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INSIDE



Churches can reach young families, stay culturally relevant with online presence

◆ Page 5



A look at challenges, stress affecting today's pastors

◆ Pages 16-17



Baptist relief provides hope to Niger River's flood survivors

◆ Page 21

'Massive cleanup'

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams focus on Staten Island

New York's Staten Island residents may have been upset about FEMA's response, or lack thereof, following "post-tropical" cyclone Sandy that hit the area Oct. 29, but they are not saying the same thing about Alabama Baptists' assistance.

"We are glad to have them here," said Duane Ullrich, pastor of New Dorp Moravian Church, Staten Island, where the disaster relief volunteers are staying while they work in the area.

And Alabama is grateful for the support of the church, said Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer Debbie Reese.

"Pastor Duane, the church staff and the members have gone out of their way for us," she said. "They've brought us supplies, fielded phone calls for us and helped us with meals."

Alabama, Louisiana and Kentucky conventions sent in the first Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams to Staten Island, and Alabama and Louisiana continue working to assist as many of the reported 20,000 families needing help with flooded homes as possible.

"There is enough work here to last a long, long time," said Larry Teel, state coordinator for the Alabama Baptist Rapid Response Assessment Team. "Alabama will run out of resources before we can take care of what needs to happen long-term."

The work is primarily mudout and tear out, Teel explained, noting contractors are in short supply and are

charging anywhere from \$3,000 to \$7,000 to do what Alabama Baptist volunteers are doing for free.

Everything in the houses that got wet must be removed so the items and the houses can dry out to avoid mold and mildew issues, he said.

"We are mainly working beach-front homes," Teel said. "The island is three miles wide and the surge came one mile inland."

"It is very slow and very difficult to average more than one job (house) a day," he said.

Impeded by snow

On top of the sheer volume of work to be done, the work also has been impeded some by the Nov. 7 winter storm that dumped snow and ice on the area.

"We had 4 inches of snow on the ground (Nov. 8)," Teel said, noting it was still a bit icy the morning of Nov. 9.

The snow storm wasn't the only inconvenience the team experienced. It also had to readjust its plans mid-route when the feeding unit was "stood down" the day after leaving for New York on Nov. 3.

The state feeding unit, feeding personnel, child-care personnel, communications personnel and related support equipment returned to Alabama on Nov. 4.

Logistics for setup of these teams turned out not to be conducive, and all requests for feeding units from the various states sending volunteers were canceled.

The main problem this caused for the 27 remaining Alabama Baptist volunteers was how to deal with meals in an area with so much devastation. "We are making it work," Teel said, noting the church facility has a kitchen and church members have been helping as well.

(See 'Staten Island,' page 4)



Photo by Alan Reese

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer Gerald Malone of Baldwin Association helps remove debris in Staten Island, N.Y., after 'post-tropical' cyclone Sandy hit the east coast Oct. 29.



Photo by Alan Reese

Mack Duck from Baldwin Baptist Association's disaster relief team serves as a chaplain alongside the cleanup and recovery teams from Alabama working in Staten Island, N.Y.

COMMENT

Don't Let Them Drift Away

Ask a pastor about those who have grown inactive in the life of a congregation and one is likely to hear about some unfortunate misunderstanding where the church failed to live up to someone's expectations. The result was lingering animosity that caused a member to drift away from the church or simply withdraw from participation in protest.

Unfortunately there are so many versions of this story that it has come to be accepted as the primary reason for inactive members. But research now indicates that up to 20 percent of church members may be headed toward declining participation in congregational life, and it has little to do with animosity.

Research also indicates that those who opt to leave a local church may be among the strongest Christians in that congregation.

Steady decline

The 2009 U.S. Congregational Life Survey found that after the second year of church membership, the percentage of members indicating increased participation in a local church began a steady decline. Just over half of the participants indicated increased participation in their first and second year of membership. That percentage fell to about 40 percent for years 3 through 5 and fell another 10 percent between years 6 through 10.

Likewise, the percentage of members indicating their participation lessened grew steadily after the second year, rising from about 10 percent after the second year to about 20 percent for years 11 through 20.

Changes in life situations were major factors for part of those declining in participation. Some felt embarrassment or disappointment about changes in their families. Some did not know if they would be accepted because of their own actions or the actions of other family members. Change in job status, illness and available time all impacted participation. None of those findings are surprising.

What is surprising is the finding that a strong catalyst for declining participation was rotating off a church committee or office. It seems a place to serve provides stimulus for continued participation. Those involved felt needed, appreciated and able to use their time and talents in the service of God.

When that opportunity was completed and



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

another place of service was not offered, opposite emotions often sat in. The result was a downward slide in participation.

Most insightful was the finding that "less-involved people are marked by a lack of motivation." In other words, their commitment to their church declined.

When participants in the Congregational Life Survey offered reasons for declining behavior they most often marked: faith had gotten weaker, had less time, ended office or position service, or had more negative view of the church.

Interestingly, respondents expressed a desire for help in identifying individual spiritual gifts and talents that could be used through service in the church. They asked for training to use their gifts and opportunities for service.

The majority of those drifting away from the church still wanted to be connected. They wanted their church to inspire them and to offer them opportunities to be tied to the church's mission.

Researchers concluded, "This decline in participation is tied statistically most strongly to a diminished sense of spiritual growth and a stronger perception that spiritual needs are not being met."

A spiritual problem

For the majority of those drifting away from participation, it is not because of a bad experience or because of some circumstance. At its core, it is a spiritual problem.

An exhaustive multiyear study by Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Ill., adds additional understanding to this topic. That study found about 17 percent of members in the average congregation are dissatisfied with the church's role in their spiritual development. The majority are in the earliest stages of following Christ.

But more than 40 percent of those dissatisfied in their spiritual growth are marked by signs of Christ-centered living that most churches desire. They tithe. They serve through the church. They talk to people about faith in Jesus Christ and invite people to become Christians. They serve the needy of the church and community. These could be called mature Christians.

What happens to a church when this type of member — the best evangelist, the best volunteer, the best donor — leaves?

These are the type of members for whom their spiritual life is so important that if they feel spiritual emptiness one place, they will seek it somewhere else.

Meaningful worship

Because declining participation in church life is a spiritual problem it must have a spiritual solution. That begins with meaningful worship, the study found.

Remember, the worshipper is the one in the pew and the experience must be meaningful for that person.

Again the Willow Creek research is helpful. After reviewing their studies, the church concluded that concentrating on getting people to the church through worship did not result in mature Christians. That realization led to wholesale changes in the church's approach to worship.

And like Willow Creek, many congregations seem more interested in attracting people to the church than in keeping them involved once they get there. In most churches much more attention is placed on outreach than on making disciples.

A church that wants to reverse the slide toward inactivity will have to be intentional in its discipleship program. Helping people identify talents and passions will become a priority. Training programs will be ongoing and the church will be catalytic in helping people plug into service opportunities through the church and in the community.

Of course, there is no substitute for walking with people through life's challenges. Even when one cannot change the circumstances, it makes a difference just to know that someone cares, that someone is there praying for you. A bond forged by walking together through troubled times is a hard bond to break.

The statistics of about 20 percent of church members drifting toward inactivity can be changed. By aggressive actions aimed at solving spiritual problems the drift can be stopped.

A church that wants to reverse the slide toward inactivity will have to be intentional in its discipleship program. Helping people identify talents and passions will become a priority.

Follow Bob Terry on

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@drbobterry



"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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Photos by Monica Martin

Left: Retired IMB missionaries Rosalie and Bob Hunt admire an ebony nativity set during a WorldCrafts party at FBC Guntersville. **Right:** Caroline Smith (left) and her little sister, Ella Kate, look at a nativity made of wool set around a model yurt, a traditional Kyrgyzstan home.

'An attitude of helping'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

FBC Guntersville helps meet artisans' needs through WorldCrafts event

Your Christmas shopping could change the world. That's what Rosalie Hunt believes, at least. In fact she and others at First Baptist Church, Guntersville, believe it so strongly that they decided to make their Christmas shopping an epic event Oct. 14.

"With the things you buy, you can keep people out of trafficking. You can help people in severe need make a meaningful living. You can help show them the Good News," Hunt said. "It's a tangible way to help people around the world from right where you are."

The "it" is WorldCrafts, a fair-trade ministry that enlists the help of 50 artisan groups worldwide and sells their products on their behalf. Proceeds go to help meet the artisans' physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

"We sell the products through our catalogs and website and at parties that people throw at their home, office or church," said Emily Swader, marketing strategist for WorldCrafts, a ministry of national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU). "You can have parties that are very simple and parties that are very elaborate."

And Swader said she would definitely classify First, Guntersville's as a very elaborate party.

"It was just a delight," said Hunt of the event, which featured \$10,000 worth of World-

Crafts products displayed across a dozen display tables.

"We had nativity sets, scarves, jewelry, household items, you name it. People said over and over how nice the products were," she said. "But even more than that they were impacted by the photos of the artisans displayed beside the products. They could see the people that they were helping, and it was a link from our people to the reality of making a difference in the life of someone on the other side of the world."

Generous responses

Connecting with the need brought generous responses, Hunt said. More than \$7,000 worth of WorldCrafts sold at the party, and several people made donations to WMU on top of buying products. One church member bought gifts for each of the 20 women enrolled in Marshall Baptist Association's Christian Women's Job Corps.

One nativity set priced at \$80 was sold in a silent auction to benefit the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for missions — and it brought in a winning bid of \$959.

"It all showed an attitude of helping that was very special," Hunt said. "The day really was terrific."

And it involved a lot of people.

Twenty volunteers planned and manned the WorldCrafts party, held between First,

Guntersville's two morning services.

"We wanted to involve as many people in the church as we could, and we wanted to have it at a time that was convenient and had a captive audience," Hunt said.

During the party, GAs (Girls in Action) carried around baskets of cookies made by women in the church, and Acteens dressed in costumes from around the world and helped shoppers with their order forms.

"I feel our whole church really felt a difference because of the event," Hunt said. "It brought out a lot of creativity and awareness, and it went along with the missions theme we have going into Lottie Moon season."

Swader said themes, posters, step-by-step instructions and even recipes for parties are available on the WorldCrafts website.

"There are plenty of helps available for whatever size party a church wants to have, and you can use what we have or use your own theme," she said.

More and more churches are finding this is a way to connect their church with needs around the world, Hunt said.

"I'm hoping that even more will hear about WorldCrafts parties and think, 'Maybe this is something we could do.'"

For information about throwing a WorldCrafts party, call 1-800-968-7301, email worldcrafts@wmu.org or visit worldcrafts.org and click on "parties." ■

Across Alabama's Associations

CALHOUN

► Piedmont Judgment House of **First Church, Piedmont**, reported more than 1,300 in attendance with 85 salvation decisions and 212 rededications. Philip Cooper is pastor.

CHEROKEE

► **Pine Grove Church, Centre**, will hold "Christchild to the Judgment" Dec. 1-2, 2:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. each day. All seating is on a first come first served basis. Doors open one hour before each performance. Ricky Pollard is pastor.

COFFEE

► The adult choirs of **County Line Church, Enterprise**, and **Rossville United Methodist Church, Rossville, Ga.**, will hold the Christmas musical "And on Earth Peace" Nov. 30, 7 p.m. For information call 334-347-6082. Danny Wiggins is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► **Chris Woodall** is the new student minister at **Malvern Church**. He is a graduate of the Baptist College of Florida and Liberty Seminary. He has served at

churches in Georgia and Alabama. He and his wife, Stacy, have four children. Hosea Parker is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Stockdale Church, Muncord**, will hold a fundraiser for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering on Nov. 17, 8 a.m. There will be homemade candles, crafts, cookies, cakes, Christmas items and more. Kevin Jones is pastor.

ELMORE

► **First Church, Eclectic**, will hold "Eclectic Christmas," a walk-through drama revisiting the true story of the first Christmas. The walking tours will begin at 6 p.m. Dec. 5-9. For reservations call 334-578-4846 or for information visit www.fbcelectic.org. Britt Green is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► The teens and college students of **Clements Church, Athens**, will hold the 30 Hour Famine Nov. 16-17. The event will raise money for those struggling with hunger worldwide, and funds raised will go to the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia to provide nourishment, medicine and life-saving care. The church's

goal is to raise \$15,000 for World Vision, who will ensure the funds get to these areas of need. For information call Justin Bedingfield at 256-729-1328, email justin@clements baptist.org or visit www.clements baptist.org. Tim Anderson is pastor.

MADISON

► **Mable Hill Church, Ardmore**, will hold "Bethlehem Walk 2012" Nov. 30 and Dec. 1-2, 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m. and Dec. 7-9, 6:30 p.m.-9 p.m. Come experience the sights, sounds and smells of ancient Bethlehem during this guided, outdoor drama. No reservation is required but large groups should call 256-420-8172 in advance to be served efficiently. For information visit www.mablehill baptist.org. Mike Clark is pastor.

SHELBY

► **First Church, Pelham**, will host Power & Glory Christian Jazz Band on Nov. 25, 5 p.m. The band features brass musicians, a keyboardist, guitarist, bass player and drummer. A nursery will be provided for children 2 years old and younger. Mike Shaw is pastor.

Staten Island work 'successful' for Alabama Baptists

(continued from page 1)

While it has been an exercise in flexibility to some degree, it also has been "a very successful deployment," Teel said as he and the team wrapped up their final day on the field Nov. 9.

At press time, four more Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams were preparing to leave for New York to keep the work going.

The 40-plus credentialed volunteers will focus on cleanup and recovery as well, said Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"All teams have been warmly received by everyone," he said. "The communities, the emergency management personnel, everyone has expressed nothing but thanks.

"The initial group of volunteers did experience a situation that required flexibility and did well readjusting," he noted. "The number one rule in disaster relief is flexibility." Teel agreed, noting the team is excited about leading a person to the Lord on Nov. 8.

"If nothing else good happens, that has," he said. "We'll take one salvation all day long."



Minter's Carlowville Baptist marks 175th year

According to Pastor Charles Crim, there was "a lot of excitement" Sept. 30 as Carlowville Baptist Church, Minter, celebrated 175 years of existence.

Carlowville Baptist's pastor since 2006, Crim said he saw "lots of hard work" put into the celebration day.

Leading up to the anniversary service, each Sunday in September was focused on the church's heritage (the start of the church and the construction of its building) and the church's future (maintaining and building on the spiritual foundation others had laid).

Several significant people attended the anniversary service including Joel Smith, a former pastor; Tom Stacey, director of missions for Selma Baptist Association; Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission; and Harper Shannon, former director of the office of evangelism at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Shannon shared a sermon pulled from the Sermon on the Mount and related it to three points: an individual's relationship with the Lord, with each other and with the community. Shannon also had shared at Carlowville's 150th anniversary and mentioned that he plans to share at the 200th anniversary, Stacey said.

After the service the more than 150 attendees made their way to a luncheon held at the former high school gym.

Stacey said it was "a great day ... (and) very well attended."

"[Carlowville] continues to minister (to the community) and are big supporters of the association. It is involved with so many things [Selma Association] does (such as) missions trips and disaster relief work," Stacey said.

(Neisha Fuson)

FBC Sheffield celebrates 125th anniversary

First Baptist Church, Sheffield, celebrated its 125th anniversary during a special service Aug. 19.

According to deacon and planning committee member John Adams, 435 people attended the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association church's anniversary service, which was triple the amount of worshippers usually in attendance.

Jim Warren, former director of missions (DOM) for Colbert-Lauderdale Association, delivered the message.

Jerry Armor, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque recognizing the anniversary, and Eddy Garner, DOM for Colbert-Lauderdale Association, presented the church with a certificate.

According to Adams, a fellowship meal was held after the service. He noted many attendees reminisced throughout the day's festivities. "A lot of people returned to Sheffield from out of state and various parts of Alabama [for the reunion]," he said, adding there was much hugging and old friends reuniting.

Pastor Chad Holder said the planning committee did a "great job" in coordinating the anniversary event.

He noted that the church is working hard to reach people in the immediate area as well as in surrounding areas. "We're just trying to love God and love people," he said. "For 125 years God has blessed us and we're excited about the next 125 years." (TAB)

Lincoln Baptist celebrates 125 years of existence

Lincoln Baptist Church in Coosa River Baptist Association celebrated its 125th anniversary Sept. 30 with an extended worship service.

The service began at 10:30 a.m. and featured special music by former church member Tara Combs and the church choir.

Tom Whatley delivered a message based on Joshua 4 to the approximately 200 attendees.

Sonja Adams, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to the church to commemorate the day. Randy Hagan, director of missions for Coosa River Association, also spoke to the congregation.

Following the service was a fellowship lunch and slideshow presentation featuring photos from church members.

Pastor Bill Goodwin said the day went very well "and there were a good number of people from the community and people who had grown up in the church ... who had come back for this [day]."

"My hope and dream is that we'd continue to build on [the rich history of the church] and continue to reach our community for Christ," Goodwin concluded.

(Julie Payne)



Photo courtesy of Maytown Baptist Church

MAYTOWN BAPTIST DONATES TO CHILDREN'S HOMES

The Woman's Missionary Union of Maytown Baptist Church in Bessemer Baptist Association started a monthly supply drive for the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. They collected detergent one month and paper goods in October.

By Brian Harris
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Why your church needs a website



Churches can reach young families, stay culturally relevant with online presence

If you're looking for a place to start, check out some of these great content management systems below, recommended from churches across Alabama. All of these systems have things that make them stand apart from each other, including different pricing points and abilities. Make sure you fully explore your options before making a final decision.

(Brian Harris)

E-Zekiel.com
LightCMS.com
Cloversites.com
FaithHighway.com
Ekklesia360.com
ACSTechnologies.com
Wordpress.org
FaithConnector.com



Josh Driggers found his new church home — Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville — after the military moved his family to the area. The church had something he and his wife thought was important: an active Internet presence, both on the church's Web page and Facebook.

"Our thoughts were if a church doesn't have these, then they aren't trying to reach young families," he said. "I would also say that (having a website is) not only reaching young families, but (also) letting people know you are trying to stay culturally relevant in today's society. It is important to never change the message of God's Word, but I believe it is vital to reach lost souls with the media and means we have available to us."

When people search for a church now, it's most likely not in the Yellow Pages; it's on Google. If you're not already on the Web, you're missing out on opportunities to connect with people who are looking for you.

As part of being a state missionary and Web strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, I get calls weekly from churches of all sizes about their websites. The most common question they ask is, "Where do we start?"

I've broken it down to two different kinds of websites that churches typically have: static and dynamic.

A static page lets people find out the basic information about your church. It's cheap and quick to set up.

A dynamic page is always changing and being updated with the most current information available. The constant presence of new content keeps people coming back to the site and can help with the site's ranking on search engines. The higher it's ranked, the more likely people are to find your site when doing searches.

Determining your approach

You have to decide how much time you are willing to invest. One of the biggest mistakes is to overcommit yourself to a dynamic website and let your information get out of date. Not only does this disappoint people, but it can quickly make your site appear outdated and out of touch.

If you don't think you will have the time to keep the site constantly updated, a static Web page is the way to go, and it should contain these four basics:

1. Your pastor. Supply basic information about the pastor, including a picture. For other key staff such as music, youth, children and preschool ministers, it would not hurt to have them listed with information too.

2. Directions to the church. If you're brave enough, Google Maps supplies an embeddable map that allows a

person to put their address in and get turn-by-turn directions to your church. If not, the address and directions from major landmarks in your city will work.

3. Contact information. If people's questions can't be answered on your site, they need a way to contact you. If they are on the Web, they are more likely to send you an email than call, but you should still supply both your email address and phone number. And don't forget to check your email often.

4. Service times. Some people don't have any questions, but it's Saturday night and they want to make sure they have the right time to be at church. Even if you're creating a static website, make sure that the service times are updated if you change them. There's nothing like visitors showing up 30 minutes late or early to their first service.

Key elements

If you decide to take the next step with your website by turning it from a static Web page to a dynamic experience, keep these key elements in mind:

► Keep your front page updated with easy-to-find information about upcoming events, new Bible studies and sermon series.

► Put yourself in the shoes of a first-time guest. What kind of information would you want when coming to your church for the first time? Examples include downloadable campus maps, a weekly schedule that is updated often, a section on what to expect (including details on where to park) and how to dress.

► Clarify what your church is about. If you have a mission statement, explain it and how your church puts it into action.

► Explain the ministries of your church in detail. Don't make the mistake of publicizing a ministry that's inactive for the sake of making your church look bigger or busier. Include a listing of Bible studies or Sunday School classes so that guests can plan out their visits ahead of time.

► If you have video or audio available, including it on your website is not only great for guests but also for church members who might have missed a Sunday or want to hear what the pastor said again. It's also great to include access to the church's publications.

► Include a calendar of everything that goes on with your church. If it's outside the normal weekly schedule, add it on your calendar.

The key is keeping all this content up to date so that when people are looking for more information about your church, they can find it. ☛

November is National Adoption Month

By Judy W. Bates
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Erin Webster Turnell

Foster care, adoption tremendous missions field in Alabama

Every month, there are more than 1,000 children in need of foster homes. And that figure includes only Jefferson County. Statewide, the numbers top 6,000.

How does a child end up in foster care?

Andrea McTyer, program manager for Jefferson County Foster Care, said when a child cannot safely stay with parents or relatives, Alabama's Department of Human Resources tries to match the child with a family that can take care of him or her until hopefully the child can be returned to his or her own family.

"Anyone interested in becoming a foster parent can begin the process by contacting DHR and registering for and attending orientation classes to learn about the requirements," she said, acknowledging an overwhelming need for foster homes.

Potential foster parents can become licensed by attending 10 weekly classes and undergoing background checks and home studies by social workers.

"It has to be a calling," McTyer said of becoming a foster parent. "To take in strangers and raise those children as if they were your own — whether it's for two hours or two years — you have to have a special heart. You have to understand that you may only be there for a season in a child's life."

When a child enters foster care, the birth parent has 12 months to meet the requirements to have the child returned. If the birth parent doesn't do it, qualified relatives are sought.

"Whenever possible, we want to see the child reunified with family," McTyer said. "However, if this can't be achieved, the child can be adopted."

McTyer said anyone interested in adopting must attend the same classes as potential foster parents, and they will be licensed as potential adoptive parents. While it is not necessary to be a foster parent in order to adopt, a child's foster parents are given first consideration if the child comes up for adoption.

Over the past five years, Greg and Tracy Hacker of Gardendale's First Baptist Church have welcomed 24 foster children into their home. Their two biological daughters, Shelby and Kayla, both teenagers, enjoy being a part of this constantly changing family dynamic, which includes their adopted preschool-aged brothers, Evan and Kenny.

"They were natural brothers who had been with us for about two-and-a-half years, and there were no family members they could be placed with," Tracy Hacker said. "The adoption process took about two of those years and was worth every minute. We can't imagine our lives without these boys."

While the Hackers cautioned that foster parents should not expect to adopt every child they care for (out of 24 foster children, the Hackers were only able to adopt two), Greg Hacker said he and Tracy have

been blessed by their experience as foster parents.

"Our faith is much stronger because of what we've seen God do through the ministry of foster care," he said.

One way the Hackers saw God's grace was through the deep bond they developed with Rebekah, the mother of the first foster children the Hackers brought into their home.

Rebekah's four children were returned to her in 2009, and since then she and the Hackers have been close.

Rebekah and her husband recently visited with the Hackers.

"I was with my kids' dad — a bad situation — at the time my children were taken into foster care," Rebekah said.

"Foster care seemed like a bad thing at the beginning, but it turned out to be sort of a blind blessing," she said. "While I was getting my life in order, I knew my children were being well cared for."

Standing in the gap

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) stands in the gap to help find foster parents, with most of its children coming from DHR referrals. Its foster parents receive more help than usual, since they are assigned both a DHR social worker and an ABCH staff social worker.

"Our social workers don't have the huge case loads that the state social workers have," said Louise Green, vice president of special programs for ABCH. "This makes them more accessible, and this makes our placements more successful — that and a lot of prayer."

LifeLine Children's Services, a nonprofit Christian orphan care ministry facilitating private and international adoptions, also partners with DHR to provide foster homes for local children until they can be united with their birth parents.

Traci Newell, LifeLine's education coordinator, said she and her husband Marc have had 11 foster children in their home and adopted the 11th child, now their daughter.

"When it comes to our foster parents, we stress our goal of reunification," she said. "When foster parents share Christ with these children and they return home, it's really a ministry to the entire family, including the birth parents."

Steven Washington of Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, in Walker Baptist Association, recalled his launch into foster parenting.

"When my wife Angela told me she'd been praying and felt we should become foster parents, I told her she'd heard wrong," he said. "I had all these fears about fostering. But after attending foster parenting classes, we tried it, and as God's providence would

have it, we both loved it."

Mike and Melissa Jeffers of Wilton Bible Baptist Church, Wilton, in Shelby Baptist Association, were introduced to foster parenting through neighbors who were foster parents. The Jeffers made the decision to become respite parents, foster parents who keep foster parents' children for extended periods of time for various reasons. They also accept children needing emergency placement.

"When we made the decision to become foster parents, we set three specific goals: to provide a stable, loving home; to introduce the children to Christ; and to provide them with life skills that will hopefully help them break the cycle of living that initiated their removal from their birth families," Mike Jeffers said.

Tammy and Chris Liddell, members of Grace Life Baptist Church, McCalla, in Bessemer Baptist Association, adopted their daughter Lynzie from an overcrowded orphanage in China with minimal facilities. It's a place they say they will never forget.

"Every time I look at Lynzie, I think how many more are over in China who will never get the opportunities she has," Chris Liddell said. "And to think that I was the one who wanted my own (natural-born) child, my blood. I thought I'd feel something missing. But with Lynzie, there was an immediate bond between the three of us. This was God. I've never doubted that for one second."

Tax refunds

The Liddells said the adoption process was expensive but that a lot of the costs can be offset by tax refunds that kick in during the years after the adoption is finalized.

The needs for foster care and adoption are tremendous. Although churches and individual church members are answering the call, there's still room for many more.

"There's such a disparity between the number of children and the number of homes," Newell said. "Foster care is going to be around until Christ returns, and it's a tremendous missions field." ■

What if every Alabama Baptist church supported foster care?

By Rod Marshall
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists truly could change the landscape of foster care in the state with one simple strategy — every church find two families within the congregation willing to be foster families. In fact, a move like this would mean that a Christian foster home would be available for every child that needs foster care in the state.

Such a strategy would mean financial support would need to increase accordingly. But that too is an achievable goal if we band together with our Christian brothers and sisters in the state to attain it.

According to the Department of Human Resources of Alabama, there are currently 6,400 children in our state's foster care system. Six thousand, four hundred children who — for myriad reasons — cannot live with their biological family. Six thousand, four hundred children who may have experienced abuse or neglect. Six thousand, four hundred children who may have never been read to, sung to or rocked to sleep. Six thousand, four hundred children who may have thought it unusual to have a hot meal for supper or who may have never been tucked in at night. Six thousand, four hundred children.

Interestingly, there are approximately 3,200 Southern Baptist congregations in Alabama. According to The Encyclopedia of Alabama (encyclopediaofalabama.org), about one-fourth of the state's 4 million residents are Baptists. One million Baptists in Alabama and 6,400 children in foster care. If every congregation decided to begin earnestly praying and seeking two families in their congregation who would be willing to become foster parents, then every child in need of foster care could learn to sing "Jesus Loves Me" and would spend time in a Christian home and a caring community of faith.

If there are 1 million Baptists in our state, that means that if 1 percent of Alabama Baptists, or about 10,000, prayerfully considered and accepted the call to ministry through Christian foster care, then there would be more Baptists desiring to be foster parents than there are children in need of foster care services.

If for every Southern Baptist church in our state, there are three other Christian congregations who participate in some other faith tradition (Methodists, Presbyterians, Church of Christ, Pentecostals, Charismatics, nondenominational, etc.), then there could be as many as 12,800 Christian congregations in our state.

The approximate cost of one year of foster care is \$11,000. For 6,400 children the annual cost is \$70,400,000. For any one ministry to try to provide full-service foster care to all of those children would

likely lead to bankruptcy. However, if each of our 12,800 congregations committed to provide \$5,500 (barely over \$100 per week) to care for the fatherless, we could easily cover the expense of caring for 6,400 children. If for every Southern Baptist in Alabama, there is one other Christian from another faith tradition, then there must be 2 million Christians in Alabama. If that is the case, every Christian could commit to \$35.20 per year (\$0.68 per week) to completely cover the cost of saving a child's life. And if congregations engaged in foster care as a community of faith ministry, the cost of that care could be greatly reduced.

If Alabama Baptists lead the way in declaring that we must commit to making available a Christian foster home for any and every child in need, might our Christian sisters and brothers of other denomi-

national traditions join us in our declaration? Jesus said, "As you have done it unto the least of these, so have you done it unto Me." Six thousand, four hundred "least of these" in Alabama wait to see if we take the teachings of our Lord seriously. I have a hard time understanding why a Christian foster home would not be available for every child in need of care in our state.

If you feel called to the ministry of Christian foster care, you have many options to pursue your calling. You could become a foster parent through Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. You could be trained and licensed by another ministry or agency in your community. You could also become trained and licensed by the Department of Human Resources in your home county. The process of going through the training and becoming a foster family takes about six months and involves lots of training, multiple background checks and a home study. Believe it or not, many foster parents describe the training as "fun."

Matthew 9:36-37 says, "Jesus saw the multitudes and He was moved with compassion because they fainted, and were scattered about, like sheep without a shepherd." I wonder if Jesus sees the same thing when He looks at 6,400 fatherless children in Alabama and I wonder if He is once again moved to compassion? Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Your Alabama Baptist Children's Homes stands ready to be an equippier of laborers. Please join us in praying to the Lord of the Harvest that laborers would be sent forth.

To contact Alabama Baptist Children's Homes, call 1-888-720-8805 or visit alabamachild.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Rod Marshall is executive director of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. ☞



Photo by Rebekah Motley

Rebekah Motley writes on her blog of her adopted daughter, Eden (right), "After months and months of pictures ... always serious, always frowning ... now look at her. If this isn't the face of happiness and restoration, I don't know what is."

'Be the hope'

Adoption blesses parents, children, experts say

Faith Hill. Steve Jobs. Babe Ruth. They all have one thing in common. They were adopted.

It is estimated that more than 104,000 children and youth are waiting in the United States' foster care system to be adopted, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The actual number of children and youth awaiting adoption may be higher, however. For example, statistics from the HHS website exclude youth whose parental rights have been terminated.

Ryan Bomberger, an adopted son and an adoptive father, said an adoption's impact can be far-reaching.

"Adopt. Be the hope. That's what adoption is. It provides hope not just for that child, because that hope that transforms affects the child; it affects the family; it affects the community," Bomberger said in a speech last year at the Washington-based Family Research Council (FRC).

FRC invited Bomberger, chief creative officer of the Radiance Foundation, a pro-life organization, to speak in observance of National Adoption Month, which is every November.

"We all have intrinsic value that is not assigned to us by man or woman but that's given to us from the moment of conception," Bomberger said.

"[The Radiance Foundation's] emphasis is derived from Psalm 139 not just because we're planned. In fact," he said, "I think some of the best things are unplanned."

From 2001-2011 there have been between 50,000 to 65,000 children adopted yearly out of the foster-care system, according to Bomberger's research.

While there are many

families who would love to adopt and do adopt, Bomberger acknowledged during the event that adoption takes sacrifice. By sacrificing not just personally but also financially, parents adopting and loving a child give that child a purpose in life, he said.

Bomberger's adoptive parents already had children and could have lived a comfortable lifestyle, if they had not adopted the children that they did, he said. By sacrificing many things, including finances, they were able to give love and a home to many other children. Bomberger's parents had three children biologically and adopted 10 more, including him.

Because he was adopted and has adopted children with his wife, Bomberger encourages others to get involved — even if getting involved does not mean adopting but working with a pregnancy care center or youth organization.

The Radiance Foundation is an organization that seeks to guide people to embrace the sanctity of all human life and to live meaningful lives.

Statistics on adoption from foster care can be found at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/afcars>. (BP)



Photo courtesy of Karissa Kassing

Now a mother of five, Karissa Kassing says, "Adoption not only blesses the children, but the entire family, and opens doors for Jesus each step of the way. We are blessed."

Election ballot issues

Traditional Christian values fair poorly among voters across nation

Elections ran high leading up to the Nov. 6 election, and with an almost evenly divided nation when it came to the presidential candidates much of the focus remained on the resulting reelection of President Barack Obama.

It has been reported that evangelicals turned out as much for Mitt Romney (or against Obama) as they did for George W. Bush — but that nearly 80 percent margin was still not enough in raw numbers to put the GOP ticket over the top.

In other ballot issues, evangelical Christians and other social conservatives also took a blow with the support of gay “marriage” in three states.

Maine, Maryland and Washington state became the first states to support same-sex “marriage” in popular votes. They broke a losing streak for gay “marriage” supporters across 32 states since 1998.

All of the vote totals were fairly close and all took place in left-leaning states. Nevertheless, it was a landmark night for gay activists who had longed to see

citizens of a state embrace gay “marriage” at the ballot.

In Maine, gay “marriage” won 53–47 percent, three years after it lost by an identical margin. In Maryland, gay “marriage” was victorious 52–48 percent. In Washington, gay “marriage” won 52–48 percent.

And in Minnesota, a constitutional amendment that would have defined marriage as between a man and a woman lost 51–48 percent.

Nine states now recognize gay “marriage,” although the laws in Maine and Maryland will not take effect until January. Thirty states have constitutional amendments defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

The election also resulted in the first openly homosexual member of the U.S. Senate — Democrat Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin.

The recreational use of marijuana also surfaced on ballots

in two states; the medical use of marijuana was voted on in two other states.

In Colorado the amendment will allow people age 21 and older to purchase as much as 1 ounce of marijuana at regulated retail stores or grow up to six marijuana plants at home. Public use of the drug will remain illegal. Adults in Washington will be allowed to possess an ounce of marijuana, but it will be illegal to drive while impaired by the drug.

Before the election, 17 states and the District of Columbia had legalized medical marijuana, including Colorado, Washington and Oregon. On Nov. 6 voters in Massachusetts approved medical marijuana measures, but it was rejected in Arkansas.

An election night that largely was bleak for social conservatives had a few bright spots, including one in Massachusetts, where voters narrowly rejected a measure that would have legal-

ized physician-assisted suicide.

The measure known as Question 2 was defeated 51–49 percent. It would have placed Massachusetts alongside Oregon and Washington state in legalizing the controversial practice.

In Montana voters passed a pro-life measure requiring that parents be notified when girls under the age of 16 try to obtain an abortion. It passed with 66 percent of the vote.

In Oregon two gambling measures were defeated. Measure 82 would have allowed non-tribal casinos and Measure 83 would have authorized such a casino in Multnomah County. They were defeated, 72–28 and 71–29 percent, respectively.

But Maryland passed an initiative that will allow a Las Vegas-style casino in Prince George’s County and table-type gambling at the five casinos already in existence. Rhode Island also passed two gambling measures that will permit slot parlors in two specific localities to add table games.

In Alabama, a personality on the ballot captured much of the attention as the votes were counted.

Roy Moore won the race for chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court with 52 percent of the vote, meaning he will return to the position he once held. Moore, a member of First Baptist Church, Gallant, rose to prominence by placing a Ten Commandments monument in the lobby of the Alabama Judicial Building. He was removed from office in 2003 by a judicial panel after he refused to obey an order to remove the monument. He has said he will not return the monument to the building.

“It never was about the monument — it was about the sovereignty of God. If we are to be free and blessed, we have to acknowledge Him,” Moore said.

“To attempt to put the monument back would only confuse the issue — it would become about me and my will, or the monument itself, rather than about the sovereignty of God.”

With the outcome of the election in full view, prayer is needed in America more than ever, Baptist leaders said.

Fred Luter, the Southern Baptist Convention’s (SBC) first African American president, said the Bible encourages Christians to pray for those in authority regardless of their political affiliation.

“As citizens of the United States, it’s now time for us to put away our yard signs and buttons and [pray for] our president,” Luter said. “Our nation is in trouble, and we need believers to pray God’s will be done in America. We need to understand it’s only going to happen because the people of God start praying for revival in America.” (BP, RNS, TAB)

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What do religious leaders want for Obama's next four years?

Addressing poverty. Seeking reconciliation. Protecting religious freedom. Religious leaders already have their wish lists ready for President Obama's second term.



Kathryn Mary Lohre

president of the National Council of Churches

As followers of Christ, we hope and work for a world in which people have nutritious food to eat, safe water to drink, affordable places to live, access to quality medical care and opportunities for fulfilling work. ... President Obama, we now join others in calling you ... to adopt and implement bold policies that will provide for "the least of these" (Matt. 25), addressing the root causes of poverty and creating life-giving vocational opportunities. Eradicating poverty is a moral issue.



Richard Land

president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Our nation is in dire need of sound, principled leadership. ... I believe (the following) are essential to the future stability and prosperity of our nation: Sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death; religious freedom; sanctity of (traditional) marriage; bipartisan program to cut the national debt and stimulate economic growth; fair immigration reform; Israel's right to exist within secure and defensible borders; reduce the impact of hardcore pornography and eliminate sex trafficking.



Samuel Rodriguez

president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

My prayer is that our president advances an agenda that protects life, strengthens the family (and) protects religious liberty while globally advocating for religious pluralism, especially in Muslim nations. In addition I pray that our president engages his Christian optics in the spirit of reconciliation for the purpose of healing our nation. This will require him to provide not just political but moral leadership that refuses to sacrifice truth on the altar of political expediency.



David Beckmann

president of Bread for the World

This election is the first step in what we are hoping will be a strong U.S. commitment to ending hunger — both domestically and globally. ... There is more than enough food to feed the more than 7 billion people around the world, yet hunger and poverty persist on a large scale even in the United States. During his four-year term we expect the president to set a goal to end hunger while ensuring that we do not balance the federal budget on the backs of hungry and poor people.



Sister Mary Ann Walsh

spokeswoman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

We (seek) legislation that protects the vulnerable, including infants in utero and the elderly; efforts to help immigrants seeking ... citizenship; help for the poor; support for religious liberty; legislation on the institution of marriage that guarantees a child's right to be raised in a loving home by a caring mother and father; civility in dialogue and bipartisanship in government so all Americans can work as one for the spiritual and material health of our country and our world.



Leith Anderson

president of the National Association of Evangelicals

I believe God has blessed our nation and my number one prayer and hope for the president over the next four years is that God will continue to bless America under his leadership. My desire is that President Obama and his administration will bring Americans together in peace without a national crisis and will fulfill the vision of the Old Testament prophet Micah: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



Carroll A. Baltimore Sr.

president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention

It is my sincere desire that President Obama will lead in addressing the issues of poverty and its long-term effects on our entire society. Over the past decades we have cut critical social and educational programs that have plummeted countless children and adults into poverty. We need to enact policies and practices that lift people out of poverty. The religious community and other entities are doing a great deal to help, but our policies and laws need to be revisited.



Rabbi David Saperstein

director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Help Americans recover from the recent economic downturn. Don't weaken the safety net elements such as food stamps, Medicaid and Social Security. Allow states to make their own decisions about gay "marriage." Work to ban employment discrimination. Address the plight of undocumented immigrants. Reinvigorate efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Support religious freedom as a universal norm and address global warming before it spins out of control.

Year-round emphasis

Christmas project now ongoing mission for Rockford's Sardis

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

This might work for us.” Shelia Hardy put down her Dec. 22, 2011, copy of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper and decided to present a new idea to the leadership at Sardis Baptist Church, Rockford: yearlong Operation Christmas Child (OCC) collection.

Hardy and her husband, Pastor Jeff Hardy, began to lead Sardis Baptist in 2004 and have seen the church of about 70 participate in OCC every year, donating around 30 shoeboxes filled with toys and other items for needy children worldwide. OCC is a Samaritan's Purse ministry that seeks to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way through the global distribution of donated gift-filled shoeboxes.

Expanding the ministry

Each Christmas season, leadership at the Central Baptist Association church shared promotional videos and material and reminded everyone how to donate the items, Shelia Hardy said, but the church was “basically doing [OCC] but not really changing anything” in order to expand.

She read about a Bibb Baptist Association church in the paper (see story at www.thealabamabaptist.org/print-edition-article-detail.php?id_art=21760) that collected

items throughout the year and as a result more than doubled its number of donated boxes.

After reading the article, she said, “It just kind of jumped out at me that something like that may be something our church could do.”

“I talked [with leadership at Sardis] to see what they thought and they all liked the idea,” she said.

Shelia Hardy took the sample schedule found in the article and changed a few items to fit Sardis' needs. In January 2012, the church started collecting items month by month, she said.

A large box was placed in the foyer of the church to collect the donations. In January, for example, Sardis collected toothbrushes and toothpaste. In July plastic boxes were collected. Donations for shipping the boxes, which costs approximately \$7 per box, were collected during the first two weeks of November.

On Oct. 9, several church members of all ages gathered at the church to begin packing the items into the already collected plastic shoebox containers: a total of 60. But they're not done yet.

This year, instead of the usual 30 boxes, Shelia Hardy anticipates about 65 boxes.

Donna Miller, missions coordinator at Sardis, said everyone was excited to begin packing the boxes.

“We worked together [on Oct.

9] and it wasn't just like a machine just putting things in a box,” Miller said. “We all thought about [each box and item] a lot before we finished up packing [each one]. ... It was fun.”

The 60 completed boxes currently reside in the foyer at the church for people to see a physical example of the work they were a part of.

‘Wonderful undertaking’

Miller said the new way of collecting for OCC has been “a wonderful undertaking” and “God has blessed through it because so many people are so excited about [OCC].”

Both women hope “other churches in the state can [also be inspired]” and donate more through OCC, just as they were after reading the 2011 article about a small church “making a big impact on children around the world.”

Pastor Jeff Hardy said he thinks the yearlong collection worked well. He also said he heard positive feedback about how collecting throughout the year relieved a financial burden around the Christmas season.

Shelia Hardy said her family, who usually gives three boxes to OCC each year (one from each child in the family), probably gave much more than usual in 2012 because the collection was spread out over 10 to 11 months.



Photo courtesy of Sardis Baptist Church

UNDERSTANDING MISSIONS — Sardis Baptist Church, Rockford, collected items for Operation Christmas Child month by month. The church anticipates having 60 to 65 boxes this year.

Sardis delivered the packed boxes to Thelma Baptist Church, Wetumpka, the closest collection center, in time for Thelma Baptist to transport them to OCC's Southeast Region Processing Center in Atlanta for National Collection Week on Nov. 12–19.

And Miller is excited to see what happens in the future at Sardis because she said this year's OCC project really “helped the kids [at Sardis].”

“[The kids] are inspired now and understand missions even better. They know that the [OCC] box is the only Christmas that some children get in another country and that really gets them excited to help those who are less fortunate. It makes the kids appreciate where [they] live and the life that [they] are blessed with.”

For more information on OCC, visit www.samaritanaspurse.org/index.php/occ/.



By Christine Kapurch
Correspondent, TAB

Someone You Should Know

CHERYL MYERS

First Baptist Church, Shawmut, in Valley
East Liberty Association



MYERS

FAVORITE VERSE: The Book of Luke
FAVORITE HYMN: “Joy to the World”
HOBBIES: Reading

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Hermon
for 42 years; four children,
James, Jeffrey, Tony and Chris-
tian; five grandchildren

Cheryl Myers, a member of First Baptist Church, Shawmut, has been the director of the Christian Service Center in East Liberty Baptist Association for 22 years. Myers and her family also deliver toys to needy children every Christmas Eve.

Q: What led you to serve in the ministry?

A: I felt God calling me to do missions [work] when I was 13 years old.

Q: Why have you continued through the years?

A: Because it's a pleasure and a joy to know that we are meeting the needs of the less fortunate in our community and we can

be a witness to them. We are very thankful to live in the community we live in where different churches are able to provide the services we need.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: Time ... a lot of time. We never know when the phone rings what it's going to be. It could be a stove or washing machine that someone needs. People call literally 24 hours a day. We try to be available whenever there's a need.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: A sense of peace and a satisfaction in knowing that something we do might

be a catalyst to the Lord.

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

A: I would like to say that I still see us here 20 years from now. There's always going to be a need for the services we provide, and I pray that we are going to be here for a long time.

Q: What difference will this ministry make for you in the future?

A: Well I'm not sure about us, but for the families we serve we hope they will become more independent. We also hope they realize there is a Christian community that wants to help serve them.

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Standing on convictions

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

Areas in Alabama stay dry while others go wet following Nov. 6 elections

In addition to voting for the U.S. president and a host of other offices and amendments Nov. 6, some areas of Alabama had an extra question on their ballot: whether or not to legalize alcohol sales.

Voters in Hartselle and Blount County managed to keep their areas dry, while Randolph County, Rogersville, Boaz and Priceville all voted to go wet.

These were the areas known at press time with wet/dry elections Nov. 6.

Randolph County voted to legalize alcohol sales by almost 800 votes, according to a report by *The Anniston Star*.

"It was a very disappointing loss and we campaigned very hard," said Clayton Scott, director of missions for Randolph Baptist Association, who is also in charge of publicity for Citizens of Truth, a group encouraging Randolph County voters to vote against legalizing alcohol sales. "I went to bed Monday night pretty well confident that we were going to succeed again."

Scott believes one problem was that the question was located on the back of the ballot underneath the other amendments and that some voters may have not even paid attention to it.

Wet opponents in Boaz also

battled hard, but the wet votes still prevailed. According to unofficial results reported by the *Sand Mountain Reporter*, more than 2,800 Boaz residents cast ballots for the referendum, with the wet side winning by 156 votes.

'Forged' signatures

However, some wet opponents have contested the election, said Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Baptist Association. He said some voters feel the issue should not have been placed on the ballot at all. This is because the petition to allow the referendum on the ballot had forged signatures, according to claims from voters cited in the *Sand Mountain Reporter*. Some Boaz

residents have since contacted the attorney general's office about the controversy to attempt to have the decision overturned, according to a report in the *Sand Mountain Reporter*.

The town of Rogersville also voted to go wet. WHNT News 19 reported that election results showed 290 people voted in favor of legalizing alcohol sales while 213 voted against it.

Meanwhile, Hartselle remains Alabama's largest dry city in the state. According to an al.com news report, the vote there was 3,478 to 3,066.

Donnell Brown, director of missions for Morgan Baptist Association, said the organization Families for a Safe Hartselle that encouraged voters to "vote no" included people from the area churches. He said the churches in the city worked together months ahead of the vote. "We won the vote [and] I was happy about that," Brown said. He added that while the margin was "pretty close," it also was "pretty impressive."

Despite the big win for wet opponents in Hartselle the city's neighbor municipality of Priceville voted to go wet. "We were hoping to win that one, too, but [we are] glad we won this one [in Hartselle]," Brown noted.

He said he is thankful that churches across denominational lines worked together for a common goal, and he is pleased that it was a "collective effort" of folks working together.

Blount County wet opponents also had something to celebrate with 11,587 "no" votes to 11,427 "yes" votes, according to an al.com report that noted the county website had reported 27 of its 28 precincts.

This was the second time in four years the wet/dry issue has come up for a vote in Blount County. In 2008 those advocating to go wet in the county were defeated by a percentage margin of 60-40. This time around it was different, with less than 200 votes separating the two sides. But despite the narrow victory, wet opponents like the 501(c)(4) group Keep Blount County Special were elated at the outcome.

"It was a very close vote and we knew it would be a close vote," said Larry Gipson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oneonta, and chairman of Keep Blount County Special.

Educating students

"We are excited ... about the fact it (the measure) failed," he added, noting that one future goal will be to work with Alabama Citizens Action Program to educate area students about the dangers of alcohol.

"We will continue to do what we feel led to do and stand on our convictions," Gipson concluded.

In related news, voters in Dallas County legalized Sunday alcohol sales. According to the *Selma Times-Journal*, just over 65 percent of votes were cast in support of the Sunday sales. ☛



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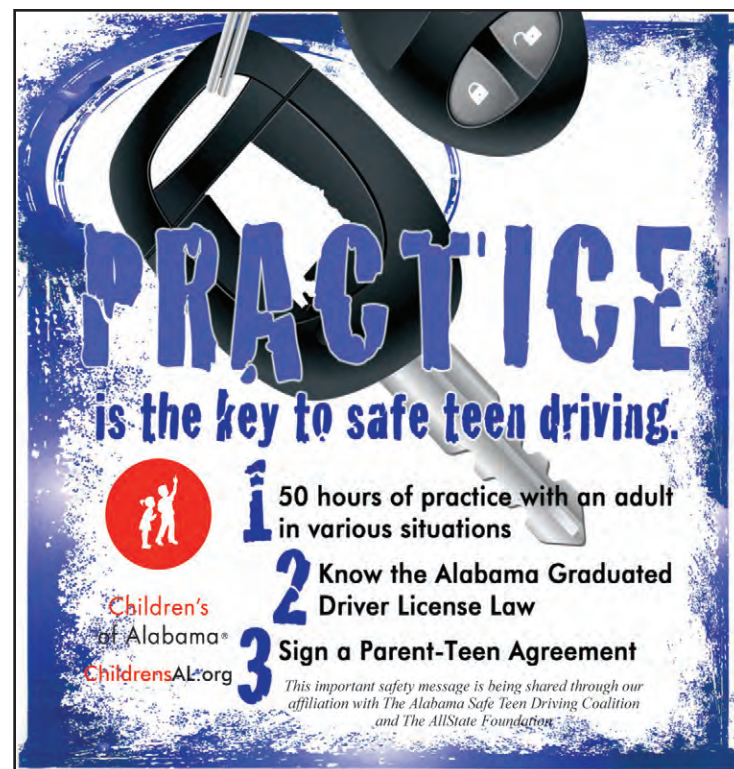


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Operation Open

Princeton Baptist Medical Center opens its new \$57 million East Expansion

After years of planning, gifts from thousands of selfless donors and months of meticulous construction, the wait at Princeton Baptist is over. A bright and brand new Princeton East Expansion officially opened its doors November 13, ready to even better serve the West End and surrounding communities. The largest construction project ever undertaken in the area, the impact will be dramatic.

Rising up over the east end of Princeton's campus, the new construction features a stunning, modern glass and steel exterior. More than a face-lift, the 90,000 square foot expansion features \$15.5 million of cutting-edge equipment that will deliver a level of care unsurpassed in the Birmingham area.

Entering through the covered drive and stepping inside, most noticeable is an abundance of open space and a pouring in of natural light. Upon entering the bright lobby, visitors see the Princeton Chapel, a centerpiece in the round inviting all to share a moment of prayer or quiet reflection.

But it's what most visitors and patients won't see that will make the biggest impact. Sixteen oversized surgery suites and two special procedure rooms feature the latest technology. Each operating



Princeton Baptist's new expansion includes the first in-room, multi-specialty imaging machine in Alabama.

room is designed and equipped to accommodate specific specialties including cardiovascular, neurosurgery, orthopedics, multi specialties and general surgery. One of the most notable pieces of new equipment is the in-room, multi-specialty imaging machine – the first in Alabama – that guides surgeons in real time as they perform procedures on patients. DaVinci robots in two of the rooms assist physicians with intricate surgeries.

While patients are in the new state-of-the-art surgery suites, their loved ones can stay in the comfort of the new surgery waiting area, which features more than double the space of the previous waiting room. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide an open concept and comfortable seating with a relaxing and inviting environment helps ease the tension as families await news from the surgery staff.

Keith Parrott, Baptist Health System's

“This project was a conscious decision by Baptist Health System to continue to support the West End community and families who have come to depend on Princeton Baptist for more than 90 years. This is a testament to our Mission of ministering to the health, dignity and wholeness of those we serve.”

chief operating officer has lived and breathed this project, beginning with just a dream to today as the dream comes to fruition. “Investing in this expansion extends beyond the financial commitment. This project was a conscious decision by Baptist Health System to continue to support the West End community and families who have

come to depend on Princeton Baptist for more than 90 years. This is a testament to our Mission of ministering to the ‘health, dignity and wholeness of those we serve.’”

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'Called to Communicate'

By Brian Harris
Special to The Alabama Baptist

'Glorify God,' Alabama pastors hear

There's a "radical difference" between a message being about God and being from God, Jim Shaddix said.

"Make sure your goal in communication is to glorify God alone," he told the more than 300 pastors and church staff present at the 2012 Called to Communicate conference.

The event, sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), focused on helping pastors take their preaching, speaking and teaching to the next level of effectiveness.

Those present at the Nov. 1 conference at Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, heard challenges from Shaddix, pastor of teaching and training at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, and Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Shaddix, who also serves as professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., led the morning session and focused on the topic of "Preaching with Power." He was quick to remind participants how easy it is to turn the focus away from the gospel and toward the pastor. In some

extreme cases the pastors become almost "rock stars," he said, and the message gets lost.

Shaddix also noted how tempting it is for a pastor to fill his message with unimportant things. "The passion of our lives must be biblical exposition," he said.

Luter told pastors they must be prepared as messengers. "We need more preachers, more pastors who have a healthy fear of God," he said.

Luter said pastors can easily get caught up in the business of the church and neglect to spend time in prayer and preparation. "My vertical relationship to God affects my horizontal relationship to man," he said.

Foundational to communicating effectively, Luter said, is to remember that being a pastor is not just a job. "Preaching is a calling, not a career," he said.

Luter also spoke about his role as president of the SBC and the



Photo by Doug Rogers

Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, challenges ministers at the 2012 Called to Communicate conference in Montgomery Nov. 1.

challenges that have been borne out of his new responsibilities.

He said the experience has reminded him of the high priority his family should have. "Pastors, your families come before your church," he said, to a chorus of ams throughout the room.

After the conference, Bradley Rushing, pastor of Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan, posted on Twitter, "Enjoyed sitting under the teaching of Jim Shaddix and Fred Luter. Two men of God with wisdom gained through years of faithful service."

Mike Jackson, director of the SBOM office of leadership and church health, which facilitated

the event, said he was pleased with the conference and the quality of the presentations.

"We're delighted that Fred and

Jim could be with us for the day and grateful for the information and inspiration these two servant leaders provided," he said. ☞

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Student Test Scores Rise But Achievement Gaps Persist

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Last spring students in grades 3–8 of Alabama's public schools took statewide tests of reading and math skills. The results were generally better than the year before and continued a pattern of progress that stretches back to 2005. However, Alabama still must close two persistent test-score gaps: between students from impoverished and more affluent backgrounds, and between black and white students.

Student results on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) are given a grade and tabulated by socioeconomic group to measure progress for all types of students.

Competing nationally

The Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) looks at the percentages of students who score at Level 4 (in effect, make an "A"). This is important because the state's grades are lenient. Alabama's students must be prepared to compete in a national marketplace. That won't happen if we set the bar too low.

PARCA also looks at results for white and black students, and for students from poverty and non-poverty backgrounds. This enables us to measure progress in eliminating well-known performance gaps between those socioeconomic groups. Enabling all types of students to succeed is crucial to Alabama's economic development.

We find that substantial percentages of students are able to make A's on the ARMT. The question is why others do not.

For example, the fourth-grade math results for 2012 show that 73 percent of non-poverty students made an A, while only 50 percent of students from poverty backgrounds did so. While scores have been rising in both groups, this gap of 20 to 25 percentage points between the two groups has persisted over time.

Reading results are similar. In the fourth grade 67 percent of white students made an A in 2012, as compared to only 39 percent of black students. Gaps of 25 to 30 percentage points between these two groups have persisted over time.

These large gaps in student results are not inevitable, and they do not occur in every school. In Mobile County's George Hall Elementary School, where almost all students are black and from poverty backgrounds, 90 percent of fourth-graders made an A in math. In the all-white, all-non-poverty Mountain Brook Elementary School, 94 percent of fourth-graders did the same. In both schools very high percentages of students received A's on both tests at all grade levels.

Our goal must be to make such results the norm. Test scores for every school and school system in the state are available on the PARCA website (<http://parca.samford.edu>).

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



Photo courtesy of Dianne Nichols

TEAM EFFORT — Ephesus Baptist Church, Sprott, dedicates its new building during a special service combined with its annual homecoming event Nov. 4. The church was badly damaged during a January tornado.

'A labor of love'

Sprott's Ephesus Baptist rebuilds after January tornado

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

After a tornado badly damaged Ephesus Baptist Church, Sprott, on Jan. 23, the congregation sprang into action to get its building back in order.

One of its two buildings — the one that housed both the sanctuary and the Sunday School rooms — was almost destroyed by the storm, so the church met in the adjoining fellowship hall while the other space was being rebuilt.

Though Ephesus is a small congregation, with about 25 in attendance each Sunday, it was able to pull together a wealth of resources that made it possible for them to

be back in their church building within the year.

"We were fortunate to get back into our sanctuary that quickly," said Pastor Henry Levert. "We were also fortunate that we were able to hold our services in the fellowship hall during the construction."

"We realized during the summer that the project could be completed in the fall," said church member Dianne Nichols. "The Nov. 4 date was picked as a target date for completion because it is so close to the date the church was founded 147 years ago on Nov. 5, 1865. It was a team effort and a labor of love for us all."

The reconstructed building

came together quickly due to an outpouring of support both from church members and from friends far and wide. After Ephesus had the foundation slab poured in place, a group from Georgia came and framed the building.

Then a group called Bethel Baptist Builders, an organization that offers assistance to local congregations with construction needs, handled the electrical wiring.

A church from Selma installed the insulation, and a former Ephesus church member who now lives in Alabaster did some interior and roofing work.

"We really had everyone rally around us in the rebuild," Levert said. "Everyone got involved in some way or another."

To dedicate the new building, Ephesus held a special service Nov. 4 and combined it with their annual homecoming event. It made for an especially large turnout.

"This is a new beginning for our church and a time for us to remember how blessed we've been," Levert said. "After this year, we're going to be closer to each other and better at realizing how good God is."

As for member David Wallace, he is thankful the construction is complete so that the church can begin to work toward the next chapter in its ministry.

"Our church wasn't in the best condition, and I guess the good Lord just saw that maybe we needed a new church, and there wasn't any way of us being able to build a new one," Wallace said. "Now that everything's done, we're looking forward to things getting somewhat back to normal."

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Pastors & stress

Pressure, stress on clergy have negative spiritual, physical effects

Most members of the clergy are taught to put the physical and spiritual needs of others first, but that self-denial may be harmful to their own health, according to a new Duke University study.

Studies of United Methodist pastors in North Carolina found high rates of chronic disease and depression, and researchers worry it can be difficult to convince clergy to seek help.

To address these unique problems, Duke Divinity School's Clergy Health Initiative developed a program to provide preventative care in a spiritual context.

"Clergy recognize the importance of caring for themselves, but doing so takes a backseat to fulfilling their vocational responsibilities, which are tantamount to caring for an entire community," said Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, the initiative's research director and assistant research professor at the Duke Global Health Institute.

The institute's research found the 40 percent obesity rate among North Carolina United Methodist clergy eclipsed the state average of 29 percent. Pastors also suffered high rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, arthritis and hypertension. More than 10 percent showed symptoms of depression, about double the national rate.

Despite these health issues, clergy were also more likely to say their health did not negatively affect their work.

Proeschold-Bell said stress, which is tied to overeating and weight gain, comes in many forms for clergy.

Pastors' schedules are unpre-

dictable and filled with diverse activities, resulting in what Proeschold-Bell called "role overload." She also points to an internal pressure to live faithfully and support the community.

"Pastors have lots of social ties, but the support goes only in one direction," she said.

Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he believes Baptist ministers have even more stressors than those of other denominations.

Less security

"A primary reason for that is that there is less security for Baptist ministers. There is no Baptist bishop who can assign you to another place of ministry if things are not going well," Huff said. "The Baptist system is one of churches and not ministers. A Baptist minister can drop out of ministry and disappear overnight."

There is no safety net, he said, and that adds extra pressure.

"Healthy ministers are essential for there to be healthy churches, but there is inadequate consideration and resources for the spiritual, mental and emotional health of Southern Baptist ministers," Huff said.

Initiative director Robin Swift pointed to the prevalence of food as clergy assume their hospitality roles, a factor leading to their high rates of obesity and associated health problems. "The community expects you to be grateful for their hospitality, and community happens a lot around meals," Swift said.

To address these problems the institute created "Spirited Life," a 23-month initiative that

provides spiritual, physical and mental counseling to 1,129 pastors, representing 64 percent of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina. Spirited Life combines stress management, a weight loss program and a healthy dose of theology. It also links clergy to an independent "advocate" to help clergy address concerns.

Proeschold-Bell said Spirited Life is the first study to combine weight loss and stress management interventions into a single program lasting more than a year.

A study by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America found similarly higher rates of physical

and mental health problems in its clergy. That denomination and others have established similar support networks to enhance clerical health.

The Episcopal Church's CREDO Institute provides support for the physical, emotional, financial, vocational and spiritual well-being of clergy. The Presbyterian Church (USA) offers a similar program.

And Huff said some resources are also available to Alabama Baptist ministers (see story, this page). For more information, contact Huff at dhuff@alsbom.org or 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263. (RNS, TAB)

Coping with stress

Short tenures. Short tempers. Angry preaching. A depressed wife.

These are just a few of the ways stress can manifest itself in the life of a pastor, said Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"Mismanaged or unmanaged stress can have negative consequences on one's physical, emotional, relational and spiritual state," Huff said, noting it is a problem rampant among Alabama Baptist pastors. "There is a high rate of frustration and despair."

To do his job, a pastor has to be a change agent, leading his church to be healthier and holier. But often pastors are resistant to change themselves, Huff said.

One way to help make a change is to develop a "big, strong support system" of family, friends, mentors, colleagues, a doctor, a counselor and others.

Breaking away for some weekly, monthly and annual time helps a pastor cope with stress too, he explained.

"Because most churches are single staff, the pastor is subject to being expected to minister on his day off, which he dutifully does, but may have to go two or three weeks without a day off," Huff said. "The church should require a pastor to have reasonable time off for his, his family's and the church's sake."

And a pastor should require himself to sleep and exercise, he added. "Most ministers, as well as most Americans, operate out of a sleep debt, which diminishes their effective functioning. Most ministers are also overweight and do not have an exercise regimen at all."

And many, in their despair, do not practice the spiritual disciplines they encourage their congregation to practice, he said.

The despair often begins with unrealistic expectations on the part of the church and the minister, Huff said. "Many pastors do not have a formal job description, so they have an informal one developed by the expectations of every church member."

And the demands never stop, he said. "There is no end to the needs of people. People-intensive vocations, ministerial or otherwise, have a higher rate of burnout. There is never a finish line — it is constant plodding."

To help pastors, Huff counsels pastors personally and responds to requests from associations to lead conferences. For more information, contact Huff at dhuff@alsbom.org or 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263. (TAB)

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5 of the most difficult challenges pastors face

By Thom S. Rainer
President, LifeWay Christian Resources

Serving as a pastor may be one of the most difficult jobs in the world. Indeed, it may be an impossible job to do in our own strength.

I know. Before I was LifeWay's president or a seminary dean, I served as pastor of four churches.

I have heard from countless pastors in countless churches. Their stories are similar to mine. So I asked the question: What specific part of being a pastor is the most difficult for you? Let's look at five tough challenges for pastors.

1. Responding graciously to someone right before you preach.

The pastor has put hours into the sermon. He has prayed for God's power for that moment. He is focused on God's Word and its proclamation. All of his energy is devoted to the upcoming moment. Then someone rushes up to him with a piece of paper and says, "Pastor, you need to announce about the garage sale we're having this week."

Most of the times I showed grace. A few times I did not and showed something else.

2. Knowing what to do with a staff member who is not making a vital contribution to the church.

Many churches will not let leaders make the tough decision of letting a staff member go, even if he is not really productive and obviously an ill fit for the ministry and the church. Such a move is considered "unchristian" and is not tolerated even if it would ultimately be best for that staff member. Many pastors have lost their own jobs when they made such a move. So we often move those persons to innocuous, low-accountability positions even though we know it is poor stewardship.

3. Loving a person in the church when that person is your critic.

We want to be Christlike and love people unconditionally. I admit that I often saw those people through their critical words instead

of seeing them through the eyes of Christ.

4. Preparing more than one quality sermon a week.

When I was a pastor I had to prepare a Sunday morning sermon, a Sunday evening sermon and a Wednesday evening Bible message. Frankly, it took all I had to prepare one good message. I know many churches no longer have the Sunday evening preaching service, but tens of thousands of pastors still prepare more than one message a week.

5. Doing the funeral of a person who was not a Christian.

We can always hope the person had a deathbed conversion of which we are not aware. And we can always preach messages of comfort to the family and friends. But it is extremely difficult to talk about the deceased if he or she was lost.

Pastors, what wisdom can you share with other pastors regarding these challenges? And laypersons, what can you or your church do to support these pastors? (BP)

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THE BAPTIST FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA

Pure Freedom event encourages mothers, daughters to talk about purity

By Maggie Walsh
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Are you smarter than your hormones?

That was the question posed to more than 300 women and young ladies gathered at Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, Oct. 25 for Pure Freedom, a three-hour mother/daughter event designed to encourage open communication about purity.

The game-show-meets-talk-show event “targets purity of the heart first and foremost,” said Michelle Wilder, a member of Ridgecrest Baptist who attended Pure Freedom.

“It focuses on being pure in heart and mind so you can be pure in relationships and marriage later.”

Modesty and beauty

Developed for moms and their 13- to 18-year-old daughters, the event was founded in 2011 by author and speaker Dannah Gresh as the next step up from Secret Keeper Girl, which confronts the issues of modesty and true beauty for girls aged 8–12.

Ridgecrest student pastor Lloyd Blank said he received a lot of positive feedback about Pure Freedom from the moms who attended the event.

This was the first time the Columbia Baptist Association church has played host to a Pure Freedom event.

Although he did not attend Pure Freedom, Blank saw the night as a great way to “strengthen that bond between mother and daughter, which they desperately need.”

The evening began with a rendition of “Let’s Make a Deal,” followed by a time of praise and worship with Ridgecrest’s praise and worship team and national worship leader Stephanie Peters.

During that time Peters shared her story on remaining pure until marriage.

Brittany Logan, youth chaperone from Arton Baptist Church in Dale Baptist Association, said Peters’ ministry and testimony were “outstanding.”

“[Hers] was one of the stories that touched me the most,” Logan said. “It showed the girls that remaining pure can be done.”

Author Suzie Weibel then spoke, proceeded by a game show called “Are you Smarter than your Hormones” and a “Truth or Bare” fashion show.

The fashion show featured local “modesty models,” such as 14-year-old Michaela Wilder, to

show girls how important modest attire is to remaining pure.

Gresh wrapped up the evening by explaining why God intends women to only share themselves with one man.

When our bodies feel a “good feeling” it releases dopamine, which our brains recognize as a good sensation, Gresh said.

Addicted to husbands

Experiencing these “good feelings” can become an addiction, she explains, and God intends us to only be addicted to our husbands.

Logan said Gresh’s approach was “exceptional,” making attendees laugh and cry while delivering God’s perspective on purity in a way that touched the heart of everyone present.

By the close of the evening seven girls accepted Christ into their hearts.

“I truly believe that because of Dannah’s words and encouragement, many of the young girls who were there will remain pure until marriage,” Logan said. “I so wish that I would’ve gone to something like the Pure Freedom tour when I was younger.”

For more information about Dannah Gresh or Pure Freedom, visit purefreedom.org.

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Family Matters

For third-grader Ty, the tornadoes that hit Tuscaloosa and the rest of the state in April 2011, got him thinking. He, too, had experienced a tornado once, and he wanted to help. But if he could find a way to raise some money, what organization would he give it to? Then Ty thought of Larry Daniels, one of our Pathways Professional Counselors in Flomaton. Because Mr. Daniels worked for Alabama Baptist Children's Homes, that would be a good place to start, Ty figured. So he sent us the following letter, along with a check for \$60.

Circle of Compassion

"Dear Tuscaloosa Victims,

Hi, my name is Ty. I live with my mom and Granddad and Granny. I am 8 years old. I saw the pictures on TV after the storm and it looked really scary! I'm sorry about what happened.

We had a tornado come through Auburn when I used to live there. My dad and I stayed in the garage basement until it was over. We saw it through the windows of the house on our way down to the basement. It did not hit our house, but it did come very close. Trees fell down and took out the power.

I wanted to do something to help boys and girls that were hit by the tornadoes so I had a lemonade stand to raise money to help out. I set it up in my front yard for two days. I was really surprised at all the people that stopped by.

I am giving my money through Alabama Baptist Children's Homes to go for the children that went through the tornadoes.

The reason I want to give to the Children's Homes is because when my parents got divorced when I was in kindergarten I was very upset. My dad did not live near me anymore and I could not see him as much. I was very mad.

My mom took me to talk to the counselor, Mr. Larry Daniels, at his office in Flomaton. It really helped! I could talk to him and it was like magic, the mad feelings would go away.

I thought that if you are scared, or mad about losing your house and things, you could go talk to a counselor from the Children's Homes. It really helps a lot.

It made me happy to have the lemonade stand. I found out that even an 8-year-old can do something to help when bad things happen."

Love and Prayers,

Ty

Ty Harrell

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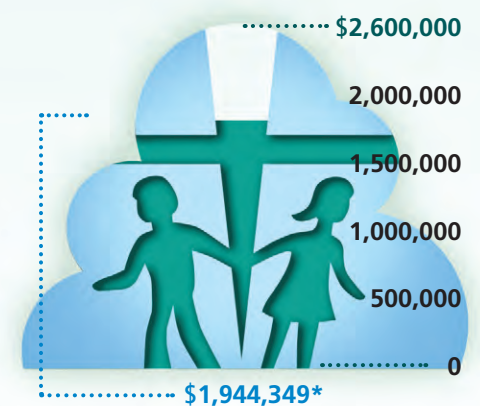
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CAMPUS News

JUDSON COLLEGE

► 'Ann Judson, Missionary' Premier at Judson College:

A new play, "Ann Judson, Missionary," was presented at Judson College on Nov. 8 and 10. The play was written, arranged and directed by Billie Jean Young, associate professor and artist-in-residence at the college.

It is a dramatic retelling of the life of Ann Hasseltine Judson, America's first international missionary.

Ann and Adoniram Judson traveled to India in 1812 as newlyweds, having sensed the call of God to take the gospel to a foreign land.

After a disappointing year's sojourn in India, the couple went to Burma (now known as Myanmar).

The drama, which highlights some of the successes of the mission as well as its trials, is conceived and performed by students at the college named for Ann Judson.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► UMobile to Host Visit Day:

The University of Mobile (UMobile) invites prospective students to attend Visit Day on Nov. 30.

A \$2,000 visit scholarship is also available for participants. This scholarship is awarded to new traditional undergraduate students who register for and attend this event, apply for admission and enroll at UMobile.

To attend Visit Day, register at www.umobile.edu/visit or call 251-442-2222 or 1-800-WINRAMS (946-7267).

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► Samford Provost Brad Creed Named to Lilly Fellows Board:

Samford University Provost and Executive Vice President J. Bradley Creed has been elected to a four-year term on the National Board of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts.

At Samford since 2001, Creed served formerly as professor of Christian history, associate dean, and dean at George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University from 1993 to 2001. He also is the former pastor of First Baptist Church of Natchitoches, La., and has previously served as a youth minister, church planter

and interim pastor of churches in Texas, Oregon, Oklahoma, Virginia and Alabama.

Samford has been a member of the Lilly Fellows Program National Network since 1992 and hosted the annual National Conference of the Lilly Fellows Program in 2011. The Lilly Fellows Program is based at Valparaiso University's Christ College in Valparaiso, Ind., the university's interdisciplinary honors college.



CREED

Alabama Cooperative Program Gifts

Alabama Baptist Giving

Year to Date through October 31, 2012

OCTOBER

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,641,666
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$3,772,222
Over Goal for Month	\$130,556

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$36,416,660
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$34,273,107
Under Goal for Year	\$2,143,553

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CHURCH POSITIONS

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Bethel Baptist Church, Brent, Ala., is seeking a bivocational pastor to begin Jan. 1, 2013. Send resumés to: Danny Russell, 298 Tabernacle Road, Brent, AL 35034.

BIVOCATIONAL ASSOCIATE PASTOR: FBC of Moody is seeking a bivocational associate pastor. Past pastoral ministry experience required. Submit resumé to: FBC of Moody, 902 Church Street, Moody, AL 35004, or email: church@fbcmoody.org, ATTN: Search Committee. Response by Dec. 31.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER/DIRECTOR: To lead the youth ministry program for Autaugaville Baptist Church. If interested, please send resumé to: Dr. Garner Clark, 245 First Street, Prattville, AL 36067.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF YOUTH: First Baptist Hoover is seeking a part-time leader to work with students and their families. Bible study, retreats, overall church ministry, time in schools and youth activities. Vacation Bible School, Youth recreation, etc. Contact 205-823-3472 or fbchoover@bellsouth.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONARY:

Baldwin Baptist Association is seeking a new associational missionary. Please submit resumés to: Baldwin Baptist Association, P.O. Box 459, Silverhill, AL 36576, or email to: bbaoffice@gulfnet.com no later than Dec. 31.

INDEPENDENT SALES ASSOCIATE CONTRACTOR: The 170-year-old *Alabama Baptist* is an award-winning statewide weekly newspaper with more than 200,000 readers. Baptists comprise the largest Christian denomination in Alabama with membership of more than a million. *The Alabama Baptist* is seeking contract sales people with the ability to develop advertising partnerships with businesses and organizations interested in reaching the key demographics of our readers and growing their business. As an independent sales associate contractor, you would work from your home office with no territory restrictions. *The Alabama Baptist, Inc.* provides a unique working environment. We are partners with the churches of the Alabama Baptist State Convention working together for the advancement of the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Each employee is expected to manage his/her personal and professional life in accordance with this relationship and consistent with the tradi-

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Want to know God?

By Pastor Donald Payne
Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa

If the question is "Do you want to know God?" well, who doesn't? Has there ever been a person who did not want to know for sure that God exists? And has there ever been a person who was convinced that God existed who did not also want to know Him as you would a close friend? Mankind has debated the subject of whether or not God is real. And for those of us who are convinced that God exists, we may continue to struggle to discover or define a way to personally connect with Him.

Luke 19 tells about the experience of a man named Zacchaeus who wanted to connect with God. When Jesus passed through his town one day, Zacchaeus went out of his way to meet Jesus. The Bible does not tell us Zacchaeus' agenda that day, just that he wanted to get closer to Christ. Surely he had heard of the mighty miracles of Jesus, or perhaps the astounding sermons Christ delivered. Whatever the case, his hunger to know God drove him to abandon cultural norms. Running ahead, he scurried up a nearby tree to get a better look. Too short of stature to see over the crowd, Zacchaeus reached up, grabbing limb after limb until he perched above the masses.

Then one of the most surprising things happened: Jesus stopped and spoke to Zacchaeus. No one in the crowd expected that a respected Jewish rabbi like Jesus would give any attention to such a man as this. After all, Zacchaeus was a tax collector. But Jesus challenged the man to come down from the tree and take Him home. Zacchaeus wanted to be closer to God, but probably thought because of his sins that he was disqualified. In response to Jesus' challenge, Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly into his heart and his home.

Do you want to know God? If the answer is "yes," then the experience of Zacchaeus can be yours. All you have to do is welcome Jesus into your life. The apostle John explained it this way in John 1:12: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

World of Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Revival spreads in Egypt amid persecution

CAIRO, Egypt — Revival is spreading throughout Egypt — a revival of faith in Jesus Christ. During the first weekend in October about 10,000 young people gathered in the desert 60 miles north of Cairo to sing, pray and worship the Lord.

The youth gathering was followed up with an even larger event at the same location — an Oct. 25–28 Count It Right Christian rally that drew 45,000 people.

The focus of the event was to present the message of salvation and call people to give their lives to Jesus. Christians in Egypt are now experiencing even more persecution since the June election of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi.

According to a report by Open Doors, a Christian leader said 45,000 people attended and 25,000 gave their lives to Jesus. About 8,000 cards were filled out by people who requested follow-up visits by churches.

An estimated 2–3 million people followed the rally on two Christian satellite channels for the 6.5 hours of airtime broadcast live each day to North America, Australia and the Middle East.

About 1,000 children participated in a special program prepared for them, and 5,000 people attended a one-day parallel festival Oct. 25 in the Coptic Orthodox Cave Church, located in Cairo's garbage dump.

In addition, about 6,000 people from different churches attended a similar gathering Oct. 28 in Assiut, a city located six hours south of Cairo.

Egypt's Coptic Christians name new pope

CAIRO, Egypt — Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church found its 118th pope Nov. 4 during a televised drama at Cairo's St. Mark Cathedral.

In the drama the fingers of a blindfolded boy reached into a crystal chalice, wrapped around one of three transparent spheres, and pulled it out. The small, clear globe was opened, revealing the name of Bishop Anba Tawadros, one of three finalists in the church's search for the successor to Pope Shenouda III, who died in March after a 40-year reign.

When Tawadros takes the throne Nov. 18, he will move from oversight of a bishopric in the Nile delta northwest of Cairo to the head of the Coptic Church, whose estimated 10 million members comprise the largest Christian denomination in the Middle East. Tawadros, 60, was educated in Egypt and Great Britain and was manager of a pharmaceutical company before entering monkhood.

The rise of Islamic representation in the government, an increase in anti-Christian violence and the ongoing debate over a new Egyptian constitution have intensified the pressure on Christians to secure a place for themselves in the post-revolution Egyptian society.



BP photo

'READINESS' — Relief supplies were distributed in two West African communities after the Niger River in August reached its highest levels in 90 years, killing 81 people and destroying 37,000 homes.

Filling the gap

Baptist relief provides hope to Niger River's flood survivors

Floods are nasty. Water destroys, dissolves, stains, reeks, stagnates and displaces. Even in the "best" circumstances, recovering from flood is a long-term effort.

For those with homes built of mud and livelihoods based on farming, the devastation — and the time it takes to rebuild — multiplies exponentially.

This was the initial assessment of Baptist Global Response (BGR) partners who distributed 306 hygiene and living kits to families in two communities in Niger — Sarando and Yonkoto — after the Niger River reached its highest levels in 90 years following heavy annual rains. According to reports, rising floodwaters have killed 81 people and destroyed 37,000 homes, affecting nearly half the country's already impoverished communities.

In the village of Sarando water destroyed nearly 95 percent of

houses, granaries and other mud block structures, BGR partner Gabe Manor reported. "It was like walking through a village of wax houses," Manor said.

Cooperation

BGR partner Shadrach Black agreed. "It's like building a house out of play-doh and then squishing it," he said.

The BGR team worked with representatives from the United Nations and other aid organizations to "fill the gaps" in smaller or harder-to-reach communities. This level of cooperation assured that organizations were not duplicating efforts and ultimately allowed aid to reach more hurting people, explained Mark Hatfield, who directs BGR's work in sub-Saharan Africa.

The kits contained mosquito nets, mats, blankets, buckets, soap, a kettle, sugar and tea. The BGR team purchased the items in lo-

cal markets, allowing relief to get to affected families much more quickly than importing from other countries would.

"Our goal was that this distribution would be relational," Manor explained.

While villagers in both communities were grateful, both Manor and Black admitted their own struggle with the inadequacy of their efforts in the face of such great need.

Tini Magarie, a leader in another heavily affected village, put their efforts in perspective. Magarie thanked the team for providing what he described in the local language as "readiness." Receiving things to be set aside for later use helps villagers "get ready" to rebuild once floodwaters recede, he said.

Black said, "Our buckets, mats and blankets represent hope — hope and 'readiness' that when the time comes, they will rebuild their lives."

In addition to BGR's aid to flood victims in Niger, the Baptist World Alliance has sent an initial \$10,000 to help with flood relief in Nigeria.

According to Olasupo Ayokunle, president and chief executive officer of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), "rivers overflowed their bridges, roads were cut off and many communities were submerged." The NBC has responded to the flooding with truckloads of food.

For more information on how to help, visit baptistglobalresponse.com or bwanet.org. (BGR, BWA)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed.

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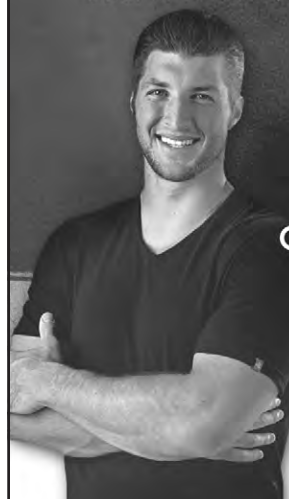
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After a year of missionary travel and enough danger and difficulty to last a lifetime, Barnabas and company arrived home in Antioch. What rejoicing there must have been. And what a beautiful reminder to them and to us that though the work of the Kingdom may become lonely, we are never alone in the work. As we labor for the King may we never need to say, “I guess you had to be there,” but “I’m glad you have always been there.”

RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Rick Sharp

STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN

Joy

Reunion Records/Provident Label Group

You knew it was coming. It's not even Thanksgiving and here we have the first Christmas music review!

What a difference time can make. A little over a year ago I reviewed Steven Curtis Chapman's record "Re:creation" and said, among other things, that it seemed "everything lying around was thrown in." What I didn't say was that Chapman had recently gone through the heartbreaking loss of his child in a tragic accident and almost certainly didn't have his heart in the making of that record.

Just over a year later Chapman is poised to release another

record, this time a Christmas album titled "Joy." A mix of new and rearranged traditional songs, Chapman has created a magnificent palette of lush beauty. It's all here — jumping bluegrass (well, almost), elaborate and skillfully performed jazz, swaying fingerstyle acoustic guitar numbers, and, at the heart of it all, an energy and joy from Chapman and his band that utterly sucks you in. Even the recording process adds to the joy of the record — unprocessed, clean and in-your-face. To me, this is easily the best Chapman has ever sounded, and to say that about what has come to be, for most artists, an obligatory holiday record



is as unexpected as it is welcome. Chapman and his band retreated to a studio in Lexington, Ky. (Chapman's home state), put up a Christmas tree and Chapman wore his Charlie Brown T-shirts for the entire recording session. It worked. If there's a better Christmas record released this season, I'll be amazed.

JASON GRAY

Christmas Stories: Repeat the Sounding Joy
Centricity Music

Jason Gray has woven familiar Christmas carols with original music that tells the story of our Savior's birth from the perspectives of those who were there — the wise men, the innkeeper, the shepherds and others. Gray receives collaborative help from Nichole Nordeman, Joel Han-

son, Andy Gullahorn and Randall Goodgame. Cason Cooley provides excellent production.

Even Gray's sons Kipper, Jacob and Gus get in on the record with vocals and handclaps.

"Christmas Stories: Repeat the Sounding Joy" is already attracting a lot of attention. Says best-selling author and

pastor Max Lucado, "I love Jason's voice, his songs and, most of all, his heart. This Christmas release is a Christmas gift for all of us!" That's pretty high praise, and deserved. You'll want this Christmas album on your holiday playlist.

MICHAEL MILTON

When Heaven Came Down
Self published — michaelmilton.org

Michael Milton, singer/songwriter, author and theologian, has released his first Christmas CD, "When Heaven Came Down," a

collection of 15 original songs that range from Celtic to acoustic ballads to symphonic. Milton describes the record as "a desire to express the drama, beauty and wonder of the Incarnation, when God became Man." Long-time accom-

panist Cindy Gibbs joins him on vocals. Milton's lilting vocals are beautifully framed by lush, mostly acoustic arrangements. Gibbs' accompanying vocals, ranging from plaintive to ethereal, add significantly to the power of the record. Award-winning singer/songwriter Buddy Greene ("Mary, Did You Know") jumps in on harmonica on "Carolina Christmas."

Milton's new CD is distributed through Reformed Theological Seminary and can be found on Amazon and iTunes. This is a gentle and beautiful Christmas and Advent record that deserves a place in your holiday playlist.



Book Reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Grandma's Christmas Legacy: The Testimony of the Tree

Casey Schutrop. Chaska, Minn.: WOW Ministries, 2009 (Re-released for 2012). 48 pp. (Gift Book).

This little gift book is really a "book within a book," offering first the story of Grandma's legacy, then turning to the reader and asking pointedly what the reader will do with the story.

The legacy from Grandma is a story of a family who gathers to decorate the tree the first Christmas after Grandma's death and finds a story Grandma left, investing special meaning in what may be the most frequently utilized symbol of Christmas, weaving the fruit of the Spirit into the narrative of the decorations to be placed on the tree.

Grandma's story then becomes the reader's own story, presenting an interactive experience that can be used by families as they celebrate Christmas together. The closing pages of the book present the biblical account of the Christmas story and a read-along version of Grandma's story.

The book is meticulously and beautifully illustrated and is sure to be a welcome gift for almost anyone.

A Wreath of Snow

Liz Curtis Higgs. Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2012. 212 pp. (Hardcover).

Winters tend to be hard in Scotland, and the winter of 1894 was one for the record books. But Meg Campbell wasn't thinking about the weather or the threatening snow when she abruptly left her parents' house the day before

Christmas to catch a train back to Edinburgh and her home; all she could think about was the hatefulness of her younger brother and how quickly she could get away from the intolerable situation he created.

What Meg didn't realize was that the train she was going to board would not make its destination. Instead of Edinburgh, she would end up somewhere else for Christmas with someone she would never have expected — or wanted — to be spending the celebration of Christ's birth with.

"A Wreath of Snow" is a small fiction book, released just in time for Christmas reading. It presents a short and simple story of forgiveness and the need to look beyond the obvious. For fans of Liz Curtis Higgs, this is another winner. For those who are not fans yet, this book just might make you one.

Movie Review

By Rick and Martine Sharp

The Heart of Christmas

Image Entertainment

"The Heart of Christmas" is based on a true story about the Locke family, whose son, Dax, was diagnosed with cancer that failed to respond to treatment. Learning that their son would probably not survive until Christmas, the family decided to give their son one last Christmas — in October.

The Lockes' neighbors saw what the family was doing and joined in the celebration. The outpouring of love and support from the community was amazing and overwhelming, touching the grieving family and the entire community.

The movie came about because singer Matthew West asked people to send him inspiring true stories of their lives so he could write songs about them. He got thousands of

submissions, including three about the Locke family. West was so moved by the story that he wrote the title song that led to the movie.

The movie is well done and beautifully cast, with actors like Candace Cameron Bure and Erin Bethea. If you like movies described as "heartwarming" and "touching," you'll love this one.

The movie is available on DVD.

Christmas 2012 Top Gift Ideas

For him/her

1. iPad 3 — under \$800
2. Kindle Fire — under \$200
3. iPhone 5 — under \$400
4. Keurig B60 Special Edition Brewing System — under \$150
5. Sculptor Body Massager — under \$60

For kids

1. Crayola Digital Light Designer — under \$40
2. Ninjago Fire Temple by Lego — under \$140
3. Furby 2.0 — under \$60
4. Fujifilm Instax Mini 7S Film Camera — under \$70
5. Smart Planet MCM-1 Mini Cupcake Maker — under \$30

For toddler/infants

1. Leapfrog Scribble and Write — under \$20
2. Let's Rock Elmo — under \$40
3. Baby Einstein Neptune Soother — under \$40
4. Fisher Price Laugh & Learn Click 'n Learn Remote Control — under \$12
5. Vtech Rhyme and Discover Book — under \$15



BP photo

In North Africa and the Middle East, 49 people met to craft a set of Bible stories in sign language to enhance their work in evangelism, discipleship and church planting. During the training, more than a dozen people accepted Christ as Savior and were baptized.

Finding forgiveness

Deaf man who murdered his brother turns to God

We were tightly packed into a bus heading out of the city on our way to train deaf nationals to craft Bible stories in their own sign language.

Our training team consisted of International Mission Board (IMB) workers, deaf European workers and deaf nationals — a total of 49. The bus could seat only 40. It was hot, it was crowded and there were many unfamiliar faces — deaf people who had not come to last year's training.

A man and a woman sat in front of me. He looked too young to be her husband, yet they seemed protective and caring of one another. I wondered who they were.

Shereen, a deaf national, told me (by signs), "Those two are brother and sister. ... He stabbed their brother in the heart, killing him last year."

"Don't ask them any questions," Shereen continued. "They do not want to talk about it and, oh, by the way ... they are people from the Garbage City."

These are people who live in the city dump and sift through the refuse and recycling to earn a meager living.

After we passed all the security checks, the sister actually came to me and told me what had happened. She was eager to tell the story.

She and her brother lived among garbage. While their hearing brother had found some kind of escape, they had not. He was always at peace, comfortable and involved with a church — a hearing church.

Her deaf brother joined a gang and used drugs. He envied his hearing brother for the things he had — money, significance, comfort and peace. One night, in a fit of fury, rage and confusion, he stabbed his hearing brother in the heart.

He was immediately locked away in prison for a crime he never denied and for which he thought he could never find forgiveness. He tried to hang himself in his cell, but he survived the attempted suicide.

Someone begged that he be shown mercy, and

he was released from prison. Not long after that the brother and sister learned about a group of Deaf believers meeting together in the city. They began to attend the deaf church there.

She closed her story by taking my hand, kissing it and thanking me for the opportunity to join in this pilgrimage to learn about Jesus.

We arrived at the retreat center and gathered together to begin the training, focusing on crafting Bible stories in sign language for use in evangelism, discipleship and church planting. As the group was divided into small groups, I made sure these two were placed with leaders who would love them and lead them to understand the saving power of Jesus.

I was pleased at the end of each day's training to see the siblings standing with the others, rendering Bible stories and understanding Bible truths. I prayed that any judgments others had harbored in their hearts against them would be dispelled. It brought me great joy to see our deaf workers being Christ's heart, hands and voice and loving them as He loves them.

In one of our group meetings at the end of the week, the "murderer" dropped his head in despair, looked at his group leader and slowly raised his hand. His intent was not to be recognized or gain permission to speak. He meant it as a gesture of surrender.

Then he signed, "Me. I do." Curling his big hands into fists, he gently pounded his head (the Arabic sign for "sorrow plus repentance"). Then his hands straightened and he lifted them from earth to heaven, signaling a turning of ways. "I want to turn," he signed. "I want to follow Jesus in baptism."

The next afternoon more than 40 of us walked into the sea to witness this new brother symbolically "buried" in the sea and brought up to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

A murderer redeemed.

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

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Tufts University Christian group fights bias claims

MEDFORD, Mass. — Another campus Christian group is fighting claims of discrimination over its requirement that leaders share a common profession of faith.

The student-led judiciary at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., voted last week to revoke official recognition for Tufts Christian Fellowship (TCF), the largest evangelical group on campus. Complaints from a group formed to challenge TCF's presence on campus prompted the judiciary's decision. Members of the Tufts Coalition Against Religious Exclusion accused TCF of violating the school's nondiscrimination policy.

TCF, a chapter of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, faced similar complaints 12 years ago after denying a female student a leadership role because of her beliefs about homosexuality. In that case, as in most other recent incidents involving campus Christian groups, school officials responded to a situation involving a specific student.

But this time the challenge to TCF did not include any current or former members of the organization. Nothing but a desire to force the group off campus prompted the complaints.

In 2000, InterVarsity representatives successfully persuaded Tufts administrators that the school's commitment to diversity required them to allow Christian groups to operate on campus even if they disagreed with a specific group's beliefs. Since then TCF's membership has grown to about 120 students and the group has not faced any accusations of discrimination.

As a private school, Tufts is not bound to follow Supreme Court rulings.

Last year, another private school, Nashville's Vanderbilt University, adopted an "all-comers" policy that forced 15 evangelical Christian groups to sever ties with the school. Most public colleges have avoided such policies, knowing they are likely to be challenged in court.

Synagogue cuts ties with Boy Scouts due to new policy

NEW ORLEANS — For nearly a decade, hundreds of local Boy Scouts have learned the virtues of the Ten Commandments on an annual Thanksgiving holiday hike to churches, synagogues and mosques, where clergy and scholars explained their faiths' take on the ancient code.

But this year, Touro Synagogue, a major Reform Jewish congregation and a longtime partner, has told the organization it is no longer willing to take part because the Scouts deny membership to gay troop leaders and gay Scouts.

For Rabbi Alexis Berk, who used to host the Scouts at Touro, it is a clear justice issue that mirrors the civil rights struggle of a generation ago. She sees public dissent to Scouting's membership policy as a moral duty.

Elsewhere around the country, Jewish organizations are similarly pushing back against Scouting's membership policy, especially since July, when Scouting reaffirmed it after a two-year study.

"This position has taxed Scouting's relationship with the Jewish community," said A.J. Kreimer, chairman of the National Jewish Committee on Scouting.

"Our committee's motto since 1926 has been 'Scouting Serves the Jewish Community' — and that relationship has been strained."

Anti-Semitic incidents decline in US, report shows

WASHINGTON — Anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. dropped by 13 percent in 2011, according to a report released Nov. 1 by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which tracks assaults and other attacks on Jews.

There were 1,080 incidents against Jews last year, according to the ADL, the lowest tallied by the nonprofit civil rights group in two decades.

ADL's annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents for 2011 included 19 physical assaults, 731 cases of harassment and threats and 330 incidents of vandalism.

Documented cases of anti-Semitism ranged from graffiti on a Brooklyn subway station that read "Jews were responsible for 9/11" to an incident in which a Pennsylvania middle school student wrote numbers on another student's arm and told him to "Go die in the ovens."

The report highlighted particular concern about anti-Semitic bullying in schools and cyberbullying by students.



BP photo

Oklahoma mud-out crew member Mark Teders removes damaged wall insulation and sheetrock from a flooded home in the Port Monmouth area of Middletown, N.J.

FEMA chief praises Southern Baptist Disaster Relief; chaplains becoming key need

On the 11th day after landfall of Hurricane Sandy, more than 750 Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers were continuing to aid survivors in hard-hit communities. Their work has not gone unnoticed.

Craig Fugate, chief of the Federal Emergency Management Administration, voiced appreciation to SBDR leaders in a conference call Nov. 7 for their response to Sandy.

"Thanks to everyone," said Craig Fugate, FEMA administrator. "It has been a busy time. The president and the rest of the team appreciate Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. This will not be a short response. We still have a lot to do. Until people are back in their homes, Southern Baptist [volunteers] will be needed. Thank you for all that Southern Baptist Disaster Relief has done."

Coordinating logistics with FEMA, the American Red Cross (ARC), The Salvation Army, state and local governments is a daily task for SBDR leaders. The North American Mission Board routinely maintains representation at the FEMA and ARC national headquarters for the duration of large-scale disaster responses such as Sandy.

The recognition of that service came quickly from another government leader in the hard-hit community of Middletown, N.J., this week, Gov. Chris Christie.

"Ah, my friends with disaster relief," the New Jersey governor said when he met SBDR volunteers from Oklahoma serving in Middletown Nov. 5. Christie thanked the volunteers for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the people of his state.

SBDR volunteers who were among the first responders to Sandy will begin heading home soon. Replacement teams will begin arriving this weekend and into next week. One of those units is a Tennessee recovery team, which completed its 18th job Friday in the Norwalk, Ct., area.

Maryland-Delaware incident commander Carl Brill reported an interesting occurrence in Crisfield, Md., where local leaders developed a system to collect needs and communicate them to volunteers.

"They are using white towels to identify homes where help is needed," Brill said. "It made me think of the passage that the fields are white for harvest. There are a lot of

white towels in Crisfield. They need help and we have a lot of work to do."

SBDR is preparing meals at five locations in New York and six in New Jersey. The overall meal count for the response stands at more than 275,000. The SBDR kitchen stationed in Deer Park, N.Y., staffed by volunteers from New York and Arkansas, for example, prepared more than 10,000 meals Friday. Mud-out and cleanup jobs also were on the increase in New York.

"New York will not have that many chainsaw jobs," said NAMB DR team leader Mickey Caison, who leads the New York incident command team housed at the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association office. "The jobs will be for repairs, mud-out and pump-out. Identifying jobs will also be a challenge at times."

'A tremendous need'

"I want to challenge everyone who comes to bring chaplains," Caison added. "There is a tremendous need."

NAMB DR executive director Fritz Wilson echoed Caison's challenge. Wilson said NAMB DR chaplain Enio Aguero will be arriving soon to coordinate chaplaincy efforts. Wilson said Aguero, a National Guard chaplain, has years of experience in DR response chaplaincy.

"I want to stress the need for chaplains," Wilson said. "We need people who are dedicated to chaplain ministry. Yes, all of our volunteers can share with people but when you are in the middle of a job you may miss an opportunity. We need chaplains coming with teams."

Southern Baptist volunteers in New England were at work in Connecticut, helping homeowners lacking sufficient insurance to cover the damage to their homes.

"It was just a good connection for ministry and for the local church," said Bruce James, team leader for evangelism, disaster relief and men's ministry with the Baptist Convention of New England. He said Connecticut bore the brunt of the damage from Hurricane Sandy in New England, and SBDR is assessing how they can be of further help to the state.

In West Virginia, the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia kitchen and crew completed work and returned

home Thursday. The Baptist General Association of Virginia kitchen continues to serve, providing more than 4,000 meals Friday, Nov. 9.

Several counties in the state continued to struggle with power outages and heavy snow.

"Some people have been told not [to expect their power to come back on] till Thanksgiving," said Don Knotts, pastor of Wayside Baptist Church in Buckhannon, adding that if temperatures continue to rise and melt the snow, flooding could be a future concern.

West Virginians pull together during tough times, Knotts said, so the disaster provides "an opportunity for us to reach out beyond the four walls with no more motivation other than just to help our neighbors and to share Christ."

Referencing two SBDR units that have been stationed in West Virginia preparing meals for distribution to afflicted areas, Knotts said there is "no finer working system" than SBDR, whose volunteers he praises for rising before dawn and working hard throughout the day.

"These people have been self-sacrificing to meet the need of the folks here in West Virginia," Knotts said. "And their whole motivation is to be Jesus to someone in need."

From its disaster operations center in Alpharetta, Ga., NAMB coordinates and manages Southern Baptist responses to major disasters through a partnership between NAMB and the SBC's 42 state conventions, most of which have their own state disaster relief programs.

SBDR assets include 82,000 trained volunteers, including chaplains, and some 1,550 mobile units for feeding, chainsaw, mud-out, command, communication, childcare, shower, laundry, water purification, repair/rebuild and power generation. SBDR is one of the three largest mobilizers of trained disaster relief volunteers in the United States, along with the ARC and The Salvation Army.

Southern Baptists and others who want to donate to the disaster relief operations can contact their state conventions or contribute to NAMB's disaster relief fund via namb.net/disaster-relief-donations. Other ways to donate are to call 1-866-407-NAMB (6262) or mail checks to NAMB, P.O. Box 116543, Atlanta, GA 30368-6543. Designate checks for "Disaster Relief." (BP)