunity to be supportive of others instead of them being supportive of me.

Perhaps I would learn the value of listening before speaking.

A friend of mine once said the best piece of advice she ever received was to find ways to be part of a group where everyone knew more than she did. Learn to bow to the expertise and leadership of others.

It is an interesting paradox, isn't it? Leading and following. It sounds so familiar ... much like when Jesus shows us the best way to lead — whether serving or being a strong witness — is to first be a strong follower of Him.

So maybe in order to improve

myself, I need to learn to stand aside and follow. Maybe to be a better mother, I need to let my children lead in some areas such as choosing their activities and handling their conflicts. Maybe to be a better member of a faith community, I need to do the job no one else wants to do and serve, but not lead. Maybe to be a better supervisor, I need to trust in the abilities and ideas of the people with whom I work.

Maybe I would be reminded that I am part of a body of believers. Maybe I would be a better person.

Maybe in order to be a better leader, I need to find ways in which to follow.

A Takeaway Value ...

Let us be quick to listen and slow to speak.

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.



Photo courtesy of First Baptist Church, Hokes Bluff

RETIRED MISSIONARY WHORTON HONORED

First Baptist Church, Hokes Bluff, in Etowah Baptist Association, honored retired International Mission Board missionary Mary Jane Whorton on May 20 in celebration of her 85th birthday. Whorton grew up attending the church and later served 37 years in Nigeria.



The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I lack. He lets
me lie down in green pastures;
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waters.

Psalm 23:1-2

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More Americans pro-life than pro-choice, poll shows

The most recent Gallup poll on Americans' opinions of abortion shows that the number of people identifying themselves as pro-choice is at an all-time low.

Since 1995, Gallup has asked Americans to identify themselves either as pro-life or pro-choice. While initially 56 percent considered themselves pro-choice and only 33 percent considered themselves pro-life, that has changed dramatically over the years.

Now, for the second time since Gallup began the poll, pro-lifers significantly outnumber those considering themselves pro-choice. The first time this occurred was in May 2009.

Forty-one percent of Americans identify themselves as pro-choice, according to this most recent study. Fifty percent say they are pro-life, while 9 percent said neither.

This decline in pro-choice leaning in Americans has occurred across

political lines, Gallup reported. Pro-choice Republicans declined to 22 percent from 28 percent in 2011, while pro-choice Democrats declined from 68 percent to 58 percent in the same period. The number of pro-choice independents declined from 51 percent to 41 percent, actually falling below the number of independents identifying themselves as pro-life (47 percent).

Regionally, the South is the only area of the nation that shows a clear preference: 56 percent of Southerners are pro-life while only 33 percent are pro-choice.

Nonwhites are more likely to be pro-life than pro-choice. So are

older Americans (35 and older) and Americans who earn less than \$75,000 per year.

A majority of Catholics and Protestants consider themselves pro-life, while a vast majority of nonreligious Americans consider themselves pro-choice.

Despite the shift in identifying themselves as pro-life or pro-choice, Americans' views on the morality and the legality of abortion remain largely unchanged over the last few years. Fifty-one percent of Americans consider abortion morally wrong, while 38 percent consider it morally acceptable. At the same time, 52 percent of Americans

think abortion should be legal under certain circumstances, while 25 percent think it should be legal in all circumstances and 20 percent think it should be illegal in all circumstances.

'A clear shift'

In Gallup's analysis of its statistics, the company notes that the current figures represent "a clear shift from 2001 to 2008," before which a majority of Americans considered themselves pro-choice. It remains to be seen whether this trend is temporary, as it was in 2009, or whether it continues through the years. (Gallup, TAB)

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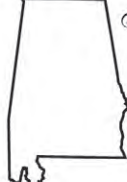
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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 24

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson

Professor, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

LOYALTY DARE
Joshua 14:6-15; 15:14-17

Caleb was a man of unquestionable loyalty. From his early days as the representative spy from the tribe of Judah (Num. 14:24) until here in his latter years as a battle-tested officer, Caleb demonstrated his single-minded devotion to God. You may recall that Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies among the 12 who brought back a positive report (Num. 13-14). They had every confidence that the God who promised the land to Abraham and later to Moses would fulfill His promise. These men counted on God to be faithful, and they were faithful in turn.

One could argue that etymologically, Caleb's name comes from "all" and "heart," but this is unlikely. Scholars are in general agreement that his name comes from a common word meaning "dog." As we will see, Joshua had no greater ally than Caleb in the years of the southern campaign in Canaan. He was a trustworthy friend, and he was a leader among the young pups.

Loyalty Demonstrated (14:6-12)
"Give me this mountain." What a thought. Caleb approaches Joshua at Gilgal and reminds him of a time long past. They were much younger then; Caleb was 40, with a bold confidence that nothing and no one could stand in the way of God's plan.

Forty-five years have now passed. Caleb is now older than the average lifespan during the wilderness wanderings (Ps. 90:10). Even at 85, he still has the confidence to trust God. He reminds Joshua of the apportionment granted to him and his kin (the Judahites).

Some of the greatest contributors to the body of Christ today are overlooked. Either they believe that they no longer have a place of service within the church, or the younger generations feel that their ways and their thoughts are outmoded. In both cases, the church suffers from the lack of wisdom and experience that develops over time.

I had the privilege to serve among senior

adults at First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in recent years. What a blessing it was to see octogenarians with more get-up-and-go than the Baby Boomers following them. On the other hand, I also saw 60-year-olds who decided they were old and had nothing left to contribute.

For all *The Alabama Baptist* readers above the age of 60, now is the time when you may have more to offer than ever before. Take up the mantle of Caleb and say, "Give me this mountain."

Loyalty Rewarded (14:13-15)
How was Caleb's loyalty rewarded? Joshua blessed him, entrusting him with Hebron, a city in the southern hill country of Canaan. A careful study of this concept of blessing will yield some interesting results.

Whenever God blesses an individual or a group, stewardship is entrusted. God blessed the man and woman with stewardship of the earth (Gen. 1:28). God blessed Noah and his family with the same stewardship (Gen. 9:1). Abraham was entrusted with a covenant that would be passed to his family, and yet that stewardship would affect all nations (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Missiologists refer to this as top-line/bottom-line blessing. In the top line, you are a recipient of the blessing of God. The bottom line, however, is that you are blessed to be a blessing, a conduit of God's blessing.

Loyalty Challenged (15:14-17)
Though the land had been granted to him by Joshua, the challenge for Caleb was to take the land. Having confidence is one thing; finding the strength to rise to the challenge is another. Caleb rose to the occasion, showing that God was still with him as he led the army to drive out the Anakim from their stronghold.

In the midst of this skirmish, readers are introduced to Caleb's daughter, Achsah, and to Othniel, another member of Caleb's family who will demonstrate his loyalty to God and His people.

We will read more about Othniel in the coming days.

Bible Studies for Life

By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh

Chair and Armstrong Professor of Religion, Samford University

WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?
Malachi 3:13-4:6

Marva Dawn writes of worship as "a royal 'waste' of time" in which we immerse ourselves in thankful praise and loving adoration of a God who is worthy of honor and glory. She means this in a positive way, noting such worship only occurs as we put God first in our lives. Yet this was exactly the opposite of what was happening during the days of Malachi, when the people of Israel concluded that serving God was futile.

Serve God (3:13-15)
It would appear that Israel only thought of God in commercial terms and concluded there was no "profit in keeping His commandments." Yet without committing ourselves to a daily journey with God, our lives have no true center of reference. We find ourselves at the mercy of the ways of the world, manipulated by the latest advertisement, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose.

Malachi considers such a life to be characterized by "murmuring," which is a word that is consistently used of the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness and missed out on entering into the land of promise. It wasn't just that they were disgruntled and complained; they openly rebelled against God's teaching. They did not listen but rather spoke openly against God. This is the danger of disobedience, which can begin as a careless attitude toward the Scriptures but can ultimately end in a life of wrongdoing.

Honor God (3:16-4:3)
The opposite of such attitudes and actions is to "fear the Lord." This is a phrase that doesn't mean to be frightened of God but rather to honor, reverence and obey Him. Isaiah 11 reminds us that the Messiah was a person who would know the presence of the "Spirit of the Lord upon Him ... the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (v. 2). The Book of Acts tells us that the mark of a growing church is that they "lived in the fear of the Lord" (Acts 9:31). Those who fear God are the people who prosper spiritually and seek the companionship of fellow believers as they "talk with

each other." Even in the midst of a disobedient people, Malachi believes that there will be a remnant of those who receive God's rebuke and begin to encourage each other to renewed faith.

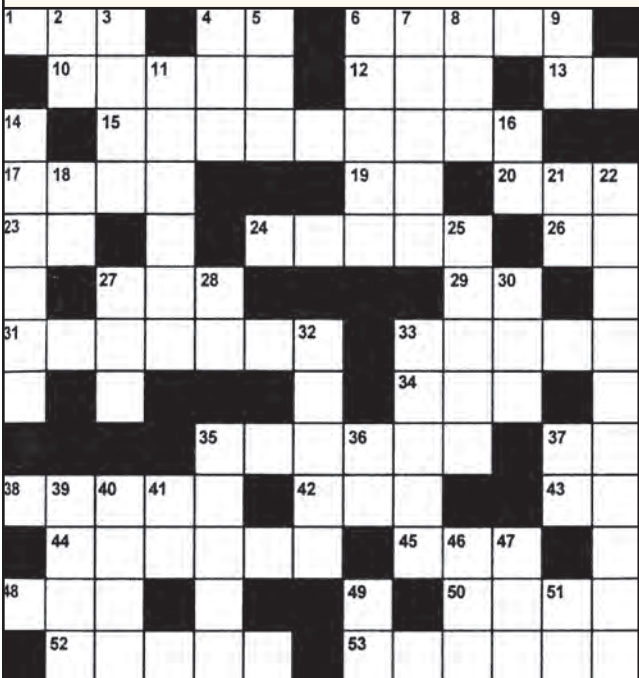
God promises the faithful that if they do not forsake Him, He will never forget them. Their names will be written in a "book of remembrance." They belong to God in a special way, they are His "special treasure" and they are assured of His constant love and companionship. They will be warmed and healed by the rays of God's presence. Malachi doesn't just speak of the rays of the sun but of the Sun of Righteousness. They will be renewed in their spiritual strength, "leaping like calves released from the stall" and experiencing triumph over all their spiritual enemies.

Live by God's Instruction (4:4-6)
Malachi ends his short book by reminding the people of Israel that the foundation of their spiritual lives must be that of listening and obeying God's instructions. He calls them back to the statutes and ordinances of God's law, which are unchanging in their relevance wherever and whenever we live.

The final two verses are brought as a word of encouragement that however bleak the future might appear, God's promise always brings hope to our hearts. Malachi speaks of the promise of the coming of the prophet Elijah. Elijah still plays a role in Jewish thinking, especially around the Passover meal with a special cup called Elijah's cup. At one point in the ceremony a child opens the door in expectation of Elijah's coming to announce God's deliverance of His people. In the New Testament this promise was seen as being fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist, and yet we also have a famous incident when Jesus encountered Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. There, as they spoke of the saving work of God that would be accomplished through the cross of Calvary, the promises of the Old Testament came to fulfillment. It is in the hearts and lives of those who have found the ultimate fulfillment of hope through Christ that a life of obedience to God's Word and His ways will also be seen.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- 1. I am from _____. (John 7:29)
- 4. _____, thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
- 6. He shewed himself _____. (Acts 1:3)
- 10. To goad.
- 12. Local area network. (abbr.)
- 13. Have mercy on _____. (Matt. 15:22)
- 15. He giveth meat in _____. (Job 36:31)
- 17. Abram said unto Lot, Let there _____ strife. (Gen. 13:8; 2 words)
- 19. Royal Canadian. (abbr.)
- 20. Missing in Action. (abbr.)
- 23. Registered nurse. (abbr.)
- 24. Strain at a gnat, and swallow a _____. (Matt. 23:24)
- 26. 1,100 in Roman numerals.
- 27. The _____ a Pharisee, the other a publican. (Luke 18:10)
- 29. _____ the King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
- 31. Now _____ faith, hope, charity. (1 Cor. 13:13)

- 33. The price of wisdom is _____ rubies. (Job 28:18)
- 34. They _____ Jesus to the brow of the hill. (Luke 4:29)
- 35. Be not _____. (Matt. 14:27)
- 37. In a certain place.
- 38. The tower of _____. (Gen. 11:9)
- 42. Bringing sick f _____. (Acts 5:16)
- 43. Mom.
- 44. For many be _____. (Matt. 20:16)
- 45. The falling tide.
- 48. It is. (contraction)
- 50. They shall _____ as lions' whelps. (Jer. 51:38)
- 52. Demonstrated.
- 53. Horse's strut. (Nah. 3:2)

Down

- 2. Out of _____ are the issues of life. (Prov. 4:23)
- 3. What _____ these seven ewe lambs? (Gen. 21:29)
- 4. Arizona State University. (abbr.)
- 5. As a _____ gathereth her chickens. (Matt. 23:37)
- 6. Trumpets to cry _____. (2 Chron. 13:12)
- 7. They shall hold the _____ are cruel. (Jer. 50:42)
- 8. Incorporated. (abbr.)
- 9. Dorothy's aunt.
- 11. A faithful man shall _____ with blessings. (Prov. 28:20)
- 14. The love of God is shed _____ in our hearts. (Rom. 5:5)
- 16. Printer's measure.
- 18. _____ able.
- 21. I am. (contraction)
- 22. For this is _____ in the sight of God. (1 Tim. 2:3)
- 25. Divided into sections, such as the brain, the ear.
- 27. Thou didst eat fine flour, honey, and _____. (Ezek. 16:13)
- 28. Electrical Engineer. (abbr.)
- 30. He that is of _____ heareth. (John 8:47)
- 32. _____ feared John. (Mark 6:20)
- 33. Whether they both shall be _____ good. (Eccles. 11:6)

- 35. That which I do I _____ not. (Rom. 7:15)
- 36. American League. (abbr.)
- 37. Whom do men say that I the Son of man _____? (Matt. 16:13)
- 39. Praise him for his mighty _____. (Ps. 150:2)
- 40. To smash, or a wild party.
- 41. Elevation. (abbr.)
- 46. Even a fruitful bough _____ well. (Gen. 49:22; 2 words)
- 47. Benjamin's nickname.
- 49. All these things I kept from my youth _____. (Luke 18:21)
- 51. Lower case. (abbr.)



RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Rick Sharp and Adam Borden

ELEVEN22

The Reason

In partnership with the McKenzie Noelle Wilson Foundation

The death of a vibrant teen is always a tragic and heartrending event. When McKenzie Noelle Wilson gave her heart to God during an evening service at Beach United Methodist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., then led her parents to God, many saw God's hand at work in her life. Her untimely death only a month later shocked and saddened the church community, but her passion and love for God served as the inspiration for much of Eleven22's sophomore record (and first national release) "The Reason." All proceeds from "The Reason" will go toward building an orphanage in Uganda through the McKenzie Noelle Wilson Foundation.

Eleven22 aims at reaching unchurched young people for God, and their music is drawing young people in droves. Their hard-hitting guitar-based heavy rock, powerful ballads and inspirational lyrics put them in good company. Their first record produced the song "Rooftops."

Raw and often emotionally gripping, the record's occasional lack of polish is far overshadowed by its

pure spirit. With the overproduced, often overhyped worship music we hear these days, "The Reason" reminds us of the passion and overwhelming urgency experienced by that young band of believers 2,000 years ago. Whether you're 14 or 85, listen to this record. There's something here just for you. (Sharp)

MARK WAGNER

NeedLove

Otis Alan Records

Mark Wagner released his fourth national studio album, "NeedLove," on May 15. Wagner says the record is intended to remind listeners of their need for God's love. The new album is available exclusively through Mocha Club, a nonprofit organization that funds relief and development efforts in Africa.

Those who partner with Wagner and with Mocha Club's program to counsel and rehabilitate women in Ethiopia who had been forced into prostitution will receive the album free, along with a music video, lyrics, chord charts and monthly communications from Wagner and Mocha Club documenting how their contributions are being used.

While the album has gotten lots

of attention for what it does, does it stand on its own for what it is? The answer is an unqualified "yes." Well written and recorded, this is an impressive acoustic-backed collection of songs, buoyed by soaring guitar work and moving backbeats. A remake of Rich Mullins' "Creed" is one of the best, losing nothing to the familiarity of Mullins' powerful lyrics. Call me sappy, but "Gonna Be with You" is another standout. Written to Wagner's wife, it's a beautiful song with a beautiful message, a pledge of faithfulness that comes across honestly and sincerely.

Contact the Mocha Club at www.themochaclub.org. (Sharp)

TRIBUTE QUARTET

The Waiting Is Over
Sonlite/Crossroads

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccles. 3:1).

These are the opening words of the inside credits in the new Tribute Quartet record.

Gary, Josh, Riley and Anthony came through fiery trials in 2011 and emerged with a renewed purpose and dedication to take the gospel message to audiences everywhere they



go. If you have looked for a record with great songs and production delivered by a classy quartet, then the waiting is over. (Borden)

MERCY ME

The Hurt & The Healer

Fair Trade Services, LLC

What do you say about the latest release from one of the giants of Christian music?

"The Hurt & The Healer," Mercy Me's seventh album, hit Billboard's Top 200 Chart at No. 7 and topped the Christian Soundscan Chart. The first week after its

release it reached the No. 1 spot on iTunes' Christian Album Chart and the No. 10 spot of their overall Album Chart. So far, every record they've made has been certified Gold or Platinum, and this one will be no different.

Their music has always been a rousing, infectious mixture of pop and rock, with thoughtful and inspiring lyrics, world-class musicianship and production, and an eyes-wide-open view of our relationship with Christ and how we interact with Him and those around us. Perhaps, as much as anything, it may be their honest take on living the Christian walk that endears them so to all of us.

Or, maybe it's their music. Yeah, it's the music. (Sharp)



Book Reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Living in the Age of the Ram and the Goat: The Coming War Between Iran and the United States as Foretold in the Book of Daniel

Darren Thompson. Crane, Mo.: Defender Publishing, 2011. 99 pp. (Paperback).

Although the "age of the ram and the goat" in Daniel 8 has historically been considered a reference to Alexander the Great's military campaign against Persia, the author of "Living in the Age of the Ram and the Goat" takes the position that the events are yet to come — and will unfold, in fact, in our lifetimes.

Taking on long-recognized biblical scholars is a bold move for Thompson, but the author presents his case confidently, verse by verse, as he lays out his belief that the Bible predicts the rise of the Kurds to power in Iran, the weakening of the United States as a military power in

August of 2020, and a Greek Secretary General of the United Nations. Thompson believes the tribulation period will occur between 2014 and 2031.

Having lived through the "Late, Great Planet Earth" period in the 1970s, I find myself reading modern interpretations of biblical prophecy with a raised eyebrow, at least. For those who were not jaded by that period — and perhaps even for those who were — the book is interesting speculation, and may well have some merit as another way to look at some of the events described in Daniel.

Thompson is a member of Wall Highway Baptist Church in Madison Baptist Association.

Campus Ministry: How to Reach Your Campus for Christ

Roy S. Isbell Sr. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2011. 128 pp. (Paperback).

A campus minister at five different universities over a 45-year period, Roy Isbell wrote this book as a manual for campus ministers, pastors and religious leaders "to help you develop a successful college ministry." The first few chapters do deal with setting up and organizing a campus ministry, including basic details such as setting up a prospect list of Baptist students and cultivating a good relationship with the faculty, staff and administration.

About halfway through the book, the focus turns to Isbell himself, becoming an autobiography complete with a chapter on his brother, the author's personal life story and a sprinkling of photos of the author and his family.

In spite of the shifting focus of the book, it is clear that Isbell has spent his life in service to the Lord and undoubtedly influenced many youth to seek and follow Christ. His family and friends are sure to treasure the book.

Christian Marketplace Top Ten Best Sellers

Fiction

1. **The Harbinger**, Jonathan Cahn (Charisma Media)
2. **The Fiddler, Home to Hickory Hollow Series #1**, Beverly Lewis (Baker)
3. **Loving, Bailey Flanigan Series #4**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
4. **Half-Stitched Amish Quilting Club**, Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
5. **Illusion**, Frank Peretti (Howard Books)
6. **The Shack**, William Paul Young (Windblown)
7. **Her Mother's Hope, Marta's Legacy Series #1**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale)
8. **Tale of Three Kings**, Gene Edwards (Tyndale)
9. **The Screwtape Letters**, C.S. Lewis (Zondervan)
10. **Redeeming Love**, Francine Rivers (Waterbrook/Multnomah)

Nonfiction

1. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Heaven Is for Real**, Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
3. **Jesus Calling, Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
4. **The Power of a Praying Parent**, Stormie Omartian (Harvest House)
5. **Dear Jesus**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
6. **Torn**, Jud Wilhite (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
7. **Jesus Calling, Large-Print Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
8. **One Thousand Gifts**, Ann Voskamp (Zondervan)
9. **That's Why I'm Here**, Chris Spielman and Stephanie Spielman (Zondervan)
10. **The 5 Love Languages**, Gary Chapman (Moody)



CDN photo

A DIRECT HIT — The suicide bombing of Christ's Chosen Church of God, Jos, Nigeria, was the second such attack in two consecutive Sundays in the country.

Christians targeted

Suicide bombers hit another church in Jos, Nigeria

An Islamic extremist ran a car full of explosives into a Pentecostal church in Jos, in Nigeria's Plateau state on June 10, killing at least two Christians and injuring more than 40 others, military and police officials said.

In Borno state on the same day, gunmen reportedly killed at least two Christians during church worship. The Boko Haram Islamist sect reportedly took responsibility for both assaults.

The attack in Jos on Christ's Chosen Church of God was the second suicide bombing of a church in two Sundays and the third church bombing in Jos in six months. The explosion, which hit after a service had ended and church leaders and some children remained in the building, collapsed the roof of the sanctuary, witnesses said. The death toll was expected to increase as injuries were severe.

Clearing checkpoints

The bombing marked the second consecutive Sunday that an extremist from the Boko Haram Islamist sect got through checkpoints to bomb a church, and reports followed of rioting by aggrieved youths that left further casualties.

Esther Solomon, a 31-year-old university student whose family's house sits directly opposite the church building, said a pastor, church elders and some children remained in the sanctuary when the bomb was detonated. She was in her family living room at the time.

"I heard this loud explosion that broke ... glass. The ... explosion forcefully opened the front door of our house and threw me into one of the bedrooms," she said. "I ... found

myself in the bedroom, and when I rushed out, I found out ... a suicide bomber had crashed into the church across the road."

Rahab Gunat, 41, said the suicide bomber was seen trying first to bomb two churches, St. Peter's Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), each like Chosen Church located along Rukuba Road, but could not gain entry. The bomber then targeted Christ's Chosen Church of God, though officials said he was stopped short of the building before detonating the explosives.

"He was seen trying to go to the ECWA church, but he was prevented from doing so by members of the Boys Brigade (similar to Boy Scouts) who were keeping watch over the church," Gunat said. "From there, he went to the St. Peter's Catholic Church, but was denied entry too, but when he found that there was no security in this church, he crashed into it."

Celina Malo, 20, whose family's house is just a few meters from the collapsed church building, said that she was preparing for a bath when the bomb exploded.

"I heard a loud explosion that brought down the ceiling of our house, shattered all glass of our windows and violently brought down household items," she said. "I was confused and began crying."

Her two younger sisters, ages 8 and 11, were also crying, she said.

"I rushed outside to see what had happened and saw that it was a car that had crashed into a nearby church and people inside were crying," Malo recounted.

She said that when she rushed out of her house, she saw the daughter

of the pastor of Christ's Chosen Church of God crying outside the demolished structure.

"Her name is Victory, and she told me that her dad, the pastor of the church, and her mom were both inside the church," Malo said. "As we were thinking of what to do, people around rushed here to rescue people trapped in the church. Many have been injured, and they have been taken to the hospital."

Critical condition

Malo added that she assisted in moving Peter, the 10-year-old son of the church pastor, away from the bombed church before he was taken to a hospital.

The News Agency of Nigeria reported that the church pastor, Monday Uzoka, and a church elder were in critical condition following the blast.

Malo's mother, who was out of town at the time of the bombing, arrived as Malo was speaking to reporters and began to cry upon seeing her daughters.

"I am happy my children are alive," she explained. "I praise God that I met them alive."

The injured were being treated at Bingham University Teaching Hospital, Jos University Teaching Hospital and the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, all in Jos.

In Biu, Borno state, gunmen reportedly shot at worshipers as they were leaving a worship service before entering the sanctuary and killing two Christians. The Borno state police commissioner reportedly confirmed the attack on the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN in the local Hausa language) congregation. (CDN)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Christian leaders protest contraceptive rule

WASHINGTON — Nearly 150 faith leaders wrote Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on June 11 protesting the administration's requirement that faith-based employers include contraceptive coverage for women in their health care plans.

The Affordable Health Care Act, also known as Obamacare, requires that beginning Aug. 1 all health insurance policies cover preventive services for women including contraception. Churches that oppose birth control on moral grounds are exempt, but religiously affiliated institutions like hospitals and universities that serve the general public have until August 2013 to comply.

The June 11 letter organized by the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance said the rule sets up a "two-class concept of religious organizations" between those that focus inward in houses of worship and those that express their faith in outward service to their communities.

"The scheme honors acts of worship while burdening those whose faith leads them to service in our common life," the letter said. "Among its many troublesome aspects, the scheme moves us further toward an unconstitutional, unhistorical and unhealthy naked public square."

The letter urged the White House to "eliminate the two-class scheme of religious organization in the preventive services regulations" and extend the same exemption currently limited to churches to other faith-based service organizations as well.

Signers included *Christianity Today* editor David Neff, Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action, Leith Anderson of the National Association of Evangelicals and Richard Land, president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mark Foley, president of the University of Mobile, was among others who signed the letter.

African-American pastors divided on gay 'marriage'

WASHINGTON — The 200 or so African-American pastors gathered here for the Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) feel strongly about the topic of gay "marriage" — some for, many against. But there is one thing nearly all of them agree on.

The issue will not distract black voters from supporting President Obama's re-election.

Bishop John Hurst Adams of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who dismissed same-sex "marriage" as a "wonderful program for population control," said he was nonetheless behind Obama.

"I love the president ... I'm going to support the president," Adams said to applause and shouts of "Amen" on May 31. "I disagree with his statement," he said, referring to President Obama's saying he supported same-sex "marriage."

The CNBC comprises nine denominations that include more than 10 million Americans, and all nine oppose same-sex "marriage," said CNBC chairman W. Franklyn Richardson, who moderated a session called "A Conversation About Same-Sex 'Marriage.'" But he also noted a diversity of opinions within churches on the topic.

Amos C. Brown, pastor of Third Street Baptist Church of San Francisco, said he would not perform a same-sex "marriage" but believes in equality before the law, including marriage equality for gays and lesbians.

"I'm a Baptist, not a bigot," Brown said. "Don't be diverted by these right-wingers."

Union for Reform Judaism names new leader

BROOKLYN, N.Y. — Rabbi Rick Jacobs on June 9 was installed as president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest movement of Jews in North America.

Jacobs, 56, succeeds Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who held the post for 16 years and made the transition official when he handed Jacobs a Torah at a service at a historic Brooklyn synagogue.

The Reform movement, which includes more than 900 American and Canadian synagogues and takes a less traditional approach than Conservative or Orthodox Judaism, has had trouble retaining younger members.

The gospel choir from Greater Centennial African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church, a Mount Vernon, N.Y., congregation that has close ties to Westchester Reform Temple in nearby Scarsdale, N.Y., where Jacobs was senior rabbi, will participate.