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Reuters photo

Palestinians in the West Bank celebrate the UN's vote to upgrade their status and give them more diplomatic rights. The vote came Nov. 29, eight days after the ceasefire with Israel.

'TRAINING up ENEMIES'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Christians in Israel, Gaza say only true peace can break cycle of war

Draw anything you want to draw." That's what the teacher told her class of small children in Gaza. After a few minutes a little girl brought her a finished picture.

It was of a man without legs lying in the street. She said she had seen him just outside her home.

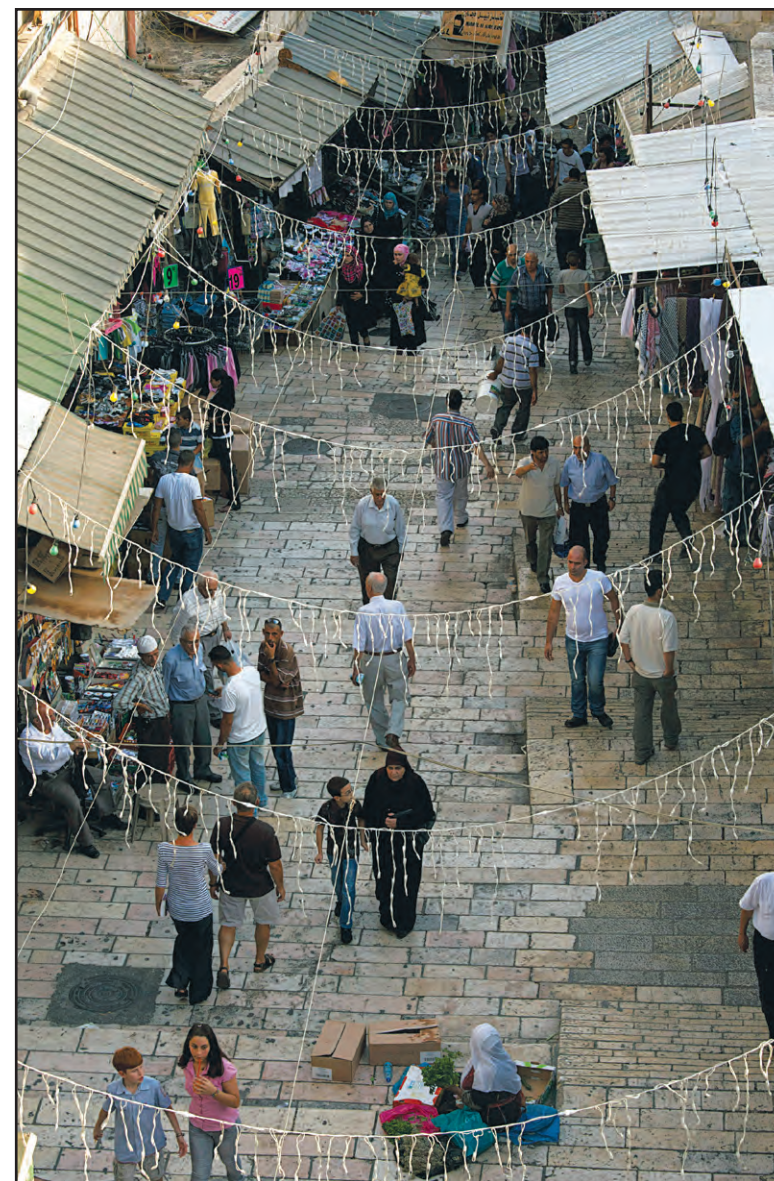
In Israel, shell-shocked victims of a bus bombing lay outside a tangled mess of seats and shattered glass,

panicked and waiting for medical treatment.

In both Gaza and Israel, life is marked by the ravages of war. "Those who want no part of the bombings — either from Gaza to Israel or from Israel to Gaza — are caught between the bombs of both," said Stephen Johnson, an Alabamian who serves as a Christian worker among Palestinians. "The long-term psychological effect is impossible to gauge, but continued warfare is training up another generation of enemies."

In recent rocket exchange stopped by a Nov. 21 ceasefire, more than 150 Palestinians and six Israelis died. Israel said its military action, called Operation Pillar of Defense, was in response to 100 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel during peacetime.

And now, in the midst of a tenu-



IMB photo

Israelis 'try not to let terrorists disrupt their life,' said Christian worker Ben Martin. But when bomb sirens go off, Israelis have a matter of seconds to seek shelter, he said.

ous ceasefire, Christian workers see a great need for real peace — and they wait to see what will happen next, Johnson said.

Ben Martin, an Alabamian who serves as a Christian worker among Jews, said, "The attitude in Israel right now is that things didn't turn out well. Israelis believe the world doesn't understand what happened and that when they retaliate in response to rockets from Gaza, they are looked down on by the world."

Chronic violence

Though normal life goes on, Israelis constantly anticipate that the wind could change, Martin said.

"They try not to let terrorists disrupt their life," he said. "But when the sirens go off you have mere moments to get into a bomb shelter. In Tel Aviv you have a minute and a half. In Sderot (just outside Gaza)

you have 15 seconds. One hundred missiles had already been fired into Israel before [Operation Pillar of Defense] ever started."

And Gaza is reeling from what Johnson called the "worst bombardment" it has ever experienced. "Destruction is widespread," he said. "The stakes get a little higher each time."

Many say they fear the ceasefire won't last. The tension is a chronic situation, Johnson and Martin agreed — what will stop it?

"Gaza has got to get some hope that their lives can get better," Johnson said. "When more than 150 Palestinians were killed and [only a few] Israelis, why were the people in Gaza cheering? Because they have no hope for a better life in their situation."

The more hopeless they are, "the (See 'Not time,' page 3)

COMMENT

Schuller's 'Positive' Prospects Perishing

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, Robert Schuller may not have been as positive about his prospects for prosperity as he had been during most of his 60 years of ministry. On that day a bankruptcy court in Los Angeles rejected the once-powerful preacher's final claims to assets related to the famed Crystal Cathedral and its ministries.

The loss may have been the final step in a too-familiar pattern for ministries, including churches, built around the power of a personality.

Schuller's ministry is an amazing story. What began as a weekly prayer service in a drive-in movie theater grew into the palatial Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, the church Schuller started in 1955. At its peak, the church claimed 10,000 worshippers a week.

Schuller's Hour of Power television broadcast was on the front end of the explosion in religious television when the show began in 1970 and helped make him an icon in much of the religious world.

Today Schuller's cathedral has been sold to the Catholic Diocese of Orange in a bankruptcy sale and renamed Christ Cathedral. The 86-year-old Schuller has withdrawn from worshipping with the remnant that remains of his former congregation, now led by his daughter Sheila Schuller Coleman, and lost a lawsuit against the board of directors of Crystal Cathedral Ministries.

Family members say he will have to begin "liquidating" everything. But don't feel too sorry for him. In an email to parishioners, which was later made public, Schuller asked for meals for himself and his ailing wife. He asked that the meals be left at the church where his limousine drivers would pick them up and bring them to his home.

Observers say Schuller's troubles started long before he retired in 2006. The Hour of Power, the economic engine for Schuller's religious empire, lost about half its audience in the 1990s. Other religious programs captured some of the religious viewing market. Then other nationally recognized preachers of a positive-thinking message — Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer among them — cut deep into his following. The uniqueness that had once belonged to Schuller became all too common.

That created financial problems. Schuller built the Crystal Cathedral confident that donations would help pay for it once construct-



THOUGHTS
By Bob Terry

ed — and they did. But that strategy backfired when the church added a Welcome Center. The church ended up owing about \$40 million on the structure, reports indicate, when expected gifts never arrived.

At the same time worship attendance was dropping. When Robert Schuller Jr. succeeded his father as pastor of the church in 2006 attendance was between 900 and 1,000 each week, well below peak attendance.

The elder Schuller had trouble withdrawing from the affairs of the church he built. Two years after installing his son as pastor, the father restructured the church and placed one of his sons-in-law as head of the church. Robert Schuller Jr. was allowed to preach a little longer but soon resigned and was succeeded by his sister. This was another example of the general rule that nepotism in a church is a bad idea.

During this same time frame the elder Schuller became embroiled in serious disagreements with the board of directors of Crystal Cathedral Ministries, which retained the control of the Hour of Power program and related books, tapes, etc.

A family matter

In the end Schuller resigned from the board in protest and the board of directors fired another of Schuller's daughters and two of his sons-in-law who worked in the ministries. The board had no authority over the church congregation, so daughter Sheila continues to lead there.

What reports call a "series of financial reversals" led the church into bankruptcy in 2010 and the sale of the property, the separation of the church from its ministry arm and the break in relationship between the board of directors and all the Schuller family.

Observers point to a number of problems.

Strong personalities attract a committed following. Even now some longtime church members pledge loyalty to the Schuller family. But, like the strong personality they follow, church members age. Frequently a strong personality of one generation has trouble exercising the same drawing power for a younger generation. The result is a decreasing audience.

Where at one time Schuller stood almost alone on the national stage with his positive thinking message, the stage became crowded as he neared retirement. Again the result was a smaller following.

Administration was another problem. Trouble in the family and trouble between the family and members of the board of directors of various ministries all contributed to Schuller's fall.

Finances were a key issue. The positive outcomes of Schuller's theology made him believe "if he built it they would come." But they did not, and he left a debt for Crystal Cathedral that was unserviceable. There is a long list of vendors stiffed by the church who hope to get some of the money owed them out of the bankruptcy sale.

Personality-centered ministry

But the primary problem of Crystal Cathedral was the ministry was built around the personality of one man. History demonstrates over and over again that it is almost impossible for a personality-centered ministry to continue once that personality is no longer leader. Charles Haddon Spurgeon's son could not follow him in London. No worthy successor was ever able to duplicate the impact of Dwight L. Moody in Chicago. Other examples abound.

A better option is to congregate around a purpose. Alabama Baptist churches exist for a purpose. The churches exist to provide opportunity for people to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and then to help believers grow in Christian discipleship. Personalities come and go, but that purpose remains. It is the same from generation to generation and has been for 2,000 years.

Yes, a purpose-focused church may have problems. Challenges with leadership, with church administration, with finances and with relationships are not limited to personality-centered churches. They are common to all. But a church that is founded on the purpose of evangelism and discipleship has a foundation that can endure such storms.

A church that has a pastor with an attractive personality is blessed, but the personality of the pastor is not of primary importance. Purpose keeps people together even when personality is lacking. Alabama Baptists unite around the purpose of sharing the gospel and growing Christian disciples. May that ever be so.

"Alabama Baptist churches exist for a purpose. The churches exist to provide opportunity for people to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and then to help believers grow in Christian discipleship."



"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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Not time to 'pick sides' but pray for both groups

(continued from page 1)

more radicalized they become and the more difficult they are to reach with the gospel," Johnson said.

But Johnson said he firmly believes many will eventually find their hope in Jesus Christ.

"We are sharing our lives and His love so that when the time comes, they will know the Source of all hope," he said.

People on both sides express gratefulness when Johnson, Martin and others choose to stay with them when the bombs are coming their way, Johnson said.

"For those (Christian workers) on the field who are new, it is a challenging time of re-considering their call to the field," Johnson said. "It's a fairly sobering experience. We are blessed to know that our new workers counted the cost and chose to stay in spite of difficult circumstances."

Martin said they desperately need Baptists to be in prayer for the people of their area — and for them not to pick a side.

"This is not like a football game where we choose a side we're for," he said. "This is a situation where we have to be for both of these people groups and for their salvation. This is about choosing the Lord's work."

Issues facing Christians

Christians there need special prayer because they teeter on the line of whether to use this as an open opportunity to share the gospel or to tuck and run and take the light with them, said Botrus Mansour, an Arab Israeli who serves as director of Nazareth Baptist School.

One Christian in Gaza died of a heart attack after rockets struck houses near his. And the



Reuters photo

In a school in southern Gaza, children put flowers on the desk of a young girl killed in the rocket fire. Civilians in both Gaza and Israel face the consequences of war.

small Christian community in Gaza — about 1,500 people, with fewer than 100 Baptists — struggles amid overwhelming need, Mansour said.

The Christian community in Israel has a lot to face too, he said.

"Times of tension and conflict create an opportunity for the Baptist churches to serve the people through sharing the gospel and offering relief services," he said. "But they also cause (enough) frustration for some Baptists to consider leaving the country (Israel). The future looks pessimistic without peacemakers; this will cause more emigration of Christians from the Holy Land."

Herb, a Southern Baptist representative living in Israel, said he hopes that Baptist churches there will continue "to be agents of peace in the midst of the situation."

"We continue to pray for both groups (Palestinians and Israelis) — that God will strengthen those who want true peace," he said.

And Herb said he hopes not only that people will stay but also that they won't stop coming to Israel.

"Sometimes when flare-ups like this happen, people stop coming because they fear Israel," he said. "We feel like people should continue to come. We feel very secure."

And he said he doesn't see anything changing in Baptist work in Israel anytime soon.

"We are in it for the long haul. Baptists have been in Israel since 1911, and we are committed to carrying on."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons. ☞

Seeing God work like 'drinking energy drink,' Amason says

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Clay Baptist Association, with its office in Lineville, currently does not have a director of missions, so Fred Amason is the person people call.

For 21 years Amason has served as the chairperson of the association's executive board, but he often works behind the scenes. Sometimes he can be seen doing maintenance work on the association's office facilities. At other times one might see Amason running errands. "I help carry out what our churches vote to do," Amason said.

Through Amason's leadership in the association, the seven churches of Clay Association provide school supplies for Clay County schools, give Christmas gifts to residents of Lineville's local nursing home, provide Christmas toys for needy families, participate in Lineville's annual Heritage Day event and conduct an annual Christmas supper for the pastors, deacons and executive board of Clay Association and their families.

But Amason's heart really is set on missions. "I think our association has a high view of missions. We don't have large amounts of funds, but we put our money to



Photo by Gary Hardin

'CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION' — Fred Amason opens the doors to the Clay Baptist Association office and Baptist Center. Amason has served as the chairperson of the association's executive board for 21 years.

work in ministry," he said. "I believe in local missions. We start locally and go out into the world. When our neighbors are being taken care of we can reach out into the world. If we lost our vision for missions we'd be in a bad way."

Local missions are carried out primarily through the association's Baptist Center. Food, clothing, baby goods, some household furniture and other items are distributed

daily to persons in need. Each quarter volunteers from Clay Association's churches give more than 600 hours to the Baptist Center.

L.C. Harris, the association's moderator, described the ministry of the Baptist Center as "Christianity in action." Amason volunteers many personal hours to the Baptist Center ministry. "You'll meet a lot of people here. Not only do we provide practical assistance, but

we also get the opportunity to talk with people about their problems and pray with them," Amason said.

Amason urged the association to exhibit a missional spirit in April 2011 when a series of tornadoes struck the state. "Our association's churches, seven of them, and just county folks, raised more than \$12,000 for tornado relief," he said.

Gary Swafford, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Amason's leadership has strengthened the fellowship and ministry of the association. "Fred's leadership has been a stabilizing force for many years," Swafford said. "Fred's personal ministry is impacting lives."

Amason vividly remembers his experience of coming to faith in Christ at 20. "I was driving a milk truck for a Sylacauga dairy. One day on my route, the Lord spoke to me and pulled me to Jesus."

What motivates Amason to serve? "I would say it's the pay," he said, laughing. "God is a terrific paymaster. You can't place a monetary value on what God does through our churches. When you see God's work being done it's like drinking an energy drink." ☞



IMB photo

Nik and Ruth Ripken help a Somali shepherd boy fix a broken shoelace. 'We need to pray that the peoples of the earth will have access to Jesus,' Nik says.

Sharing Christ trumps fleeing persecution, Baptist worker says

Nik and Ruth Ripken have served in some of the toughest areas of Africa. They've known believers who have been martyred for Christ. They've interviewed hundreds of Christians experiencing persecution in more than 70 countries.

They've learned something about persecution.

"The most persecuted person is a lost person who has no access to Jesus," Nik said. "Satan wants to keep people from hearing about Jesus. If he can't do that, he wants to shut you up, to silence your witness."

Most American Christians fall into the second category. They experience no persecution because they tell no one about Jesus. Yet persecution of Jesus' true followers has been normal from New Testament times to our day. The No. 1 cause? People coming to know Jesus.

The Ripkens learned that the hard way. They served in South Africa and Kenya after sensing a call from God in the early 1980s. They experienced the drama — and trauma — of ministry amid racial apartheid, religious and tribal tensions, and other challenges.

But Somalia, their next place of service, was even worse. The overwhelmingly Muslim nation was wracked by civil war, chaos and danger in the 1990s, as it is today.

Their son was fatally stricken by an asthma attack in Kenya on an Easter Sunday. And they saw nearly 150 Muslim-background followers of Christ in Somalia martyred. Four of their closest friends died on a single, terrible day in 1994.

The Ripkens and other workers were forced out in 1998. They have not been able to return.

Their experiences have led them to a long-term effort to understand the nature of persecution and how God works through it. Trying to stop it in every case or "rescue" every believer experiencing it is a misunderstanding of religious freedom, they said.

"We need to pray intelligently, not that persecution will increase, but that the peoples of the earth have access to Jesus — all of them," Nik said. "When that happens, persecution is going to be a reality. Sometimes God needs to have Joseph in Pharaoh's prison. Historically and biblically, persecution is normal. In many places today it authenticates the faith. So perse-

cution is not something you run toward or run away from. ... It's what you make of it that counts."

Now based in northern Africa and the Middle East, Nik and Ruth specialize in training and research to help the global body of Christ, including Southern Baptist representatives and churches, understand effective gospel witness and church planting in environments where persecution is the norm.

Everywhere they go they meet Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others hungry to know about God. "Every time we send a missionary through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, we're saying, 'We will not stop until every man, woman, boy and girl on earth has access to Jesus,'" Nik said. "Being His heart, His hands and His voice means we're representing Jesus among all the nations."

The nations are often much closer than we think, Nik said. Immigrants arriving in America include people who are hard to reach in their home countries. Here they can be reached by crossing the street.

But we must cross the street.

"God ... is bringing the nations to us," Nik said. "But we're running from the nations in our midst. ... [Often] these people are lonely and isolated. Get out of your church. Go to their homes. Invite them to your home. Shop where they shop."

Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and through the Cooperative Program help Southern Baptist workers around the world share the gospel. Give to the offering through your local Southern Baptist church or online at imb.org/offering, where there are resources for church leaders to promote the offering. Download related videos at imb.org/lmcovideo.

A book about the Ripkens, "The Insanity of God," is their true story of faith persecuted in the midst of war, opposing religions and personal loss. It will be available at major outlets beginning Jan. 1.

To learn more about the Ripkens and their ministry, visit nikripken.com.

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

WEEK OF PRAYER
for International Missions and
International Missions Study
Dec. 2–9



LOTTIE MOON
CHRISTMAS OFFERING
National Goal: \$175 million
Alabama's Goal: \$11.6 million

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Young convert beheaded by extremists in Somalia

NAIROBI, Kenya — Islamic extremists from Somalia's rebel al-Shabaab militants killed a Christian in Somalia's coastal city of Barawa on Nov. 16, accusing him of being a spy and leaving Islam, Christian and Muslim witnesses said.

The extremists beheaded 25-year-old Farhan Haji Mose after monitoring his movements for six months, Christian sources said. Mose drew suspicion when he returned to Barawa, in Somalia's Lower Shebelle Region, in December 2011 after spending time in Kenya, underground Christians in Somalia told Morning Star News.

Kenya's population is nearly 83 percent Christian, according to Operation World, while Somalia's is close to 100 percent Muslim.

A crowd assembled in the coastal city that Friday morning to watch the slaughter of Mose, the sources said.

"His body was split into two, then carried away, only to be dumped near the beach of Barawa city," a Christian source who witnessed the murder told Morning Star News.

Muslim witnesses independently described the same scene. They and the Christian witness told Morning Star News that the Islamic extremists accused Mose of being a spy for foreigners and of embracing the "foreign religion of Christianity."

Loved ones of the deceased did not risk immediately recovering the body, fearing the militants would consider them guilty by association and kill them as well.

Mose, who had studied in Kenya, had a small cosmetics shop in Barawa and had traveled to Kenya on business in 2011. He converted to Christianity in 2010 while in Kenya, sources said.

A leader of the underground church in Somalia also confirmed the murder.

Al-Shabaab rebels have killed dozens of Christian converts from Islam since embarking on a campaign to rid Somalia of Christianity. The insurgents, variously estimated at 3,000 to 7,000, seek to impose a stricter version of sharia (Islamic law) on Somalia.

The transitional government in Mogadishu proclaims itself moderate, but it too has embraced a version of sharia that mandates the death penalty for those who leave Islam.

Designated a terrorist organization by several Western governments, al-Shabaab was one of several splinter groups that arose after Ethiopian forces toppled the Islamic Courts Union from power in Somalia in 2006.

Azerbaijani police raid homes, seize religious literature

ALIABAD, Azerbaijan — Police in Azerbaijan raided a meeting for Baptist worship in the home of former prisoner of conscience Zaur Balaev on Nov. 7, Forum 18 News Service reported.

The raid in Aliabad took place as Balaev and his wife, Nunuka, were in Moscow, where she is undergoing cancer treatment. Police detained and questioned one Baptist. They also seized religious literature including New Testaments.

In a simultaneous raid on another home in the village, police seized more religious literature and questioned another former prisoner of conscience, Hamid Shabanov.

Local police refused to discuss with Forum 18 why they had raided the two homes and seized literature.

State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations spokesperson Orhan Ali claimed that if nothing illegal is found in the books, they will be returned. "This is not censorship," he insisted to Forum 18.

Religious law could result in home confiscation

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Kazakhstan continues to attempt to make exercising freedom of religion or belief dependent on state permission, Forum 18 has found.

Members of the Baptist Council of Churches face possible confiscation of their homes if they continue to meet, a pastor reported.

"What difference does it make whether you are registered or not?" Pastor Dmitry Yantsen asked rhetorically.

The government is raiding both registered and unregistered communities, he said.

'God

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams minister to Superstorm Sandy survivors during Thanksgiving

While most Alabamians enjoyed Thanksgiving Day surrounded by family and friends and gathered around tables filled with mouthwatering food, 35 Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers spent their Thanksgiving holidays conducting cleanup ministries on Staten Island, N.Y.

Three disaster relief teams from West Cullman, Limestone and Elmore Baptist associations arrived several days before Thanksgiving to assist survivors of Superstorm Sandy in the cleanup of their water-damaged homes. The teams also included disaster relief chaplains and administrative support personnel.

Kyle Jeffreys, the disaster relief "white cap" who directed the ministry of the 35 volunteers, described Thanksgiving Day as "the best day ever to help people in need."

"This is some of the dirtiest work our cleanup/recovery teams have ever done, but it was just awesome to see our volunteers work so hard with big smiles on their faces," he said. "Our group devotion and sharing time on Thanksgiving morning was one of the best ever."

Mel Johnson, Alabama Baptist disaster relief strategist, sang the praises of Alabama's disaster relief volunteers. "These teams are but a few of Alabama's finest. Their commitment to spend Thanksgiving assisting Sandy survivors is a vivid reminder that being on mission for Christ is a lifestyle and not simply an event."

Glen Baggett, Elmore Association disaster relief team leader from Tallassee, said the teams worked Thanksgiving week in a square-mile area not far from one of Staten Island's beaches. "This work has been dirty and nasty. Sheet-rock in homes has been destroyed, basements flooded and in some cases even framing studs have been damaged."

'A Thanksgiving to Remember'

Jeffreys noted that the teams completed an average of six cleanup jobs each day. Louisiana and New York Baptists provided shower/laundry units. The New Dorp Moravian Church housed the disaster relief volunteers. Illinois Baptists provided a disaster relief team to cook meals for Alabama's volunteers.

Ronald Bobo, disaster relief team leader from West Cullman Association, said eating the meals cooked by Illinois disaster relief volunteers was "like having a picnic every day." The Illinois group left the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

So what did Alabama's disaster relief teams do for their



Photo by Don Scott

Disaster relief volunteers from West Cullman Association clean the basement of a home damaged by Superstorm Sandy. Thirty-five Alabamians spent their Thanksgiving helping with cleanup in Staten Island, N.Y.

Thanksgiving meal? Jeffreys told how some food was obtained from the American Red Cross. Then several of Alabama's disaster relief volunteers scoured the area for other needed Thanksgiving food items. While cleanup crews were at work during Thanksgiving Day, a small group of volunteers remained behind to prepare a delicious Thanksgiving dinner.

Don Scott, a chaplain with the West Cullman team, said to a fellow disaster relief volunteer, "When I get home I think I'll write a book — 'A Thanksgiving to Remember.'"

Grateful for help

Staten Island residents have expressed deep appreciation for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief efforts since Superstorm Sandy struck. Baggett commented that Alabama's trailers and vehicles all had disaster relief signs on them. "When Staten Island residents saw our vehicles they would flag us down and thank us for being there."

Amey Primiano, a resident of Staten Island, wrote in a letter to disaster relief volunteers that she is "reduced to tears" every time she sees a disaster relief trailer.

"You are Jesus," she wrote. "You have changed us. You have inspired us. You have restored our faith in humanity. There is no adequate way to say thank you."

Baggett summarized the week's ministry this way: "It's been much more of a blessing for us than for them."

The teams from West Cullman, Limestone and Elmore associations were scheduled to leave the Saturday after Thanksgiving, although some volunteers from all three teams were planning to remain behind for a while longer to assist a Kentucky disaster relief feeding unit.

Johnson explained that coordination is currently underway to continue sending Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams to Staten Island. The plans call for rotating three teams at a time through Dec. 22, when future needs will be assessed. ■

Church collects needed items

When a former member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, who lives in New York alerted the church to some unmet needs from the devastation of Superstorm Sandy, church members went into action. It took only two weeks for the Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA) church to collect 152 boxes filled with clothing, shoes, winter coats, blankets, toiletries, cleaning supplies and baby supplies to be distributed to those impacted by Superstorm Sandy. In addition church members generously gave \$45,000 in cash and gift cards.

"This ministry was our church's disaster relief response," said Wayne Splawn, an associate minister of Mountain Brook Baptist who coordinated the relief effort. "We had plenty of dedicated and excited church members who helped pack the boxes."

Pat Ferguson is one of the members who helped with the boxes. "We felt this ministry project was a practical way we could show love to the hurting people of New York," Ferguson said.

In his blog on the church's website senior minister Doug Dortch commended the church for its graciousness and generosity toward "hurting folks, many of whom have lost everything."

The boxes were shipped to the Arundel Baptist Association in Pasadena, Md. Shipping was arranged by BBA as part of an association-wide Superstorm Sandy disaster relief outreach. Through the Arundel Association, BBA has been in touch with the Sector NY Coast Guard unit, which is assessing needs and distributing items to people in need. (TAB)

College students to respond to Hurricane Sandy during holiday break

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) is coordinating the deployment of college students to respond in the wake of Superstorm Sandy in New York and New Jersey.

"The opportunities for short-term mobilization will be ongoing because the need is so great," said Susan Peugh, a NAMB staff member who coordinates volunteer opportunities and helped pull the initiative together. "It is great to see this partnership come together to assist the people affected by Sandy."

"We know students want to help and

have seen the excellent ministry they have provided in the past," she said. "The opportunities to serve here will be life-changing."

The first wave of students, expected Dec. 7, will lodge at Staten Island's Arlington Warehouse.

The students will work with trained Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteers, primarily assisting residents affected by Sandy to clean up their properties. They also will receive video instruction and hands-on training prior to starting work.

Campus student directors and college students interested in ministry opportunities in the area may register at regonline.com/collegiatedr (use code "collegiatedr").

A mobilization coordinator will contact those expressing interest and connect them with ministry opportunities.

Church partnerships, too

SBDR volunteers surpassed the 1.5 million meals prepared mark Nov. 23. Kitchen operations will continue to decline as power is restored, but the recovery efforts,

like those with which the students will assist, will continue for months into the new year, according to NAMB Disaster Relief Executive Director Fritz Wilson.

Volunteers also have reported 57 individuals who have made professions of faith in Christ as a result of SBDR ministry.

NAMB is also coordinating church-to-church partnerships in the region. Churches interested in assisting churches in the areas affected by Superstorm Sandy can email disasterrelief@namb.net to submit their requests for partnership. (NAMB)

Across Alabama's Associations

BETHLEHEM

► **First Church, Frisco City, Oak Grove Church, Frisco City,** and other area churches and civic groups will present the third annual drive-through live nativity "Christmas Comes Alive in Frisco City" Dec. 14-15, 6-8 p.m., at the Frisco City High School practice field. There will be a CD narrative with background music and 10 stations complete with live animals, biblical characters and background scenes depicting the story of the birth of Jesus. A hayride also will be available. A prayer tent will be staffed by area pastors and a hospitality tent will be available with free refreshments provided by area churches. Mark McCullough is pastor of First, Frisco City. Billy Hodges is pastor of Oak Grove.

BIBB

► **Johntown Church, West Blocton,** will show Rachel Jones' nativity collection Dec. 16 and 30, 2-5 p.m. More than 400 nativity scenes will be on display. Ray Jones is pastor.

DALE

► A cast will perform "A Cricket County Christmas Wedding" at **Ariton Church** on Dec. 23, 5 p.m. David Walsh is pastor. ► **Ridgecrest Church, Ozark,** youth will hold "Wonderful Joy" Christmas musical Dec. 9, 6 p.m., and the adults will hold "Silent Night" Christmas musical Dec. 16, 6 p.m. Jim Hill is pastor.

ELMORE

► **Robert Mullins** is the new pastor of **Mount Hebron West Church, Elmore.** He holds a bachelor of arts degree in art-graphic design from Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss., a master of divinity degree in Christian education from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a doctor of ministry degree from New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as youth pastor of Calvary Church, Tuscaloosa, and also served at First Church, Decatur. He and his wife, Pam, have two children.



MULLINS

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva,** will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood!) nondenominational luncheon Dec. 11, 11 a.m. The Slocumb High School Singers under the direction of Amy Hendrix will present a musical program. For reservation information call 334-684-9617. Mike Shirah is pastor.

MADISON

► **First Church, Huntsville,** will hold the 2012 Living Christmas Tree on Dec. 13-14 at 7:30

p.m., Dec. 15 at 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and Dec. 16 at 5:30 p.m. There will also be an abbreviated presentation Dec. 16 at 3 p.m. especially for young children and their families. SlipJig will be the special guest. For information on reserving a spot visit www.fbchsv.org/lct or call 256-428-9422. David Hull is pastor. ► **Flint River Church, Hazel Green,** will partner with several area businesses to provide Christmas to families in the Hazel Green community with Shop with a Hero. On Dec. 8, the church will take up to 300 children preselected by Hazel Green Elementary School and partner them with a military hero for a chance to Christmas shop. For information contact Jason Parks at 256-679-0670. Steve Bell is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Joshua Pendergrass** is the new pastor of **Cedar Mount Church, Pinson.** He is a graduate of Lambuth University in Jackson, Tenn., and Jones Law School at Faulkner University in Montgomery. He previously served in two churches in Kentucky. He is married to Leslie.

SIPSEY

► **Jerry Hallman** is the new pastor of **Macedonia Church, Northport.** He and his wife, Jenia, have three children and two grandchildren.

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Morris' Enon Baptist pastor Hambright marks 40 years

John M. Hambright is no stranger to ministry, leading a church or missions. He has spent 40 years serving Alabama churches and 10 of those at Enon Baptist Church, Morris.

After marrying his wife, Linda, in 1965, Hambright was drafted to the U.S. Army and served two years in Germany during the Vietnam War. While he was away Linda became a Christian, and when he returned home she encouraged him to go to church with her. He reluctantly obliged, he said.

"I grew up in a Catholic home and we didn't go to church," Hambright recalled. "I got home (from Germany) on a Thursday, went to church on (that first) Sunday and got saved that night. It was the first time I (had) really heard the gospel."

In 1972, Hambright became an ordained minister through First Baptist Church, Sayre, and became a pastor at his first church — First Baptist Church, Hayden. He later earned a bachelor of arts degree in pastoral theology from Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham, and a master of divinity degree and doctor of ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Ga.

Hambright served as pastor of North Gardendale Baptist Church, Gardendale; Trussville Southside Baptist Church; and Bluff Park Baptist Church, Hoover, before taking on the pastoral role at Enon Baptist.

Enon Baptist honored Hambright in the spring of 2012 for his years of service and presented him with a plaque, a watch and a diamond pendant for Linda. Hambright and his wife have two children and their son, David, was also able to attend the celebration.

When asked what was the biggest lesson he has learned in his years of ministry Hambright said, "I've learned through the years that being able to broaden the foundation of the church (is important). ... The more people you have working (to serve the church), the stronger the foundation of the church is."

Hambright said he does not know what the future holds for him in ministry but that he hopes to "finish well" and to serve the Lord wherever He leads. (Neisha Fuson)



HAMBRIGHT

Headland's Concord Baptist pastor Rich retires

James A. Rich retired from Concord Baptist Church, Headland, Nov. 18. He served a total of 16 years at the Judson Baptist Association church, but his two terms were 35 years apart.

Rich first served as a volunteer in the Colquitt County Prison in Moultrie, Ga., while studying at Norman Park Junior College in Norman Park, Ga. Rich first received a call to serve as pastor in 1958 and was called to serve Concord Baptist for the first time in 1960.

Rich left Concord after about five years. He ministered for a few years in Birmingham and then for more than 30 in Ohio and southeast Michigan, planting churches in both states.

After Rich decided to retire from his planting work, Concord Baptist called him to serve again as an interim preacher, said Marlin Miles, chairman of deacons for Concord Baptist.

"Then they just called him to be the preacher again," Miles said. "He's probably the most inspiring pastor I've ever been under."

Judson Association director of missions George Thompson said of Rich, "He's been described as a community pastor rather than just one of Concord." Rich is known for visiting any members of the community who are hurting or in need.

"My main scripture is 'the least of these,'" Rich said. "What's important is the local church getting into the community to reach people who are hurting."

The 74-year-old Rich said he felt God moving him toward focusing on prison ministry.

"I was a prison chaplain ... before I accepted a pastorate," Rich said. "It got in my blood."

Rich plans to work with Ask, Seek, Knock Mentoring Outreach, Inc., a ministry that focuses on building one-on-one relationships with inmates for evangelism and encouragement. He will also supply preach if he is needed. (Joseph Rhea)



RICH



Photo courtesy of Jackson Way Baptist Church

JACKSON WAY HONORS MEMBER FOR PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Jackson Way Baptist Church, Huntsville, honors Earl Thompson (right) for perfect attendance of Sunday School for 62 years Oct. 14. The perfect attendance pin was presented to him by his Sunday School teacher, David Golden (left).

Shocco 5K run to take place Dec. 8

Dashing Through the Springs, a 5K run to support the missions work of Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, will be held Dec. 8. The event will also feature a 1K run/walk, vendor booths and refreshments as runners make their way through one of the most challenging 5K courses around. The course is set on Shocco's 783-acre campus. The race course is certified by USA Track & Field and can be viewed on Google Earth.

Proceeds will benefit Shocco Springs Conference Center's missions fund. The event is promoted by Brook Hills United Appeal Fund. The race begins at 8 a.m. Trophies and medals will be awarded to the top three male and female finishers overall and top three for each of the 12 male and female age categories.

Overnight accommodations are available for an additional cost.

Participants can register online at shocco.eventbrite.com or at shocco.org. For more information, call Shocco at 1-800-280-1105.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Renowned lay speaker Zig Ziglar dies

PLANO, Texas — Zig Ziglar, known worldwide for his folksy and often anecdotal motivational talks on success through serving others, died Nov. 28 at a Plano, Texas, hospital of complications from pneumonia. He was 86.

Ziglar's deep, soothing Mississippi drawl and speeches and books often sprinkled with mentions of his Christian faith endeared him to millions. Ziglar was arguably the best-known motivational speaker of his day, having conducted hundreds of corporate seminars and given motivational speeches to hundreds of thousands of people over a 42-year speaking career.

An active Southern Baptist layman and a member at Prestonwood Baptist Church in the Dallas suburb of Plano, Ziglar served as first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1984–85 during Atlanta pastor Charles Stanley's tenure as SBC president.

He wrote more than 30 books, including best-sellers "See You at The Top!" and "Confessions of a Happy Christian."

Ziglar was born in Coffee County as Hilary Hinton Ziglar, but the nickname "Zig" stuck with him as he grew up in Yazoo City, Miss. Ziglar was a World War II Navy veteran and attended Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss., and the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., before beginning a full-time sales career that would catapult him to fame as "America's motivator."

Ziglar is survived by his wife, Jean; one son; two daughters; seven grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild.

University controller charged with embezzlement

ST. LOUIS — A Missouri Baptist University employee has been charged with embezzling about \$107,000 since being promoted to the university controller's position in 2009.

St. Louis County prosecutors charged 48-year-old Melinda Okai of O'Fallon, Mo., with theft of more than \$25,000, a felony carrying a penalty of between five and 15 years in prison.

Okai allegedly executed fraudulent refund checks and took out numerous emergency student loans for her husband, who had been a student at Missouri Baptist University, between December 2009 and May 2012.

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that Okai confessed to her employer but refused to make a statement to police in Creve Coeur, the St. Louis suburb where the university's main campus is located.

The newspaper quoted court documents alleging that Okai used two strategies. One involved refund checks that are issued when a government educational loan exceeds the amount of charges from the university. The other was emergency loans of up to \$1,000 that are credited to students' accounts in anticipation of receiving loan payments.

Police said Okai executed numerous loans on her husband's account but never credited the loans to his tuition.

Discrepancies reportedly totaling \$107,406.39 were discovered during an internal audit.

Ky. Baptists continue relationship with Georgetown

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The Kentucky Baptist Convention's (KBC) mission board voted unanimously and without discussion Nov. 12 to approve an administrative committee recommendation to postpone by one year a vote on the convention's future with Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky. A motion to terminate a partnership agreement struck in 2005, when Georgetown changed its governance to recruit one fourth of its trustees from outside the Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated state convention, appeared in the 2012 KBC book of reports but was withdrawn at the state convention's 175th annual meeting Nov. 13 in Lexington, Ky.

KBC President Adam Greenway, assistant professor of evangelism and applied apologetics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., told messengers that convention leaders felt that with the recently announced retirement of Georgetown College President William Crouch next June, the selection of his successor might open the door for renewed cooperation.

A state convention study committee that proposed ending ties with Georgetown cited factors including a recent decision by the school's trustees to drop the requirement that 75 percent of the board members be Kentucky Baptists.

Another was a revision of Georgetown's identity statement from sectarian Baptist to one "built on a Baptist foundation" in pursuit of "a knowledge of and commitment to the Christian faith."

Forever changed

Moulton's Pleasant Grove rebuilds home for needy neighbor

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Well?" Rodger Nix's Sunday School class asked when he walked in. "What's it going to take?"

Everything, he said. "It's going to take everything."

Nix, a member of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Moulton, had gone that week to visit a family he had heard was in need so he could report back to the class.

"It was exactly like I'd heard — it was not good," Nix said.

In the stump grinding business, the man and his wife had worked together in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina until they had a baby and he got cancer.

They loaded up their pickup truck and drove northeast.

"They stopped at a local gas station, and a man asked them what they were doing in town," said Neil Carter, Pleasant Grove's associate pastor. "They said, 'We are just trying to find a place to live,' and the man asked him, 'What's wrong with here?'"

The family stayed.

They bought a house near the church. His cancer got worse.

"The house was an old place that basically wasn't livable — it was just a frame basically," Carter said. "He planned to refurbish it, but it was clear he wasn't going to live long."

Nix's Sunday School class did not waste any time.

"I told them what I found — a family in need with a baby," he said. "They (the men in the Sunday School class) are a good bunch of guys, and they said, 'Tell us what we need to do.' They don't do any-



Photo courtesy of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church

MAKING A DIFFERENCE — Tony Myers (left), a member of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Moulton, and Andrew McKay work on a home in Moulton for a family in need.

thing for any recognition but just wanted to get involved in helping these folks."

The family needed the house gutted and rebuilt — everything.

'Money kept coming'

"I didn't know where the money was going to come from, but we said we would just go until the Lord shuts our money down," Nix said. "The money kept coming, and from sources we never dreamed of."

With their contributions, the members of Nix's Sunday School class refurbished the entire house.

This was nothing new for them, Carter said.

"These guys are really involved in those kinds of projects," he said. "They have taken international missions trips where they did quite

a bit of construction, and they've been doing work for people ever since the tornadoes last April."

But with this project the whole church became involved, committing some of its missions fund to help the family. Church members donated supplies, including a complete set of kitchen cabinets. A group of girls painted the little girl's room with a Hello Kitty theme.

The husband passed away just before the house was completed, but his family is forever changed by the help of Pleasant Grove Baptist, Carter said.

"It was good for the family, but it was great for us," he said. "The Lord used them to bless us. We don't deserve any credit — we are just fortunate the Lord allowed us to be a part of it."

Majority of voters back traditional marriage despite rise in gay 'marriage' proponents

Despite four state votes for gay "marriage" Nov. 6, a majority of voters still define marriage as between one man and one woman, a new poll showed.

The survey by the Polling Company shows that 60 percent of voters in this year's election agreed that "marriage is between one man and one woman." Fifty-one percent agreed strongly. In total 34 percent disagreed with the statement.

The poll of 800 people who either voted on Election Day or who voted early was conducted Nov. 7.

Voters in Maine, Maryland and Washington state chose this year to legalize gay "marriage," while voters in Minnesota defeated a constitutional amendment that would have defined marriage as between one man and one woman.

The margins ranged from 51–49 percent in Minnesota to 52–48 percent in Maryland and 53–47 per-

cent in Maine and Washington. It was the first time voters in any state approved gay "marriage."

"The outcome of the marriage votes in four very liberal states has caused some to speculate as to whether the American people have changed their views on marriage. This scientific poll shows that the answer to that is 'no,' they have not changed," said Brian Brown, president of the traditional group National Organization for Marriage.

Traditional marriage draws support across party lines, Brown said, noting that the traditional side on the ballots outperformed the Republican ticket by an average of 6.6 points in the four states.

A financial disadvantage contributed to the losses by traditionalists, Brown said, with his side being outspent at least 4–1. Sitting governors in three of the states also campaigned heavily for gay "marriage."

"Our opponents and some in the media will attempt to portray the election results as a changing point in how Americans view gay 'marriage,' but that is not the case.

"Americans remain strongly in favor of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. The election results reflect the political and funding advantages our opponents enjoyed in these very liberal states." (BP)

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Alternate gifts counter Black Friday, holiday consumerism

When it began nearly a decade ago, the Alternative Christmas Gift Fair at Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C., attracted barely 100 church members and generated a few thousand dollars for participating nonprofits and missions groups.

But it has since generated \$200,000 and drawn more than 300 each year from around the community. With the ninth annual event scheduled Dec. 1-2, organizers say they are challenging Black Friday and holiday-related consumerism.

"Our joke is that department stores don't have anything on us," said organizer Ellen Sechrest, minister of spiritual formation and missions at Boulevard Baptist.

Sechrest and faith-based nonprofit leaders say Boulevard's experience is reflective of national and global trends in alternative gift giving.

The practice involves making contributions toward the purchase of goods and services for those in need domestically or internationally. A donation may provide books for at-risk children in Florida or a water well for an African village.

Donors also can give to different classes of ministry such as disaster relief, combating human trafficking and health care, or to support an individual missionary.

The donation is then made in the name of a friend or loved one, which is making the practice one of the most popular forms of charitable giving nationally, nonprofit leaders say.

Local, state and global ministries and nonprofits report that an

increasing number of donors are asking for the ability to make their donations into such gifts.

They also are seeing more churches wanting to facilitate such giving among their members and communities with annual fairs like Boulevard's.

"We participate in three to four of these things a year, and they seem to be growing yearly," said Bill Stanfield, chief executive officer of Metanoia, a North Charleston-based Cooperative Baptist ministry that serves impoverished children and families.

At Boulevard's fair, Metanoia offers gift packages for varying prices. One includes \$50 to provide one child's books during summer camp.

Alternative giving "benefits us from a financial standpoint ... and it keeps our name out there, which helps our ability to do our work," Stanfield said.

Missionaries and others who see the end result of the alternative gift trend also are big fans of it, said Nell Green, a Texas-based Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary with extensive global experience.

Green said she has seen human trafficking victims benefit from targeted gifts of clothing and money. Overseas she has seen impoverished communities benefit from businesses created from donations used to provide microfinancing.

"It's a small sum of money for us, but it makes a significant difference in their lives," Green said.

The donors also are strongly impacted — especially when letters and photos begin arriving from recipients, Green said.

"Once you make that investment

you will learn about the person or project, and you'll put that somewhere and be reminded to pray for them," Green said.

"I think that goes a long way beyond 'here's a new shirt for Christmas,'" Green said. "It does give back on a very deep, spiritual level."

And it does not take a lot to do that, said Devin Hermanson, director of marketing for World Vision.

The agency's gift catalogue alone generates \$35 million each year with items like five ducks for \$30, a goat and two chickens for \$100, an array of clean water gifts and more.

"I've seen them change lives and even generations of lives," he said.

Hermanson said that ability to make a major impact for just a few dollars likely fueled the increase of that kind of giving even during the worst years of the recession.

20 percent increase

"During that period our revenue increased 20 percent, and we have never had a down year," he said.

The agency's own polling found that in addition to stretching their dollars, consumers saw alternative gifts as a way to teach children about sacrificial giving.

"People are hungry for a differ-

ent way of celebrating Christmas," he said. "Eighty-three percent said they would rather receive a meaningful gift."

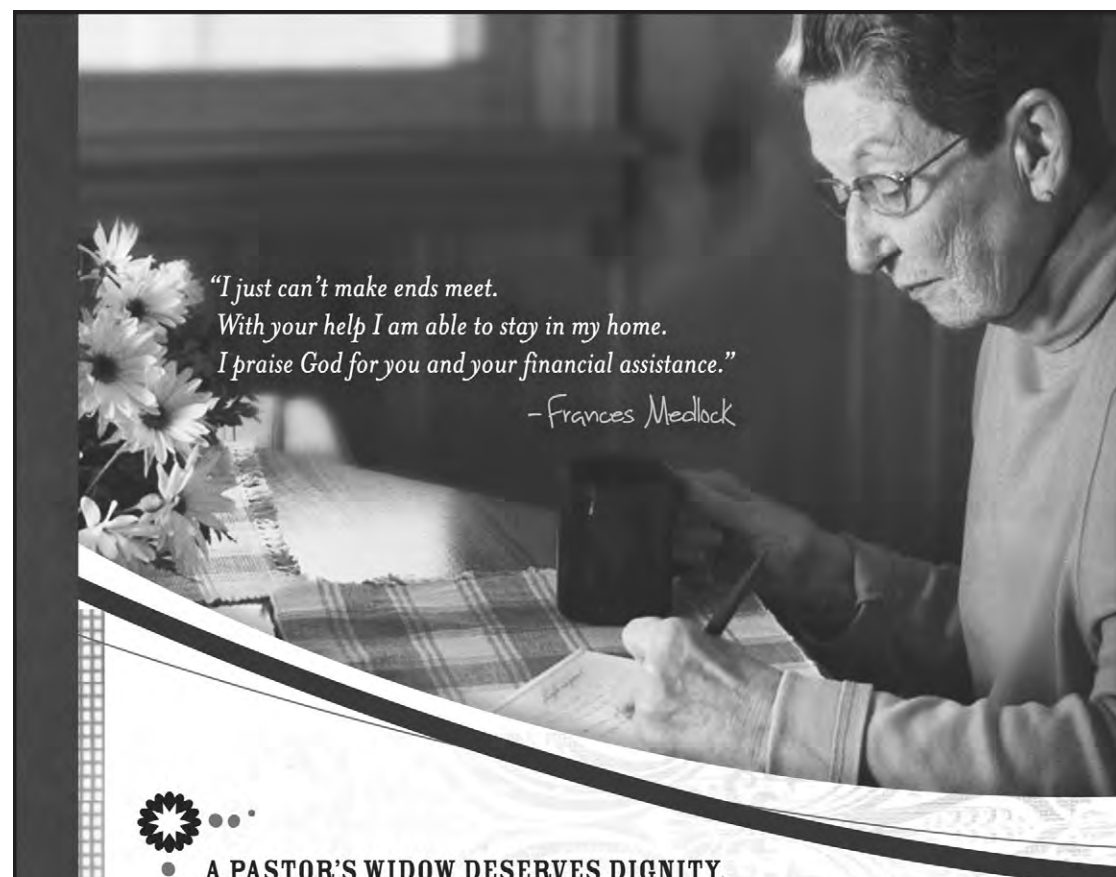
Sechrest said word continues to spread through Anderson about the fair and how good it feels to give and receive alternative gifts.

The result is more people from outside the congregation shopping at the fair each year and more visitors from other churches wanting to start their own, she said.

"It goes back to that feel-good purchase," Sechrest said. "It's a win-win because you made somebody really happy in a much more meaningful way." (ABP)

"People are hungry for a different way of celebrating Christmas."

**Devin Hermanson,
World Vision**



*"I just can't make ends meet.
With your help I am able to stay in my home.
I praise God for you and your financial assistance."
— Frances Medlock*



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Church ANNIVERSARIES



Munford's Stockdale celebrates centennial

Stockdale Baptist Church, Munford, had a lot to celebrate recently with the renovation of its sanctuary and an Oct. 7 centennial.

A representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented the Coosa River Baptist Association church with a plaque, and two former Stockdale Baptist pastors, Billy Dempsey and Martin Murray, both spoke to the congregation. Dempsey, who served at Stockdale from 1962–1968, also was present for the church's 50th celebration, Pastor Kevin Jones said.

A slideshow presentation recognized current staff and church members and honored former members and staff. Former church members reunited for a special choir presentation. A fellowship lunch followed the worship service for the approximately 200 people in attendance.

Jones preached on "Greater Things Are Yet to Come," a theme which also served as the church theme for the entire year. He said that a special element of the anniversary was a book the church published about Stockdale Baptist's history.

Jones added that a group of people felt led to start the church in 1912 and minister to those around them, and that purpose of ministering to the community continues today. (Julie Payne)

Bipartisan agreement on US immigration reform gains strength

Stymied by gridlock during President Obama's first term, a bipartisan agreement on immigration reform seems to be getting new momentum in the wake of a Republican defeat on election day. The defeat was largely attributed to Hispanic support for Democrats.

Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land and other evangelical Christian leaders have called on President Obama and congressional leaders to act quickly next year in an effort to reform the country's immigration laws.

Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, joined nine other leaders of the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) in asking Obama and the leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives on Nov. 13 to meet with them in early 2013 to discuss a bipartisan solution.

"It's past time for us as a nation to deal with this vexing and divisive issue," Land said. "The foundation and structure for fair, just and comprehensive reform legislation is there and needs to be embraced by both parties for the good of the country."

The EIT leaders asked the president to meet with some of their representatives during the first 92 days of his new administration. They asked for a meeting with congressional leaders in the first 92 days of the next session. They chose 92 days because the Hebrew word for immigrant, "ger," appears 92 times in the Bible.

They are prepared to back a proposal "that reflects our Christian values and builds the common good," the leaders said.

In their letters the EIT leaders reiterated their call for legislation that:

- ▶ "Respects the God-given dignity of every person;
- ▶ "Protects the unity of the immediate family;
- ▶ "Respects the rule of law;
- ▶ "Guarantees secure national borders;
- ▶ "Ensures fairness to taxpayers;
- ▶ "Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents."

The EIT, a new coalition at the time, cited the same six principles in a June statement signed by 150 evangelicals. More than 20 Southern Baptists endorsed that document, titled an "Evangelical Statement of Principles for Immigration Reform."

In that statement the signers acknowledged that efforts to repair what many of them describe as a broken system have resulted in polarization and a misrepresentation of "each other's positions as open borders and amnesty versus deportations of millions. This false choice has led to an unacceptable political stalemate at the federal level at a tragic human cost."

The others signing the Nov. 13 letters with Land were Leith Anderson, president, National Association of Evangelicals; Stephen Bauman, president, World Relief; David Beckmann, president, Bread

for the World; Noel Castellanos, chief executive officer, Christian Community Development Association; Robert Gittelsohn, president, Conservatives for Comprehensive Immigration Reform; Samuel Rodriguez, president, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Gabriel Salguero, president, National Latino Evangelical Coalition; Richard Stearns, president, World Vision United States, and Jim Wallis, president, Sojourners.



The foundation and structure for fair, just and comprehensive reform legislation is there and needs to be embraced by both parties."

*Richard Land
president, Ethics &
Religious Liberty
Commission*

They sent letters to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Speaker of the House John Boehner and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, in addition to Obama.

Messengers to the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., approved a resolution on immigration reform that called for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus while pursuing justice and compassion. The measure urged the government to make a priority of border security and holding businesses accountable in their hiring. It also requested public officials

establish after securing the borders "a just and compassionate path to legal status, with appropriate restitutionary measures, for those undocumented immigrants already living in our country."

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas, managing director of Resource Development at American Baptist Home Mission Societies, said recent comments by Boehner that he would make overhauling the nation's immigration system a priority make the issue "timely and worth another look by Baptists."

In exit polling by the Associated Press, just 3 in 10 voters said that most illegal immigrants working in the U.S. should be deported.

Land has called for comprehensive reform that includes a pathway to citizenship that would consist of such requirements as paying fines, undergoing a criminal background check, learning English, pledging allegiance to the American government, accepting a probationary period and going to the back of the line behind those seeking to enter the country legally. (BP, ABP)

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'Two and a Half Men' actor finds faith, causes conflict

A television star has become vocal about his faith, saying in a recently released online testimony that he has become a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). He also stirred up a little controversy when he decided to pit his faith against the morals taught on the show he has basically grown up on.

Actor Angus T. Jones, star of the CBS sitcom "Two and a Half Men," was featured in a video where he said he loathed the "filth" in his TV show.

"You cannot be a true God-fearing person and be on a television show like that," said Jones, 19, in a video posted online by Forerunner Chronicles in late November.

Just a short time after his remarks were released, the teenage star issued an apology. In the Nov. 27 statement Jones did not address his faith but said he considers the cast and crew he has worked with for the past 10 years "an extension of my family."

"I apologize if my remarks reflect me showing indifference to and disrespect of my colleagues and a lack of appreciation of the

extraordinary opportunity [with which I have been blessed]," he said in the statement.

In the video, and in another posted in October by the California-based Adventist Media Center, Jones describes his spiritual journey. He takes evangelism classes and observes the Sabbath, like other Adventists, on Saturday.

The SDA Church said Jones joined a congregation in California's San Fernando Valley in June and was recently baptized.

"We are happy that Angus has joined the Seventh-day Adventist family and has found a place in which he feels comfortable to worship and grow his faith," George Johnson, communication director for the SDA Church in North America, said in a statement.

Johnson added that the young actor's views of his show "are of a personal nature, reflecting his views after having undergone changes during his spiritual journey."

Johnson also distanced his church from Christopher Hudson, who posted Jones' testimony on-

line. Hudson, who operates the video-based ministry Forerunner Chronicles, is not an SDA minister, Johnson said.

With one year left on his "Two and a Half Men" contract, Jones hinted at his spiritual crisis in an October interview with *Christi-*

anity Today, which the magazine posted on its website Nov. 27.

"I know I am there for a reason, but at the same time I have this strange twist of being a hypocrite: a paid hypocrite," he said. "Even though it's my job to be an actor, I have given my life to God." (RNS, TAB)



JONES

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Want to know God?

By Pastor Jim Cooley
First Baptist Church, Haleyville

Whenever I buy something at the store that has to be assembled, I quake in fear. I know I am going to encounter multiple pages of detailed information about the item I have purchased. So many times I long for simple instructions to make it easy to accomplish what I am trying to do.

Sometimes we think knowing the Lord is just as complicated. The road to salvation can become cluttered and seem so complicated. All you want is something simple you can understand that will give you a chance to know God in a personal way.

The apostle Paul felt the same way. In the Book of 1 Corinthians, he brought everything about salvation back to basics. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he wrote, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Here is the simple gospel that verse teaches:

Jesus Christ is the only One. He is God's one and only Son, and only He can give you the gift of salvation. You can't do enough good things, learn enough wise things or accomplish enough holy things to earn salvation. He is the only way to God.

Jesus was crucified. He gave His life away as a perfect sacrifice. Nobody took His life; He gave it away, just the way the Bible had always said it would happen.

Jesus was crucified for you. It was a personal act of love. On the cross He took the judgment for your sin. There is a wonderful word in the Bible for what He did. That word is "propitiation," which means "took the punishment." When you trust Christ, your sins are wiped away because He literally took the punishment for your sins.

You have to trust Him. That is why Paul wanted the crucified Christ to be his only message.

How can you know God? By believing in the crucified Christ. By asking Him to forgive your sins and come into your heart. By trusting Him to take away your sins and give you eternal life. It is so simple, but it is necessary for every person to make the choice for himself. Will you trust Christ today?

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

Focused on the finish line

You would laugh if you knew how many different starts there were to this month's column.

As I started each one, I truly thought it had potential and was excited to see how it developed. But none of them worked. They all fizzled after the midway point.

Maybe it was the wide range of emotions I've encountered over the past three to four weeks.

Maybe it was my strategically planned and extremely tight schedule that should have worked perfectly but never did.

Maybe it was all the interesting ways I've seen God show up in the routines of each day this past month.

Whatever the reason for the stall, I'm not sure. But I do know that now I find myself suddenly inspired and speedily filling in my 600 (give or take 15 to 20) words as I take a break from packing.

After all, there's certainly nothing that motivates you like a looming deadline. Plus I needed to stop obsessing about what was going in my overnight bag anyway.

My bag is light and filled mainly with running shoes, athletic clothing and protein bars. I've checked three times — yes, my running shoes are in the bag!

Team Belle

Around 40 of us are headed to Memphis to run/walk in a half-marathon to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in honor of my niece Belle (see October Rashional Thoughts for Belle's

story or visit www.caringbridge.org/visit/bellemitchell).



We'll join about 18,000 others in the run, but we hope our Team Belle shirts will definitely make a statement.

Running is not necessarily my idea of fun nor am I any good at it, but the experience of training for something way out of my league has been a great exercise in discipline and perseverance.

Staying motivated

I've encountered numerous obstacles and challenges to staying on track with my training. I've easily lost motivation to stay focused several times throughout the past six months. I've heard others on the team say the same thing.

Some garnered new work responsibilities and demands that kidnapped those extra minutes they used to spend training.

Some encountered health problems; some fractured bones.

Some faced major life decisions and found themselves too emotionally exhausted to lace up their running shoes.

Everyone's story is different, and everyone's point of decision is different. But everyone had to make the decision to start down the path and when the tough days came, they had to decide to keep going.

As far as I know, we haven't lost one member of Team Belle. In fact, we gained a few along the way.

It's like our spiritual journey. There are days when we feel like we could run the entire race that day. And then there are days we can't put one foot in front of the other.

But we keep going, holding onto God's promises and looking up.

First Corinthians 15:58 reminds us, "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Psalms 17:5 reads, "My steps have held to Your paths; my feet have not slipped."

So, just as Team Belle has trained and persevered for that glorious moment of crossing the finish line, I am reminded to do the same in the race to the ultimate finish line. 🏃

Rashional EXTRAS...

What topics are on your mind?

Email jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

"Henry Ford once said he didn't want executives who had to work all the time. He insisted that those who were always in a flurry of activity at their desks were not being the most productive. He wanted people who would clear their desks, prop their feet up and dream some fresh dreams. His philosophy was that only he who has the luxury of time can originate a creative thought. ... Unfortunately our culture glamorizes being under pressure. Having too much to do with too little time is a badge of success. ... (But many of the great leaders throughout history took time to think.) The apostle Paul took long walks between cities, using the time to think and talk. Andrew Carnegie would go into an empty room for hours at a time as he was 'sitting for ideas.' Thoreau wandered through the woods around Walden Pond, recognizing that the free time created fertile ground for original thinking. ... If you are feeling stuck, your solution may not be in doing more, but in taking a break from the busyness of life."

Dan Miller
"48 Days to the Work You Love"

What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of failing? Are you afraid of not being good enough? Are you afraid that God is displeased with you because you struggle with fear? Fear can be debilitating when we fear the wrong thing. But fear of the Lord is a different story. To fear Him is to begin to live in wisdom and lead with His power. The object of your fear makes all the difference!

Lead Like Jesus Inspired
Online devotional
Day 331, Nov. 26, 2012

"A leader is a lifelong learner."
Richard Schwein Jr.
Special agent in charge
Birmingham FBI

Unseen wind, unseen Spirit

By Kathi Holcomb
Russellville, Ala.

Hurricane season often brings more of an interest in the weather as many watch for any potential damaging storm on a path toward their hometown. ... Some hurricanes bring danger of flooding while others bring danger of damaging winds. A hurricane that brings both is one which can bring about great devastation regardless of any preparation.

It is the wind of a storm which interests me the most. It is something you really cannot see. As I walk outside during the change of season when the air is crisp and cool, I cannot see the wind when it blows. Yet I can with absolute assurance tell you that the wind is blowing because the wind proves its existence in a very particular way.

We have all enjoyed its self-expression. The wind shows itself by its impact on the environment or objects within its path. Simply put, it can blow leaves off a tree or dishevel one's beautifully styled hair. It can rage, causing trees to bend or houses to move off their foundation. ... The evidence of wind is all around us. No one can deny this truth. The swirl of leaves and the chatter of branches on a cool fall day is confirmation enough that the wind is a tangible and viable element.

'The wind blows where it wishes'

I have found that it is the same in our lives spiritually. John 3:8 says, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Jesus, in this passage, is explaining the mystery of being born again to Nicodemus, a Pharisee. He told Nicodemus that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). When Nicodemus questioned this new birth, Jesus then spoke the words about the wind in John 3:8. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that new birth comes from God alone and it is evidenced in the lives of those born again.

Like Nicodemus, we too can ask questions about new birth. "How is it evidenced in the lives of those born again?" Well, just like the wind in its self-expression, new birth is evidenced through what is seen lived out in the lives of those who have the Spirit.

The Spirit has a job to do and He does it well. It is His job to cause those who are born again to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). It is His job to bear fruit in the lives of those born again (Gal. 5:22). It is His job to enable us to love, forgive, persevere, extend grace and be more like Christ (2 Peter 1:3-4). And the truth is He will do His job.

Just like the invisible wind is seen in the power it has on the objects within its path, so too is the Spirit seen in the power He has within the hearts and lives of those who are indeed born again.

As those who have truly been born again, may He be seen by the world around us as we live our lives under the influence and by the abiding power of the unseen Spirit. He is really all they need to see.

END-OF-YEAR NOTES

Just as employers are preparing for end-of-year evaluations on employees, we should each be planning to do the same on ourselves. How did you do this year spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.?

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 9

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen

Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

REBUKING DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR

Hosea 4:1-6, 12-14

Spiritual Decay (1)

This section of Hosea focuses on Israel as a nation. Just as Hosea's wife was unfaithful, so too was Israel unfaithful to God. God used Hosea's wife as an image of the spiritually adulterous behavior of the Israelites.

The judgment is for the entire nation of Israel — all those who inhabit the land. Interestingly, the same land that the Israelites lived in had been inhabited by the Canaanites, a race that did not acknowledge God either. God had judged the Canaanites, and now He was judging the Israelites for the same behavior. The Israelites did not acknowledge God. This does not mean that they did not know who God was or even what He expected from them. Rather it indicates that the Israelites lived in a way that did not match God's expectations. Even today many people claim to know God and love God, but their actions suggest otherwise. A true indicator of a Christian is that they love God not only in word, but also in deed and attitude.

Lawless Society (2-3)

God points out the sins that the Israelites have committed, bringing judgment upon themselves. The list includes murder, stealing and adultery. These are violations of the Ten Commandments. Because of these sins the land itself is languishing. Sometimes God brings judgment upon nations by bringing natural disasters such as drought and famine. However, just because God brings judgment in this fashion at times does not mean that every natural disaster is necessarily God bringing judgment for a certain reason. Christians need to be careful about claiming that disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes are God judging a certain nation or city. In Israel's case, their actions had brought condemnation from God and this extended to the land as well.

Failed Leadership (4-6)

In particular, God is bringing His case

against the priests in the land. As those who are charged with teaching the people God's Word and acting accordingly, they are held accountable for the bad actions of the Israelites. Handling God's Word is a very important task. Our Christian leaders and pastors need to be sure to preach God's Word in its entirety so that the people know what God says and what He expects. For example, in many churches across the land cultural elements have crept in to replace biblical truth. Many churches have asserted that homosexuality is acceptable to God and that all religious faiths lead to God. Furthermore, in many churches gossip and grudges reign and are not confronted. We need to be praying for our church leaders because of the great responsibility they have.

Sick Religion (12-14)

The Israelites were guilty of following idols and false gods, which led to sinful behavior. Worship of Baal required temple prostitution, and these behaviors crept into worship of Yahweh. Because of this, the Israelite children did the same things. They were only following the example set by their parents.

For Christian parents today, this is a dire warning. Our children will learn about God from us, and they will see where our faith lies. For the Israelites, their faith was in foreign gods. If we put our faith in the government or in the stock market for our security, what does this say about our faith in God? Can we expect our children or even non-Christians to take our faith seriously when we put our hope in things seen rather than in God and His promises? This is not to suggest that the government or businesses are not important, but Christians are to place their hope and security — both financial and eternal — in God. Many Christians live in a way where God is only acknowledged in church on Sundays. What does this teach our children about God if He is supposedly supreme but only takes part in our lives one day a week? Christians need to realize that God is God of everything, not just certain aspects of our lives.

Bible Studies for Life

By Michael Wilson

Director, Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence, Samford University

YAHWEH OUR FATHER

Psalms 103:2-6, 8-13, 17-18

Last week's lesson invited us to consider Yahweh, the name of the God of holiness and wonder — the great *I Am*, our God. We were reminded that the Holy One keeps promises. Moses and the Hebrew people learned this truth as they experienced redemption from generations of Egyptian bondage.

This week's lesson reminds us that the Holy One engages with us in our daily living. Though holy and different from us, God is always reaching out to us like a compassionate, loving father to his children.

Yahweh Gives Undeserved Love

(2-6)

It all begins with forgiveness. From the Psalmist's inmost being, he gives voice to a song of praise and blessing to God for what God has done in his life. The Hebrew people could identify with the message. They too had experienced the beneficial activity of Yahweh's steadfast love: theirs was a forgiveness that healed, delivered from desperate life-and-death situations and made it possible for them to experience a renewed, satisfying, good life.

Undeserved and impossible to earn, God's loving, redemptive activity encompasses the entire life experience. Like David and the Hebrew people, we too can declare, "Praise the Lord, O my soul" for God's active love and care in all of our life situations.

Yahweh Displays Unequaled Love

(8-12)

We know many stories in Scripture that describe God's punishment of evildoers and His blessing of the righteous. These verses present a slightly different testimony. David's words reflect personal acquaintance with disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. Yet he declares that Yahweh does not deal with a person based on his or her sin. Like a loving father, God's response to disobedience is motivated by compassion.

"As high as the heavens are above the earth" defines the limit of God's love. "As far as the east is from the west" describes the distance transgressions are placed from the memory of God. Thankfully, Yahweh does not act in a way commensurate with one's transgressions. Mercy, compassion and love are God's ways. There is no love that can be compared to this love. However, there is an appropriate response to such love: we are to live with a reverent sense of awe and righteous responsibility before the Holy One.

Yahweh Extends Unceasing Love

(13, 17-18)

In reflective moments we are aware how fragile and vulnerable life can be and how brief is our time on earth. Many older adults increasingly ponder the end of their days and what is beyond this life. The Psalmist reminds us that God knows our condition; we are made from dust, and to dust the body will return. The steadfast love of Yahweh for us is not just unending, it is everlasting. This unceasing love exists eternally just as God exists eternally. Though our time on earth is limited, God's love for us is not. It extends beyond the end of our time in this life to include even our time in eternity with God. The Psalmist declares that, like a loving father, God's blessings and love are also for those who transgress and are disobedient, who turn to Yahweh for help.

The Life Lesson

Psalms 103 is a personal testimony. David experienced firsthand God's compassion-driven forgiveness that renewed his life and restored his joy and gave him purpose. David's testimony also was the testimony of a people. God's compassion-driven forgiveness for the Hebrew people and their repeated transgressions renewed them and gave them a future. What was true for the Psalmist and the Hebrew people is true for us today. The undeserved compassion and steadfast love we can experience in our lives is possible as we daily continue turning to God in obedience and away from our transgressions.

Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Headwear.

4. Girl's name.

8. Delete.

12. Genetic material.

13. French city.

14. Black. (poetic)

15. ___ and outs.

16. Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his ___s. (1 Pet. 2:21)

17. Englishman.

18. Get up and about.

20. To chant.

22. Mine ___ is as nothing before thee. (Ps. 39:5)

23. Dove's sound.

24. We remember ... the melons, ... leeks and the _____. (Num. 11:5)

27. The king's chamberlains, Bigthan and _____. (Esther 2:21)

31. Kinsman. (abbr.)

32. Dessert.

33. Do not interpretations ___ to God? (Gen. 40:8)

37. Thy ___ shall be to thy husband. (Gen. 3:16)

40. Civil Aeronautics Authority. (abbr.)

41. Historical period.

42. Wager.

45. Elevated train.

46. Unoccupied.

50. The sons of Mushi; Mahli and _____. (1 Chron. 23:23)

52. Hawaiian welcome presents.

54. Neither/____.

55. Capital of Peru.

56. It is appointed unto men ___ to die. (Heb. 9:27)

57. Power maker.

58. Yet will they ___ upon the Lord. (Mic. 3:11)

59. Edgar Allan's kin.

60. Whom do men ___ that I, the Son of Man am? (Matt. 16:13)

Down

1. Manger.

2. Queen ___ furniture.

3. As the flower of the grass he shall _____. (James 1:10)

4. Every man shall pitch with ___ of their father's house. (Num. 2:2)

5. As vinegar upon ___, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart. (Prov. 25:20) (pl.)

6. Frozen water.

7. Describe.

8. I am ___ both to the Greeks and ... Barbarians. (Rom. 1:14)

9. River in Spain.

10. Cut of meat.

11. Between. (prefix)

19. Chinese religion.

21. As the days of _____. (Matt. 24:37)

24. Sphere.

25. Born.

26. Love worketh no ___ to his neighbour. (Rom. 13:10)

28. Upon, over. (prefix)

29. ___, we would see Jesus. (John 12:21)

30. Part of a giggle.

34. In the work cited.

35. Scottish no.

36. Horse's gait.

37. Graven by art and man's _____. (Acts 17:29)

38. Expunges.

39. Internal pouch.

42. A ___ and a pomegranate. (Ex. 39:26)

43. Singer ____ Gorme.

44. Son of Ishmael. (Gen. 25:13-15)

47. The ___ are a people not strong. (Prov. 30:25)

48. A suddenly bright star.

49. Salver.

51. The herd ___ violently down a steep place. (Luke 8:33)

53. ___ch walked with God: and he was not. (Gen. 5:24)

World of Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Chinese Christian leader K.H. Ting dies at 97

NANJING, China — K.H. Ting, an Anglican bishop prior to China's Cultural Revolution who led a "postdenominational" re-emergence of Chinese Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s, died Nov. 22 after several years of poor health.

Hailed by some as a patriot and visionary and criticized by others for being too cozy with China's Communist leaders, Ting, 97, worked through 60 often difficult years of change in China.

Ting was ordained as China's last Anglican bishop in 1942, a position he never renounced. His church was effectively dissolved and merged with other Protestant denominations into an umbrella organization called the China Christian Council. Ting served as the liaison between church and state in China and as president of the China Christian Council, the official Protestant denomination. He became president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1953.

He lost his positions during the Cultural Revolution — a crack-down launched in 1966 to strengthen Mao's position in the Communist Party and ensure continuation of the revolution that formed the People's Republic of China in 1949 — but returned to prominence in the wake of liberalizations following Mao's death in 1976.

In 1985, Ting and others set up the Amity Foundation, a Christian faith-based organization that promotes education, social services, health and rural development across China. Its work includes Nanjing Amity Printing Company, Ltd., a joint venture with the United Bible Societies launched in 1988 that recently celebrated the printing of its 100 millionth Bible.

Ting also is credited with opening up the Chinese church to the outside world, including Amity's Teachers Program, which recruits people from around the world sponsored by church agencies to teach English, Japanese or German in Chinese universities.

Church of England votes not to allow women bishops

LONDON — In a surprise move that shocked both sides of a years-long debate, the Church of England on Nov. 20 rejected a move to allow women bishops.

Many of the 470 members of the church's three-tiered General Synod (bishops, clergy and laity) were stunned that the House of Laity could not garner a two-thirds majority in favor of women bishops. The vote failed by just five votes, 132-74, after easily passing the bishops and clergy.

"The consequence of the 'no' vote of terminating any further consideration of the draft legislation means that it will not be possible to introduce draft legislation in the same terms until a new General Synod comes into being in 2015," a church statement said.

Many were perplexed by the vote, especially after 42 out of 44 dioceses approved the move and more than three-quarters of local synods had voted in favor.

Both the outgoing archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and his successor, Justin Welby, had urged the General Synod to vote for women bishops, 18 years after the church opened the priesthood to women.

The vote came after almost nine hours of debate and months of lobbying by both sides. While the vote was expected to be close, many believed Welby's full-throated support would help end years of acrimonious debate.

Russia holds first Presbyterian General Assembly

MOSCOW — "Our numbers are smaller than we had anticipated, but the start has been made." That was the opinion of Vladimir Li, pastor of Moscow Presbyterian Church, following the founding of Russia's first Presbyterian General Assembly in Moscow on Oct. 4. Twenty-nine delegates from Presbyterian congregations stretching from Moscow to Sakhalin Island, 4,400 miles to the east, attended the founding of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Russia.

The General Assembly will be meeting every two years. President for the initial two-year period is Vladimir Li, a medical doctor with a master's degree in theology from California. His deputy is Ahn Soon-Cheol, a long-term Moscow missionary from Korea. "There would be less interest if we only met again in four years," Li said. "We chose to meet in two years so that those still on the outside can join sooner." The next assembly is to be held in 2014 on Sakhalin Island.

One immediate task involves obtaining government registration. This will allow congregations to join a genuine Presbyterian denomination. In order to achieve legality, Presbyterian congregations have been forced over the past 20 years to work under a variety of interdenominational umbrellas.



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Employees Recognized for Service:** Judson College recognized a number of employees at the annual Employee Recognition Convocation on Oct. 6.

College president David Potts presided and noted that the honorees represented more than 120 years of service to the institution. "Work is a good thing," Potts said to the assembled students, faculty and staff. "A good motto for life is to find things for your hands to do that are constructive and uplifting."

Five-year honorees included Charles Flaherty and Elizabeth Huey, of the facilities staff; sports information director, Marsha Ford; and director of faith-based service and learning, Susan Jones.

Ten-year honorees were security officer, Michael Russell, and assistant facilities director, James Huey.

Twenty-five-year honorees included registrar, Eleanor Drake, and facilities staffer, Lee Andrew Mims.

Biology professor Thomas Wilson was honored for 40 years of service.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **'40 Years After Tolkien' On Display at Samford Library:** An exhibit celebrating the fantasy world of Middle Earth as created by J.R.R. Tolkien is on display at the Samford University Library. The collection includes first editions in hardback and paperback, movie posters and other documentation related to Tolkien

and his Lord of the Rings series.

The display acknowledges the 40th anniversary year of the death of Tolkien. The exhibit will be up through Jan. 2, 2013.

The items on display, more than 50 in all, are courtesy of Samford graduate student Rebecca Poe Hays and her father, Union University professor of theology and Christian apologetics Hal Poe. The two have studied and written extensively on Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and other literary-minded Inklings from Tolkien's Oxford University tenure in the 1930s and 1940s.

For information, call the Samford library at 205-726-2748.

► **Samford Continues to Rise on Kiplinger's Best Values List:** Samford University continues to rise on the annual list of best college values published by Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine. In the 2012 list of "Best Values in Private Colleges" recently released, Samford was number 63, up two places from its number 65 ranking in last year's list.

According to Kiplinger's, the most points go to "schools with the lowest total cost — tuition, fees, room and board, and books — with equal points to schools that knock down the price through non-need-based aid."

The list is available online at <http://www.kiplinger.com/reports/best-college-values>.

► **Samford's Brock School of Business and Journalism and Mass Communication Collaborate on MBA and JMC Degree:** Samford University's Brock School of Business and journalism and mass communication (JMC) department announced a unique partnership that allows JMC students who obtain a business minor as part of their JMC degree to remain at Samford with the oppor-

tunity to obtain an MBA over the course of the following year. This collaboration will allow JMC majors to graduate with both an MBA-JMC degree in five years.

► **Samford's Adult Degree Program Sets Information Session Dec. 13:** Samford University's Adult Degree Program (ADP) will hold an information session for prospective students Dec. 13, 6-7 p.m. in Divinity Hall Room N102. Doors will open at 5:45 p.m. Samford's ADP enables adults to earn a bachelor's degree or complete a paralegal studies certificate through evening classes.

Admission is open for spring semester classes, which will begin Jan. 28, 2013. For information, call 205-726-2898, email ADP director Laura Tomlin at lhlee@samford.edu, or visit www.samford.edu/adultdegree.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **UMobile Launches Updated Website:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) announced its updated website at www.umobile.edu. The site features improved navigation capabilities, dynamic photography of campus life, information about upcoming events and quick ways to schedule a campus visit, connect with alumni or keep up with championship athletics.

The update enhances opportunities for prospective students, parents, alumni, donors and the Alabama Baptist family to connect with the university. Other ways to stay informed about UMobile include Facebook at www.facebook.com/universityofmobile and Twitter at www.twitter.com/umobile-news.

Final judgment obtained in White Hall case

Gambling opponents have received another victory in the fight against so-called "electronic bingo" machines.

Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange's office obtained a final judgment for the State of Alabama on Nov. 26 in a so-called "electronic bingo" case arising out of the execution of a search warrant at a Lowndes County casino.

In March 2009, pursuant to a warrant, the State seized more than 100 machines from White Hall Entertainment Center and more than half a million dollars in cash proceeds from illegal gambling at the casino.

After that raid, a legal battle quickly ensued with attorneys for the charity running the gambling center.

The State filed an action seeking

forfeiture of the items under an Alabama law that makes illegal gambling devices and illegal gambling proceeds forfeited to the State.

Earlier this year, Jefferson County Circuit Court Judge Robert Vance declared the seized money forfeited to the State's General Fund. On Nov. 26, Vance declared that the illegal gambling devices be forfeited to the State as well.

'Consented'

After several years of litigation, four slot machine manufacturers "consented to the relief sought by the State."

Vance held that "the State is entitled to the relief sought in the complaint, namely the forfeiture and condemnation of the 'gambling devices' identified therein. The State may promptly make the

arrangements necessary for the destruction of such devices."

Strange said he was pleased with Vance's decision to grant the State's petition for forfeiture. "Today the trial court ordered that the gambling devices seized at the White Hall casino in 2009 are to be destroyed pursuant to Alabama law. This is exactly what the State has sought all along and I am pleased that this controversy was successfully resolved in the courts."

Strange also noted that he hoped Vance's order would help end the attempts of organized gambling to bring illegal slot machines into the state. "There is no reasonable argument that these so-called 'electronic bingo' machines are legal anywhere in Alabama," he said. (Alabama Attorney General's Office, TAB)



ABP photo

Lizzy Alvarado, a 21-year-old college student, participates in 'tree-sitting' as part of the Tar Sands Blockade. Alvarado has been involved in a ministry at Austin Heights Baptist Church that recycles and repurposes decorated bottles, making them into crafts that are sold to benefit Habitat for Humanity.

'Christian Hospitality'

Texas church reaches out to anti-oil protesters

Hospitality offered by Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas, shattered stereotypes of Christianity for secular-minded 20-somethings engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience to stop a controversial oil pipeline from Canada. Meanwhile, budding friendships gave church members a new perspective on a younger generation that traditional congregations are struggling to reach.

It all began a few weeks ago, when the church's earth-care ministry showed a film about energy usage at Stephen F. Austin State University. The screening was attended by a number of activists camped nearby to protest construction of the Trans-Canada Keystone XL Pipeline, a project viewed by some as essential to America's energy security and to others as an environmental disaster.

Environmental issues

Surprised to find a Baptist church in the area concerned about environmental issues, four or five of the blockaders attended worship services at Austin Heights the next morning. In the weeks that followed the number of blockaders attending church grew, with up to 30 in worship services.

"These are mostly kids in their 20s who are a long way from home," said Austin Heights Pastor Kyle Childress. "There are a few Texans, but most are from out of state — places like New York, California and Chicago. They are urban, secular young people for the most part."

Childress said a handful of the young adults are churchgoing Christians, but most are not. "Most see the church as part of the problem," he said.

Skeptical blockaders encountered an unexpected

reception at Austin Heights. "We just practiced Christian hospitality," Childress said.

The church invited the protesters to attend potluck meals. Some members offered the young people places to shower and wash their laundry.

Childress said conversations with the blockaders allowed members of Austin Heights to "put a human face on the direct actions these young people are undertaking." The church's hospitality, in turn, gave protesters a fresh perspective on Christianity.

"They had never heard this gospel stuff before, but they're open and interested," he said. "They don't take anything for granted. They've asked me questions I've never been asked before."

Twelve people were arrested Nov. 19 for chaining themselves to heavy machinery used to prepare the pipeline route and putting up a tree blockade by suspending themselves from 50-foot pine trees, effectively blocking the Keystone XL path.

Childress recalled one discussion with a young protester about the pressure many churches feel to incorporate the latest technology into worship in order to appeal to young people.

"He told me, 'If more churches were on the front lines of things that matter, they wouldn't have any problem getting young people to church,'" Childress said. "Being with these kids who are so passionate and want to do something meaningful with their lives has helped our church put a face on the next generation of urban, unchurched young people."

Childress said he hopes the church makes an equally lasting impression on the blockaders.

"I sure would like it, when they leave this area, if they would walk away saying: 'The church does care.'" (ABP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Okla. judge defends sentencing teenager to church

MUSKOGEE, Okla. — A district judge in Oklahoma who sentenced a 17-year-old boy to 10 years of church attendance is standing by his sentence as the right thing to do — even if it may not have been the constitutional thing to do.

Judge Mike Norman gave Tyler Alred a 10-year deferred sentence for DUI manslaughter. Alred was driving a Chevrolet pickup in the early morning hours of Dec. 4, 2011, when he hit a tree. His passenger and friend, 16-year-old John Dum, was pronounced dead at the scene.

The church requirement is just one of the conditions that Norman placed on Alred's deferred sentence. The judge also ordered him to finish high school and complete welding school. Both Alred's attorney and the victim's family agreed to the terms of the sentence.

Norman said the church requirement is something he has done in the past, especially in child support cases. He has never done it for a manslaughter charge.

Ryan Kiesel, the executive director of the Oklahoma chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the requirement to attend church is a "clear violation of the First Amendment."

"It's my understanding that this judge has recommended church in previous sentences, and I believe that goes too far as well," Kiesel said. "This, however — actually making it a condition of a sentence — is a clear violation of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment."

Norman said he did not believe his sentence would pass a legal challenge — but he does not believe either side will seek an appeal.

"Both families were satisfied with the decision," Norman said in an interview. "I talked to the district attorney before I passed sentence. I did what I felt like I needed to do."

Court grants injunction in Navy chaplains case

WASHINGTON — A preliminary injunction has been granted in the case of 65 chaplains who allege that evangelicals have been discriminated against by the U.S. Navy, even as many of the chaplains are nearing retirement age.

In early November, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals overruled a lower court's denial last January of an injunction request. The plaintiffs hoped the injunction would delay promotion board hearings until their cases could be argued in court.

The chaplains contend the Navy's chaplain promotion process favors mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.

"We believe our statistics show discrimination and favoritism in the process the Navy has used," said Tom Rush, pastor of Berea Baptist Church, Social Circle, Ga.

"I'm pleased that we finally have a chance to tell our side of the story."

Originating with a single lawsuit in late 1999, over the next seven years evangelicals from numerous denominations filed additional suits. The cases that were not settled or otherwise resolved later were consolidated into one class action suit.

The ruling will allow the plaintiffs to again press for a delay in the next promotion board meetings, tentatively scheduled for February.

The case has been assigned to a new federal district court judge, Gladys Kessler, who will hold a hearing to determine the next step in resolving the lawsuit.

Charitable giving shows slight increase in 2011

INDIANAPOLIS — Charitable giving overall increased by \$6 billion in 2011, an increase of almost 4 percent from 2010, according to the 2012 report by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University.

Individuals gave \$217 billion compared with \$209 billion in 2010.

"A little less than two years out from the end of the Great Recession, we're starting to see charitable giving increase modestly each year," said Geoffrey Brown, executive director of the Giving USA Foundation, which publishes the report.

Giving was highest in 2007, at \$311 billion, and then fell in 2008 and 2009 and only began to increase in 2010. The 2011 total for all giving, including foundations and corporations, was \$298 billion.

Giving for 2012 seems on pace to meet or slightly exceed last year's \$217 billion level, Brown said.