



INSIDE



Anniston dry cleaners show God's love by providing coats for needy

◆ Page 3



8-year-old girl donates birthday gifts to Toys for Tots for Christmas

◆ Page 9



UMobile's Christmas Spectacular to air on TV

◆ Page 12



May you rejoice in His blessings during this Christmas season and throughout the new year.

Merry Christmas

Photo by Caroline Summers

from the staff of *The Alabama Baptist*

L to r, row one: Melanie McKinney, Wanda Bergeron, Pam Holt, Grace Thornton, Deb Lowery, Haley Piersol, Brandi Johnson; **row two:** Julie Payne, Neisha Fuson, Sarah Anne Elliott, Susan Stevens; **row three:** Vicki Burton, Linda Harrison, Joseph Rhea; **row four:** Lauren C. Grim, Debbie Campbell; **row five:** Bill Gilmore, Jennifer Davis Rash; **row six:** Bob Terry.

God as 'divine Maestro' has 'purpose' in massive migration

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It was one meal out in Baltimore, not too different from what a lot of Alabamians do for dinner. Who could've known their conversation with a waitress would start a church planting movement in Asia?

Samuel and Young Cho didn't know that going in — but they were open.

"When they met their server, a

young girl from Nepal, they built rapport with her and shared the gospel. And then they met her friends," said J.D. Payne, pastor for church multiplication at The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.

The couple planted a Nepali church in Baltimore, reaching people the young waitress knew.

They didn't stop there.

"They found out that she still had tight connections with people in Nepal, so they traveled to visit her friends there," Payne said. "They took gifts from the Nepalis of Baltimore back to their families in Nepal, and they stayed in their houses while they were there."

And they planted a church in Nepal — with 200 people. It has only spread from there, Payne said.

"That one Nepali server in Bal-

timore was just the first domino to fall in a huge chain of people coming to know Christ in Asia," he said.

Great potential

It's a new door divinely opened to believers in the last few years — the chance to meet immigrants in the West and reach their home countries by using their existing social networks, Payne said. "What is the potential for what God can do with the movement of unreached people groups into our neighborhood? It only takes one Ethiopian eunuch to take the gospel back to Ethiopia."

And from the looks of it, there's a lot more than one in our vicinity, he said.

Payne, who wrote the book

"Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission," said the United States is near the top of the list for the number of unreached people groups (UPGs) inside its borders.

With 361 UPGs, the U.S. narrowly misses the No. 2 spot, taken by China with 368. India tops the list with 941.

"Very few of us know that the U.S. is in the top three for unreached people groups, and that Canada is No. 5," Payne said.

And not only that — the numbers are huge, he said.

If the migrant population of the world were a country unto itself, it would be the fifth largest country in the world, Payne said. The U.S. easily has the biggest slice of that

(See 'Nations,' page 4)

COMMENT

All a Part of the Christmas Story

To Israel, God promised a Messiah. He would be the “seed of Abraham” (Gen. 12:1–3) and lineage of David (2 Sam. 7:12–13). To fulfill this promise, He (the Creator of all that is) involved a variety of His handiwork to accomplish His purpose of salvation for all who believe.

None are surprised that God used a couple, both of whom were not only devout but sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit. Mary’s reply to the message of the angel that she would bear the “Son of the Most High,” even though she had never had sexual relations with a man, was a reply of humility. “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be unto me as you have said” (Luke 1:38). Such faith. Such obedience.

An angel also appeared to Joseph telling him about the coming birth of Jesus. Joseph’s response was to do “what the angel of the Lord had commanded him” even though it meant personal humiliation and ridicule (Matt. 1:24). Again, such faith. Again, such obedience.

God also used the insolent. He used Herod the Great who saw the newborn child as a threat to his power. Herod used lies, manipulation and power in his attempt to snuff out this perceived threat to his rule as king of the Jews. Every effort thoroughly failed because God’s ultimate will for humanity cannot be thwarted, not even by disbelief.

Power and wealth

It was not Herod’s power or his wealth that caused his insolence. From the east came Magi — kings and spiritual leaders. Each symbolized power and wealth, but these aristocrats chose to bow before the baby Jesus. Herod represents those so lost in themselves that they consciously choose to oppose God.

The Magi were foreigners, not Jews. Their inclusion in the redemption story shows God’s intention that His salvation be available for every tribe and every tongue. No ethnic group is excluded.

Symbols of the world’s wealth — gold, frankincense and myrrh — were laid before the baby. One is reminded of the temptations of Jesus when Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of this world together with their splendor. Jesus rejected that offer, saying that only God is worthy of worship (Luke 4:5–8). Certainly the treasures

Letters to the Editor

THANK YOU FOR PRAYING

Our family is serving in East Asia. This Christmas season we want to thank you and your readers for lifting up the Work. It makes such a huge impact on what we are doing.

Daniel and Sarah Beth S.
East Asia



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

left on the stable floor were not nearly as important to God as the believing hearts of the Magi who knelt before Jesus.

God used a pagan empire — Rome — to create the “fullness of time” for His Son to be born. He used Roman law — a required census — to drive a carpenter’s family from Nazareth to Bethlehem where the prophecy of old could be fulfilled concerning the place of the Messiah’s birth (Mic. 5:2).

God used a star to announce the birth of His Son. The star was so unusual that Magi followed it from afar but some nearby, like Herod, never even noticed its appearance. The light of the star guided those opened to its message to the One who was, indeed, the Light of the World.

Angels were chosen to sing “Glory to God in the Highest” because a Savior had been born.

Who beside the shepherds heard the joyful message of the heavenly host no one knows. Perhaps some thought the message nothing more than nighttime thunder. But the shepherds heard and understood. How surprising that of all the people around Bethlehem that night, only the poor, simple shepherds understood and obeyed.

Being a shepherd was not a vocation for those positioned to move up in the world. Shepherds were poor, mostly uneducated. Shepherds lived a simple life. But that fateful night God chose to include the poor in the cast of characters involved in the birth of His Son. God always shows Himself as caring for the poor.

God included the priesthood of Israel as well. Zechariah, the priest, was burning incense in the Jerusalem Temple when God uttered the first words about the soon-coming Messiah. Zechariah’s firstborn would be the Promised One’s Elijah to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). Later this priest would sing

of Jesus as shining like the sun to shatter the darkness of sin (Luke 1:79).

God used prophets like Zechariah’s son John, of whom our Lord said that Israel had known no greater prophet. The story of John’s birth is inextricably woven into the fabric of our Lord’s incarnation.

There was the prophetess Anna. This was not a title she claimed for herself, but one bestowed on her by those who witnessed her faithful service and her relationship to God. It was Anna who saw Jesus at the Temple and “who spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Only God could reveal such truth to her heart.

Jewish law

God also used the Jewish law in the story of His Son’s birth, for it was the law that prompted Mary and Joseph to take their son to the Temple where Mary would offer two doves as a sacrifice

to complete her ritual cleansing. It was in keeping the law that the stage was set for Anna’s declaration as well as the affirmation of Jesus as the salvation of God made by Simeon, a man filled with the Spirit.

Not to be overlooked is another woman, Elizabeth, the mother of John. It was Elizabeth who made the first confession of faith in Jesus when she blessed Him while He was still in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:42).

God even used the animals in the stable. Not only did a donkey carry Mary all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem but the animals provided their manger — a feeding trough — for the newborn’s crib and

their straw as a bed for His mother.

Some of these players might have been surprised to learn that God was in control, even when they failed to recognize it. Certainly all the world was surprised at the way the Son of God came into this world in human form.

It is comforting to know that in the midst of what appears to be chaos to the human eye, God can be at work in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

“It is comforting to know that in the midst of what appears to be chaos to the human eye, God can be at work in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.”

***The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue Dec. 27.
The next issue will run Jan. 3.***



"If ye continue in my word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-870-8957. **Website:** www.thealabamabaptist.org. **Email:** news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and other locations.

PRINT
SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Church Budget — \$13
Individual — \$20.95

ONLINE
SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Church Budget — \$8.50
Individual — \$14.95

DR. BOBBY S. TERRY
EDITOR

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Chairman James "Jim" Warren, Jane Bellew, Stuart Calvert, Travis Coleman, Gary Fenton, George A. Foust, Craig Gault, Helen W. Mayo, Allan Murphy, Jim Oakley, Larry Patterson, Wayne Randall, Bradley Rushing, Steve Scoggins, William Melton, Amelia Pearson, Judy Stiefel, Rick Lance (ex-officio), Mike Shaw (ex-officio).

NEWS SERVICES
Baptist Press (BP), Associated Baptist Press (ABP), Religion News Service (RNS), Compass Direct News (CDN), Evangelical Press (EP), Forum 18 (F18), Morning Star News (MS).

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE
Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:
Circulation Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

**'Nation's top
Christian newspaper'**
as judged by
*Evangelical Press Association &
Religion Communicators Council*



Photo courtesy of Jim Davis

Smith Cleaners in Anniston is accepting coat donations and cleaning each coat before sending it to the Baptist Service Centers of Calhoun Baptist Association. Pictured are (l to r) Jim Davis, associate director of church and community ministries at the Calhoun Baptist Service Centers, and Debbie and David Young, owners of Smith Cleaners.

'Warmth of Jesus'

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Anniston dry cleaners show God's love by providing coats for needy

David and Debbie Young are helping to ensure that members of their community stay nice and warm this winter. As owners of Smith Cleaners in Anniston, they are accepting coat donations and are cleaning each coat before sending it to the Baptist Service Centers of Calhoun Baptist Association.

"I was inspired by the book of James to start this coat drive," Debbie Young said. "Two of the things that are everyday things people have to have are food and clothing, and I thought this would be a good way of showing the love of Jesus."

Thanks to some media exposure from radio stations, word has spread around the area, and the Youngs have received more than 600 coats so far. Their goal is to collect 1,000 coats by Christmas, and Debbie Young feels confident that they'll reach or exceed that amount. She

hopes the recipients will receive more than just a new article of clothing.

"My prayer is that God will bless every person who gets a coat and that not only will they feel the warmth of the coat, but that they'll also feel the warmth of Jesus through the gift," said Debbie Young, a member of Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston.

Great response

Jim Davis, associate director of church and community ministries at the Calhoun Baptist Service Centers, is thrilled with the way this initiative has taken off. Davis is distributing the coats at the two Baptist Service Centers, and each family registered in their database is able to receive a coat for every family member.

"I just think it's a wonderful story about how a local business can reach out to its

community and then how the community has shown such a great response," Davis said.

"They're cleaning the coats at no cost — all you have to do is bring it in. It's wonderful."

The drive has already been so successful, in fact, that Davis isn't able to use all the coats for the Baptist Service Centers in Calhoun Association, so he's passing some along for Etowah Baptist Association, as well as some local charities, to distribute.

"The folks receiving them are all so excited," he said. "We have some really nice coats coming in. Some are even brand new with the tags still on them. And the need for them is so great."

To learn how to donate a coat to help the Youngs meet their goal of gathering 1,000 coats by Christmas Day, contact Smith Cleaners at 256-239-9111 or email Davis at jddavis@cbasbc.org.

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes counselor charged with sex abuse

A counselor employed by Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) has been arrested on sex abuse charges after an adult patient claimed he touched her during counseling sessions.

Jonathan Eric Minnon, 31, turned himself in to Decatur police after a woman se-



MINNON

cretly recorded her counseling session to validate her claims. He was released on \$500 bond, according to AL.com.

According to a statement released by ABCH on Dec. 12, senior administrative leadership was made aware of the allegation Dec. 10. A warrant was issued by police Dec. 11. Minnon has been

terminated from his role at ABCH. "We are working closely with legal counsel, working closely with law enforcement and examining our policies and procedures to see if they need to be adjusted to prevent any further occurrences or allegations," said Rod Marshall, ABCH president and CEO. "We want our response to reflect concern for all parties involved," Marshall said. "We are concerned for the party who made

the allegation. We are concerned for the family of the individual against whom the allegation has been made." The misconduct did not involve any children or minors in the care of ABCH, he said.

The ABCH has a rich heritage of Christian service and provides services such as long-term and short-term residential care, foster care and professional counseling. In 2011, ABCH served 3,769 children and families. (TAB)

Building relationships with internationals

Be intentional.

If you're not, you won't see the people around you and relationships won't happen.

Be a learner.

Let people teach you about their culture.

Expect to make mistakes.

They know you will make mistakes, so give yourself grace in that area. It's great to acknowledge that and humbly ask them for patience as you learn.

Work the bridges of God.

He already has social networks in place to help bring people to Himself. Make new friends, then meet their friends and family.

Prioritize along receptivity lines.

Don't withhold the gospel from people who are resistant, but begin with those who are receptive. Spend the most time with those people.

Understand cultural and generational differences.

A person who is a second-generation immigrant will likely be very different from a first-generation immigrant.

Contextualize your methods.

Share in a way that makes sense to them and their culture.

Practice evangelism that results in new churches.

Aim to start churches among groups of new believers by sharing in a person's social networks.

Keep things simple and highly reproducible.

We as believers are the representation of Christ that they will see. Teach and disciple them in a way that they can reproduce what they learn with others.

Avoid paternalism.

Don't disciple them in such a way that the work is dependent on you. They won't be able to spread it, and if you leave, it will die. They have the Holy Spirit — teach them to rely on Him and to teach others as they learn.

(Source: J.D. Payne)



The United States has 20 percent of the world's migrant population living within its borders. 'We've got ready access' to 361 unreached people groups, J.D. Payne says. 'How will we respond?'

Nations reached through migrants' social networks

(continued from page 1)

within its borders — 20 percent, or 42.8 million.

"In the top spot, the U.S. has 20 percent, but to be No. 2, Russia only had to have 5.7 percent," Payne said. "Twenty percent — that's amazing."

And it's a group that looks different than it used to, he said. "Something happened after 1945 that ushered in a new global migration era. Our primary immigrants into the U.S. are no longer European but Asian, African and Hispanic, so they bring with them a range of different backgrounds that aren't Judeo-Christian."

Also, between 2000 and 2007, the number of international students worldwide doubled to more than 2 million, and schools in the West are their main destinations, Payne said. "Many of the home countries of migrants and students are places we spend so much time trying to figure out how to get into, and here they are in our backyard."

Nearby places like Atlanta have a "global footprint" that's "enormous," said Troy Bush, minister of evangelism and missions at Cross Point Church, Duluth, Ga. "We're talking about the heart of the Bible Belt and the radical changes that have taken place right here. We literally have people from all over the world."

Payne said it's not just immigrants to the U.S. who are ripe for the harvest. People aren't just coming and starting a life in the U.S. with a blank slate — they're keeping strong ties to their home country.

About \$500 billion in earnings was sent from migrants in the West back to their home countries in 2012. India and China — the two countries with the most UPGs — receive by far the biggest slices of that money. And 23 percent of the gross domestic product of Nepal comes from money sent in from Nepalis living in other countries, Payne said.

"What this tells us is that people are keeping strong connections with their people back home, sending money often and into the countries with the most unreached people groups," he said.

And where the money flows along social lines, the gospel can too, he said. The "bridges of God" are in place.

"The opportunities are huge. This is where we find ourselves in the present day," Payne said. "So the question is — how do we respond?"

The first response, he said, is to realize that God has used migration for His purposes since the creation of the world, and it's something He still does today.

"In Genesis 1:28, before the fall of man had happened, God told Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth. This could only involve migration," Payne said. "Later, the Tower of Babel was the people's rebellion against be-

ing dispersed, something they knew God wanted them to do."

Through Old Testament history, God continued to move His people to accomplish His will, Payne said. He moved Joseph into Egypt, the people of Israel into the Promised Land and even Naomi's family into Moab so that one of her sons could marry Ruth the Moabite.

"Ruth became part of the line of David and the line of Christ, and that happened due to a famine that moved people around. After Christ, when believers were persecuted and they migrated, it caused the Church to spread," Payne said. "There are so many examples of how God moved people across the centuries to work out His purposes."

'We live in a new world'

It's evidence that God is "the divine Maestro," he said.

Payne said the apostle Paul talks about this characteristic of God when he explains God to the Areopagus: "And He (God) made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him" (Acts 17:26-27a).

It's clear from this that God is making this massive migration happen today so that people may find Him, Payne said. "And if you believe that, it makes you ask the question, 'What is our response?'"

What happens, he asked, when people get on a plane and land in Alabama? Believers should begin to intentionally build relationships with them, Payne said.

"You'll be surprised how easy it is to get into a faith conversation with someone who is not a natural-born citizen of the U.S.," he said. "Faith is an important topic to a lot of people in the rest of the world."

The Church should be awake to the doors God is opening, because "we don't know how long they'll be open," Payne said.

Leaders from the International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board have partnered in the past couple of years with the intent of reaching UPGs in North America. This focus has trickled down into state conventions, associations and seminaries. "It's a new day in partnership and collaboration," said Ken Winter, IMB vice president for church and partner services.

Payne said that's exactly the kind of solidarity needed to make the most of God's work of migration. "We live in a new world. Never in the history of the Church have we had an opportunity like this. Will we be good stewards of this ripe opportunity?"

FBC Livingston reaches Chinese students; member moves to diverse part of London

Last year, God told Mae Evans it was time to “drop everything” and go live among internationals.

Her answer? Let’s go.

Now Evans, who grew up in First Baptist Church, Livingston, in Bigbee Baptist Association, serves as a Southern Baptist representative in central London. Where she lives, there’s a mosque, a refugee center and a diverse university campus nearby.

“I’m amazed every day at how many internationals I see, and I’m burdened that each person I pass could be from somewhere — anywhere — in the world and they might not have had a chance to hear the gospel,” she said.

She’s met people in her neighborhood from China, Iran, India, Brazil — all over the map. Recently when she was in a café drinking tea and reading her Bible, she was able to share the gospel with a Moroccan man who worked there.

“He would come up in between orders and ask me questions about Jesus,” Evans said.

“I was able to tell him about how Jesus had risen from the dead to free us from death. He had never heard that before.”

Evans said that, although she felt God drawing her to move to London, it doesn’t mean there aren’t opportu-

nities to reach internationals in her hometown.

Thanks to a new exchange program at the University of West Alabama, about 80 Chinese students call Livingston home, with the number growing each year.

It’s a fact not lost on First, Livingston.

“The church has started (English as a Second Language) classes, as well as a Tuesday night dinner,” Evans said. “They are students there for a time, and then they go back to China. Imagine the impact they can have back home where people haven’t heard.”

Evans had that thought again recently when she struck up a conversation with a Chinese student who has not yet trusted in Christ as Savior.

“He saw how I had marked up my Bible underlining verses over the years, and he said, ‘You are lucky — you’ve known about Jesus your whole life.’ It just reminds me again that there are millions here who have

grown up in different cultures and countries and haven’t had the opportunity to hear about the gospel,” Evans said. “I believe everyone should have the chance to hear.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — Name has been changed. (TAB)

Who’s here?

- ▶ Unreached people groups in the U.S. and Canada = 576.
- ▶ The University of Alabama at Birmingham ranks among the most diverse campuses in the nation, according to The Princeton Review.
- ▶ In 2010, 18,016 Iraqi refugees arrived in the U.S. Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia were the top origin of refugees coming to the U.S. that year.

“I’m amazed every day at how many internationals I see, and I’m burdened that each person I pass could be from somewhere — anywhere — in the world and they might not have had a chance to hear the gospel.”

Mae Evans, Southern Baptist representative



IMB photo

As the world moves to the West, the urban face of North America is changing. People come and settle primarily in cities, according to current missions research.

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Social media proves to be useful for ministries, associations

Facebook is not just for individual use anymore.

Barbour Baptist Association, Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association, Alabama-Crenshaw Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) and Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Samantha, in Sipsey Baptist Association have recently started utilizing social media as a communication and ministry tool.

Donna Harrison, administrative ministry assistant at Barbour Association, runs the association’s Facebook page and has “found it (to be) a good way of communicating with pastors, associations and the State Board of Missions.”

Created in August 2012, the associational Facebook page has 51 “likes” or followers. Harrison said the page is used to keep in touch with Alabama Baptists and to “get the word out about revivals, special invitations or prayer requests.”

Alabama-Crenshaw WMU started its Facebook page in 2010. Wanda Means, the association’s WMU director, and Leesha Massey, associational WMU assistant director, work together to keep the page up to date and “active.”

Means said the page is used to announce many things including: any event in the association’s churches, prayer requests, disaster relief information, inspiring messages or Scripture and International Justice Mission or WMU information about human trafficking (national WMU’s emphasis).

“We (also) put up a lot of pictures of (fall festivals, WMU events, Vacation Bible School or other events),” Means said.

“We want people to look every day and make them want to know what the WMU has posted that day,” she said.

The association’s WMU page has 134 “likes.”

Arbor Springs Baptist uses its Facebook page to announce church events and prayer requests, among other things. It also features a photo of the church building, aerial view of the land and cemetery. Its page has 285 “likes.”

Shanna Malone, secretary/clerk at Alabama-Crenshaw Association, started the association’s Facebook page in 2010 and really started using it as a way of communicating prayer requests for Brycen Smith, Director of Missions Don Yancey’s grandson, after he was in an accident in January 2011.

“(Facebook was a way) to post prayer requests and updates on (Brycen) to keep everyone involved. It served its purpose well,” Malone said, noting that Brycen was able to leave the hospital February 2011 and continued healing at home.

The associational page has 54 “likes.”

Means, who said she is not “a computer person,” noted that Facebook is simple and easy to use and thinks every association and WMU should have a Facebook page. “We’re not just reaching WMU (with our Facebook page), we’re reaching outside. We are reaching others (with inspiring words and insightful information) which is what it’s all about,” Means said. (Neisha Fuson)

Alabama Baptists redouble shoe box project efforts

Many Alabama Baptist associations and churches contribute to the Operation Christmas Child (OCC) shoe box project each year, but two groups ramped theirs up to new levels in 2012.

On Dec. 3, about 50 members of Salem-Troy Baptist Association churches took a “one-day missions trip” to Atlanta. All shoe boxes collected for OCC in the continental United States are processed at six locations to ensure their contents are appropriate and will survive travel to their destinations. Every box must be opened and examined before it can be sent.

Kenneth Baggett, director of missions for Salem-Troy Association, said their volunteers processed about 2,000 boxes in the four hours they worked that day. The work was meaningful, he said. Periodically the organization also would call a halt to the work for all the volunteers to pray over their shoe boxes.

“I’d hold a box to my heart and pray for the child, the family that was getting that box,” said Mandy Norman, wife of Dwayne Norman, pastor of Bush Memorial Baptist Church, Troy.

Isney Baptist Church, Silas, in Choctaw Baptist Association also got the opportunity to pray over what was a particularly large pile of boxes for them — a pile they had been collecting all year.

“An article in a prior issue of *The Alabama Baptist* was written about a group who took on Operation Christmas Child this year as a year-round project,” said church member Helen Spears. “The WMU ladies of Isney Baptist Church decided to make this our mission.” The church met its goal of 100 boxes — a big jump from the 28–30 boxes it usually prepares. “What a joy,” Spears said. (TAB)

Union Springs' Eastside Baptist reaches local Hispanic children

Hot sauce on a watermelon? That's how Earl Hinson serves it — at least to the Hispanic children his church reaches out to, because that's the way they like to eat it.

Hinson, a deacon and children's church director at Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs, met a Hispanic family in spring 2012 and invited them to Sunday School. They attended and introduced Hinson to another family.

Introduction after introduction led Hinson to start Team Kids, a Wednesday night outreach to children of about 10 Hispanic families in the Union Springs area.

Every Wednesday, Hinson picks up the children in the church's new 15-passenger van and takes them to play on the playground at the church, learn about Jesus and eat a good dinner. A team of eight couples volunteer to help lead the studies and activities and help serve the meals.

"We always share the gospel with [the children]," said Hinson, who also picks them up for Sunday morning services. He said there are other families that the church hopes to reach in the future.

The Team Kids ministry recently took a group of 23 children to First Baptist Church, Montgomery, to enjoy their Living Christmas Tree production.

'Just thrilled'

"The children were in awe and just thrilled," Hinson said.

A group of men from First, Montgomery, also built several sets of bunk beds to donate to two families with a total of 14 children. The families live in one home but only had three mattresses on the floor to share. Hinson made the church aware of the need and First, Montgomery, went right to work on the beds. First, Montgomery, also is teaming up with the Bullock-Cen-

ennial Baptist Association church to provide Christmas presents for each of the Team Kids children.

Hinson said he feels God called him and his wife, Patsy, to this ministry.

"[God] showed me the love of these kids and their desire to be with other people. They need someone to pick them up and hold them and hug them. ... All you can do is say, 'God, thank You,'" Hinson said.

Although no child has accepted Christ yet, Hinson is determined to show each one the love of God through Team Kids.

"Just pray for our kids," he requested. "Pray that they accept Jesus."

He said the ministry is in need of sheets, blankets, pillowcases and other household items to donate to families in need.

For more information, contact Hinson at 334-738-3309.

(Neisha Fuson)

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► **First Church, Roebuck Plaza**, in Birmingham, was one of 697 of the 45,000 Southern Baptist Convention churches to meet the International Mission Board's "P'ingtu Challenge" for its support of the 2011 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The church was recognized as giving between \$75 and \$99.99 per capita based on reported average Sunday morning worship attendance. Jim Auchmuty is pastor.

CALHOUN

► **First Church, Piedmont**,

will host Tom Blackaby and Jeff Slaughter in a Family Worship Celebration on Feb. 22-24, 2013. This celebration is all about empowering parents to bring up their children to love the Lord and encourage children to hang on to their faith through life's circumstances. To find out how your business can be involved in the event, call 256-447-9496 or email michaelmaddox72@aol.com. Philip Cooper is pastor.

SALEM-TROY

► **Salem Church, Brundidge**, will host Southland Vocal Band of Andalusia on Dec. 30,

6 p.m. For information about the band, visit www.southlandvocalband.com. Chad Manion is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Union Grove Church, Opelika**, will host Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University beginning Jan. 6, 4:30 p.m. Classes will last 10 weeks and will be held at the church. For information call 334-749-0461 or email Brian Parr at Brian@ugbcopelika.com. Robert Rhodes is pastor.

Mount Gilead hosts 2nd 'Walk Thru Bethlehem'

Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan, hosts its second 'Walk Thru Bethlehem,' a guided tour of the reconstructed city of Bethlehem during the time of Jesus' birth. The event was held Dec. 12-16 and more than 1,200 people had already attended at press time. Last year's total attendance was around 4,000. Pastor Bradley Rushing said more than 200 church members are involved in the event, which will be back next year. The church made a 10-year commitment to offer the event, he said. Minister of Worship Danny Williams organized this year's production.



Photo by Julie A. Maddox



Headland's Trinity Baptist marks 25 years of ministry

Trinity Baptist Church, Headland, celebrated 25 years of ministry Oct. 7 with a worship service that began at 10 a.m.

According to Luvone Jones, a church member who served with several others on the anniversary planning committee, Trinity Baptist's music director Hasten Walker led the singing and Pastor Dan Sheppard led the welcome.

The Judson Baptist Association church's first pastor, Bill Ashford, delivered the sermon, and Virginia Stephenson, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque.

Church members Shirley and Jackie Hand gave the church history. Melissa Tran and Denise Hodgson played an instrumental medley together during the service.

Following the service, attendees gathered in the fellowship hall for a special meal.

Jones said that seeing Trinity's first pastor and his wife "meant a lot to all of us."

According to Sheppard, the anniversary was a "wonderful day" and the church thought about the days, weeks and years to come.

He added that Trinity is a "praying church." Some of Trinity's members volunteer for Overflowing Ministries, part of Judson Association's thrift store ministry, and the church prays for that ministry, he said.

Trinity also recently held "Bethlehem's Joy," a "wonderful" outdoor retelling of the birth of Christ through music and drama, he said. (TAB)

Vredenburgh celebrates 100 years with homecoming

Vredenburgh Baptist Church celebrated two events on the same day in late September: homecoming and 100 years of existence.

Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Don Donald presented the Pine Barren Baptist Association church with a commemorative plaque and Paul Kirchharr, interim pastor, shared a message about going home, both to one's earthly home and to a heavenly home.

Earnest Halbrook, the deacon at Vredenburgh Baptist, said there were at least 75 people in attendance.

"We ... (also) used the day to celebrate the founding members that have passed away (in the past year)," Halbrook said.

Charter members George Pugh, J.Y. McIntosh and Peggy Fuller were recognized during the service.

A former member led in special music and a potluck lunch followed on the church grounds.

Kirchharr said the homecoming/anniversary was a "great day" and the "service was wonderful."

He said he hopes to see God grow the church both spiritually and numerically in the future. (Neisha Fuson)

Slocomb's Pleasant Hill gives God glory for 125 years

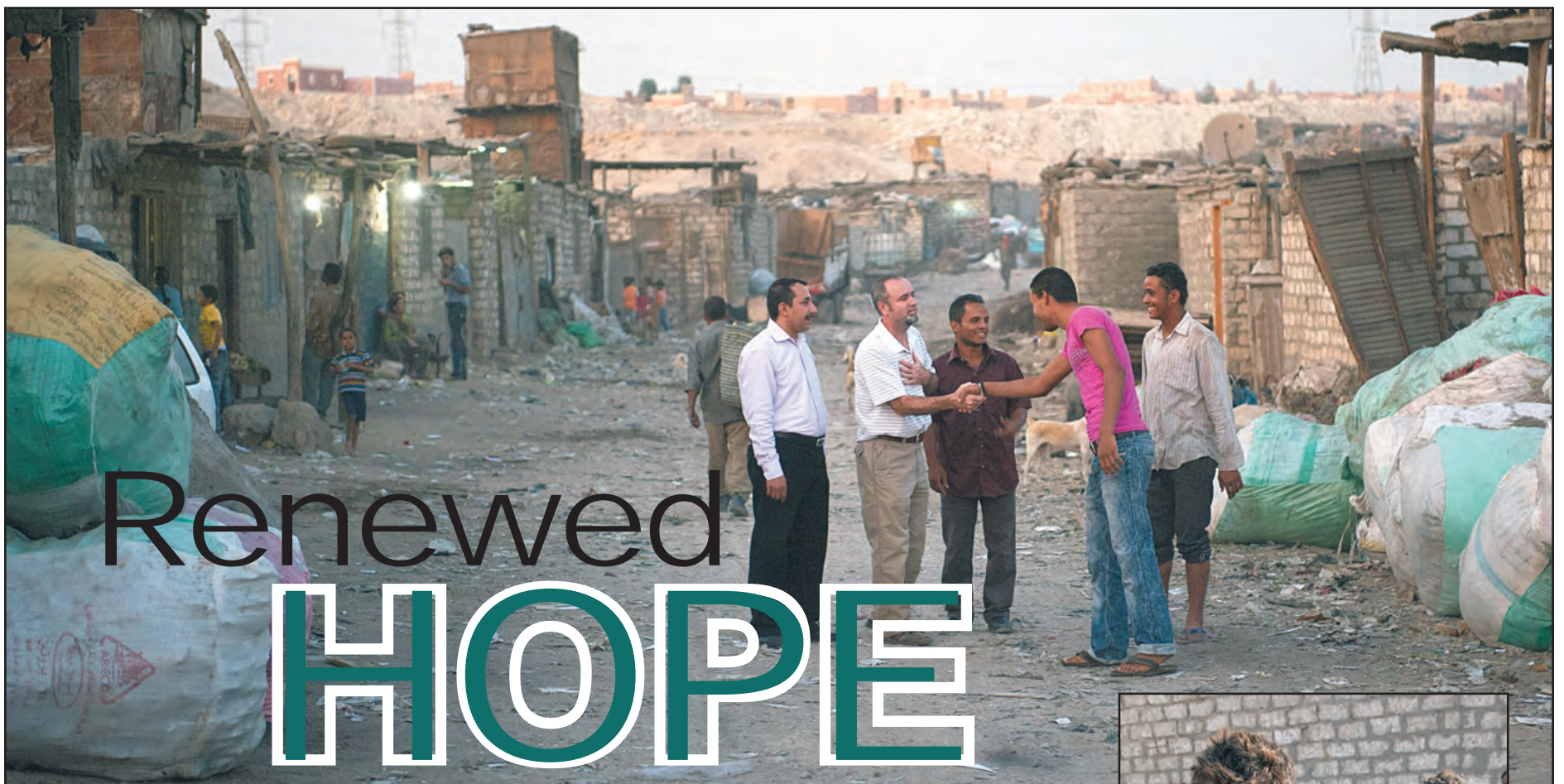
The sanctuary of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Slocomb, was full of "excitement and thankfulness" Oct. 28, according to Pastor Scott Byrd.

The Geneva Baptist Association church celebrated 125 years of existence with special guest speaker Randy Hagan, Coosa River Baptist Association director of missions who previously served as pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist. A slideshow presentation of old and new photos of church members and special events also was shown during the service.

Former member Jeff Mills and his daughter, Courtney Nowell, led special music. Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Virginia Stephenson presented the church with a commemorative plaque.

Byrd said more than 150 people attended the anniversary service and fellowship meal that followed.

Byrd said he encouraged the congregation to "be committed to serving" and to "keep the same level of commitment that [Pleasant Hill Baptist] has seen from servants in the past." (Neisha Fuson)



Scott (second from left), a Southern Baptist pastor from Oklahoma, is surrounded by refuse as he visits with residents of a 'garbage village' in Egypt in October 2011. The pastor understands the impact a church will have among the people and is anxious for his congregation to become involved.

IMB workers see one man's trash is another's treasure

A wise man builds his house upon rock, and a foolish man builds his house upon sand. On the outskirts of Cairo, about 300 people have built their houses upon trash.

But amid the stench and squalor of shifting garbage, God is building a church on a firm foundation.

Desperate for shelter on the outskirts of Cairo, residents use whatever they can find — sheets of tin and discarded cardboard — to create makeshift residences within this garbage village.

For more than 20 years, families living here have collected trash from area homes and businesses to make some cash. It is estimated that the 17 million population of greater Cairo throws away 13,000 tons of garbage every day.

Men rise early in the mornings to gather refuse and transport it back to their community in weathered pickup trucks or overflowing carts pulled by horses or donkeys. Some businesses bring the garbage to them.

"Society looks down [on us]," said Joseph, 31, who has lived in this slum for 14 years. "The smell is not good, the environment is not good." Regardless, he said, he has a message for his fellow residents of one of the poorest areas in Egypt: "You are not garbage."

Joseph's family moved to this garbage village from Asyut, Egypt, when he was a teenager. His father was a garbage collector and believed relocating closer to Cairo would offer more job opportunities.

Believing education was key to a better future, Joseph was determined to go to school. His parents sent him back to Asyut to live with his grandmother during the school year until he finished high school.

It was during his teens that Joseph began attending a Bible study. As he read the Word, Joseph felt God transforming his life — in more ways than one. He realized his worth in Christ was greater than his circumstances in the dump. At

18, he became a believer and a mentee of the study group leader. He also began attending a nearby seminary.

It was around this time that a neighborhood girl caught Joseph's eye. Hiba, who was born and raised in the garbage village, was a Christian when she met Joseph at a home Bible study. The two dated for five years before marrying.

As Joseph studied the Bible, the verses about God choosing the poor of the world to shame the rich resonated with him. Though he and Hiba had dreams of bettering their circumstances, God made it clear He wanted them to serve among their community.

"God put in my heart to build a church here," Joseph said.

In June 2011, Joseph saw his dream realized. He and several other believers began building a church from discarded cinderblocks and mud. A local Egyptian Baptist church heard about the undertaking and offered leadership and financial support. On Dec. 30, 2011, the church held its first worship service under a partial roof.

Since that first service, three people have prayed to receive Christ. This gives Southern Baptists reason to celebrate.

Southern Baptist workers in North Africa and the Middle East are training Joseph and local pastors in outreach and evangelism and providing them with needed resources to support church

plants.

In fact, Joseph's church is but one of many in a rich history of Baptist ministry in Egypt.

"Southern Baptists were very influential through the Cooperative Program (CP) and Lottie Moon [Christmas Offering]," said Ron Robinson, a Christian worker who served in Egypt for 29 years and witnessed the beginning of Baptist work there. "When we first went [to Egypt], the work was evangelism that resulted in churches. That was our statement."

The work has led to a vital impact on Egyptian churches,



IMB photos

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

which are answering the call to reach their own people.

"Now we have partners on the ground near cultural believers who are very capable of sharing the gospel and dreaming of reaching their country and communities for the Lord," Robinson said.

Those partners include Joseph. He has more big dreams for his neighborhood. He hopes to raise enough money to finish the church building, which will take about three months to complete. In addition to bringing water and electricity to the entire village, he wants his slum to be legally recognized as a community by the government in Cairo.

'Jesus loves the people'

His prayer is to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to all. "In the middle of all this [garbage], where a person could be psychologically broken and worn out, I know and believe that Jesus loves the people and is looking for them. I have lived this," he said. "God created us as a church, not to be closed in on ourselves but to serve the society around us. The people here are very precious to our Lord."

No matter where they build their houses.

Southern Baptists' gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and through the CP 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.

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



Photo by Bethany Rogers

COMMITTED TO PRAYER — Men gather for breakfast, prayer and a devotional at Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. The men's weekly meeting has been active for 45 years.

45 years and counting

Tuscaloosa's Calvary continues to touch lives with prayer breakfast

By Joseph Rhea
The Alabama Baptist

It's been 45 years since the late Allan Watson started a weekly prayer breakfast at Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, where he was pastor at the time. And while some things and many of the people have changed since the group's start in 1967, the consistent time and place for Christian men to have fellowship, prayer and a time for reflection on their lives has not.

John Price, a member of Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, currently organizes the group's schedule. Ten to 15 percent of the prayer breakfast's current attendees are non-Calvary Baptist members, he said, noting the group began attracting those outside the church and denomination walls in the late 1990s when leaders of the prayer breakfast added a new element to the weekly gatherings — a devotional brought each week by religious, political and community leaders. Pastors, politicians and even athletic staff from the University of Alabama are among those who encourage the members of the prayer breakfast each week.

After Watson died in 2001, the group voted to name the weekly event the Allan R. Watson Prayer Breakfast.

In 2006, the group established

another named element — the Jim Dowell Service Award, an award yearly given to a man "who has displayed outstanding leadership qualities throughout the year," according to the prayer group's self-description.

Dowell, a member of Calvary Baptist at the time, was involved with the prayer breakfast for 11 years until he moved in 2006. He now resides in Newnan, Ga., and told *The Alabama Baptist* how the group encouraged him and how he saw it be a blessing to others over the years.

"It was something to look forward to each week," he said. "We even had several people join (Calvary Baptist) because they started coming (to the breakfast)."

Currently the breakfast begins at

7 a.m. each Friday in Calvary Baptist's Family Life Center. The men pay for breakfast and serve themselves, then have a time of fellowship at their tables.

The group then prays for the people on a running list they keep, after they update it each week. Afterward comes the devotional.

The breakfast group sends a postcard to each person on its prayer list, letting the individuals know they have been prayed for.

"We've touched a lot of families," Dowell said, noting that people often expressed gratitude for the men's prayers.

Calvary Baptist is located at 1121 Paul Bryant Drive in Tuscaloosa. For more information about the breakfast, contact the church at 205-758-0495.

— Correction —

In the article "Historical Commission preserves 'story of God's grace'" in the Nov. 22 issue, it says the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission has been present for a celebration in every association for six years in a row. It actually has not but has served each association in some way for the past six years in a row.



What Will 'Fiscal Cliff' Mean for Alabama?

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Unless Congress and the president agree this month on an alternative solution, in January the United States government will tumble over a "fiscal cliff" that includes automatic tax increases and spending reductions. Not only would Alabama taxpayers be affected, but also the state's economy and the finances of the state government, cities, counties and local school systems.

There is broad agreement on the need to reform the finances of the federal government. Federal debt is equal to three-fourths of the nation's economic output and will exceed it within two decades. Annual deficits have exceeded \$1 trillion in each of the past four years. However, the adjustments in the fiscal cliff are steep, and the Congressional Budget Office projects that they would shrink the national economy and raise unemployment in 2013.

According to the Tax Foundation, falling off the "cliff" would cause federal taxes to rise by 5.3 percent for a typical Alabama family in 2013. Alabama allows taxpayers to deduct federal taxes on their state income tax returns, which would offset some of the increase. At the same time it would significantly reduce state income tax revenue, which is earmarked for education.

The spending cuts in the fiscal cliff are across-the-board reductions that are much like proration in Alabama. Federal grants are a major funding

source for our state's budget. According to the Pew Center for the States, cuts of about 8 percent would hit federal agencies that distribute grants for schools, highways and other services, except for Medicaid and other large income support programs that would be exempt. The grant programs themselves might see bigger cuts.

In addition to cutting federal grants, the fiscal cliff would bring a 9 percent cut in national defense spending, a 27 percent cut in physician reimbursements under Medicare and the end of certain unemployment benefits. These would not directly affect the state budget, but they would hurt Alabama economically. For example, federal spending on salaries, wages and operating costs represents about 9 percent of the Alabama economy; it is concentrated in the defense sector that is hardest hit by the spending reductions.

Seeking solutions

These kinds of impacts make clear why both sides in the debate claim to be seeking solutions other than falling off the fiscal cliff. But they also tell us that the national government's fiscal problems are serious and won't be resolved without taking painful steps in coming years.

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

PRACTICE
is the key to safe teen driving.

- 1 50 hours of practice with an adult in various situations
- 2 Know the Alabama Graduated Driver License Law
- 3 Sign a Parent-Teen Agreement

Children's of Alabama
ChildrensAL.org

This important safety message is being shared through our affiliation with The Alabama Safe Teen Driving Coalition and The AllState Foundation.

5-YEAR/60,000-MILE BODY & CHASSIS WARRANTY
STANDARD WITH EVERY NEW BUS PURCHASE

Carpenter Bus Sales has gone the extra mile again in providing a unique 5-year/60,000-mile body & chassis warranty* with every new bus they sell!

An option like this would normally add \$3,000 to the price of a bus. With Carpenter Bus, it comes standard.

LifeWay CHRISTIAN STORES

Call 866-750-5658 or visit us online at CarpenterBus.com

*Details on this Limited Warranty at www.carpenterbus.com/5-60

Compassionate spirit

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

8-year-old girl unselfishly donates birthday gifts to Toys for Tots for Christmas

Abby Henley's eighth birthday party Dec. 8 was typical in many ways. Cookie cake was served. "Happy Birthday" was sung. And gifts were given — but not opened.

Before her party, Abby decided that rather than keep her birthday gifts, she wanted to donate them to Toys for Tots, a U.S. Marine Corps Reserve program that provides new toys to children whose parents can't afford them.

"We'd been cleaning out her playroom recently and talking about how she had so much and how God tells us that we should be stewards of what we have by giving to others," said Carla Henley, Abby's mother. "So she was asking me something she could do, and we thought of the Toys for Tots thing. She wanted it to be specifically for someone like her — a little girl — since she likes girly stuff."

According to Abby's second grade teacher, Jennie Gillon, this type of giving behavior is nothing new for Abby:



Photo courtesy of Carla Henley

Eight-year-old Abby Henley donates presents she received at her birthday party to Toys for Tots. 'I'm glad that my toys went to Toys for Tots ... because there are so many people in the world who don't get Christmas presents,' she said.

The 8-year-old is kind and friendly at school, and she always lends a hand to classmates when needed. Gillon was touched to hear about her student's plan to donate her birthday gifts to Toys for Tots, and she said the rest of the class was excited about the idea as well.

Setting an example

"We all learned about it when she distributed invitations to her classmates," Gillon said. "When I read the invitation and saw that the gifts would be given to Toys for Tots, I was not surprised, as this is an example of what I see in Abby's life on a daily basis."

Carla has a hunch that Abby's compassionate spirit was heightened when Abby's younger brother, Connor — now 5 — was born. He was in the hospital a lot as an infant and underwent open heart surgery.


"She's been to the hospital so many times and has seen the kids in need there," said Carla, who attends North


Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, with her family. "I think seeing that may have played a role in her becoming so empathetic."

Still, despite Abby's exposure to others in need, Carla is overwhelmed by her daughter's decision to give away her birthday presents this year. "It made me so proud of her, and I tear up every time I think about it," Carla said. "It's one thing to talk about giving but another to take away from what you'd be getting and give to someone else. I'm proud of who she is as a person."

As for Abby, she's looking forward to envisioning some happy girls unwrapping gifts on Christmas morning.

"I'm glad that my toys went to Toys for Tots to give to kids for Christmas, because there are so many people in the world who don't get Christmas presents," she said. "I think it's going to be really fun, and I wish I could watch all those kids waking up on Christmas morning and opening their gifts." ❧

DUMAS 
Makers of Solid Wood Church Furniture Since 1928
Pews • Pulpits • Pulpit Chairs • Choir Chairs
Communion Tables • Lecterns • Hymn Boards
ROGER ROBERTS, FACTORY REPRESENTATIVE
Grove Hill, Alabama
800-633-6896 (phone)
251-605-0774 (mobile)
www.dumaspews.com
rogerdumas@tds.net



Solar-energy project proposed at Ridgecrest

A public hearing is scheduled Jan. 9 on a massive solar-energy project proposed on the grounds of Ridgecrest Conference Center, a retreat facility near Asheville, N.C., owned by LifeWay Christian Resources.

New Mexico-based Amenergy recently asked the North Carolina Utilities Commission to approve a \$64.5 million solar-panel project to be located in a remote section of the 1,300-acre encampment that has welcomed more than 1 million guests since its purchase

by Southern Baptists more than 100 years ago.

Marty King, LifeWay's director of corporate communications, told the *Religious Herald* that the Nashville-based publisher is considering leasing "five to six acres" to Amenergy for a pilot project.

The renewable energy company founded in 2009 envisions a project featuring more than 90,000 solar panels covering five sites and totaling 200 acres.

It would generate 21.5 megawatts of electricity, making it one

of North Carolina's largest investments in solar power.

King said LifeWay has not made any commitment to either the pilot or long-term projects. He said the only revenue LifeWay would receive would be payment for rent.

North Carolina is requiring that power companies get about 12 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2021. Critics of the Ridgecrest proposal say it would destroy endangered plants, displace wildlife and obstruct mountain views.

The company admits that building in a forested area presents different challenges from wide-open sites like deserts and farms used in other parts of the country but claims the construction would be unobtrusive and out of view from Interstate 40.

Construction could begin as early as next spring and be completed over five phases by 2015.

(ABP)

Seniors by the Sea
February 18-20, 2013
First Baptist Church, Gulf Shores, Alabama

FEATURING:
DENNIS SWANBERG, America's Minister of Encouragement
PAID IN FULL, Southern Gospel Male Trio
DAWN SMITH JORDAN, Soprano Soloist/Former Miss South Carolina
FRANK JONES, concert pianist/your host

Option I — Monday night/Tuesday morning
Option II — Tuesday morning/Tuesday evening
Option III — Tuesday evening/Wednesday morning

TICKETS:
Options I, II or III — \$45 • Single session tickets — \$22.50

A Presentation of Frank Jones Ministries
205-393-7020 • www.frankjonesministries.org

205.664.0955
800.729.6844 (toll free)  www.reliable-signs.com
signs@reliable-signs.com

"Professional Signs for a Professional Look"



"We are extremely excited to have our new marquee. It allows us to communicate our Kingdom building activities which are taking place 'inside' our walls to the surrounding community and Bessemer Super Highway commuters. What a blessing! Thank you Reliable Signs for listening to our vision and guiding us to the product that best fit our needs."

— Kurt S. Clark, senior pastor
Sardis Missionary Baptist Church

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Kinston church preserves history after safe stolen twice

That safe full of 100-year-old church records was a disappointment to burglars.

Twice.

"The first time it got stolen a few years ago, it was found later on the riverbank," said James Preachers, director of missions for Sardis Baptist Association. "The second time, which was in September, they found the culprits a few weeks later, and everything was still intact."

Preachers gave Pilgrim's Rest Baptist Church, Kinston, a call to rejoice with them — and to ask them a question.

"I said, 'Have you ever had those records microfilmed?' They said they weren't sure, but they didn't think so," Preachers said. "I told them, 'You need to get on that.'"

So they did.

They called the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and executive director Lonette Berg came quickly to collect the records. They were at the microfilm lab in less than a week.

"It's something we offer at no charge, and it helps preserve the story of what God has done and what He's doing in our churches," Berg said.

Now the records will be preserved no matter what happens to the paper copies in the twice-stolen safe.

"Getting the records back twice was a blessing, and it made a believer out of them in the value of getting things microfilmed," Preachers said.

For more information about microfilming church records, contact Berg at llberg@samford.edu or 205-726-2363. (TAB)

Historical Highlights

from previous issues of *The Alabama Baptist*

Compiled by Kathleen Prude

50 Years Ago December 1962

A New Position: Ann Myrick, a magna cum laude graduate of Judson College, has been named to a new position with the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn. She became assistant press relations editor in the office of denominational relations this month. Since her graduation in 1959, she has been employed as editorial assistant in the Training Union department. Myrick is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph E. Myrick of Atmore.

40 Years Ago December 1972

Faith Sharing Seminar: A seminar designed to help Christian students develop a natural way of sharing their faith in Christ with their fellow students was conducted recently by the Auburn Baptist Student Union (BSU) at First Church, Auburn. Forty-nine students attended the seminar led by Milt Hughes, a consultant in the Campus Evangelism of the national Campus Ministries Department of the Southern Baptist Convention. Richard Duncan is the president of the Auburn BSU and Meredith Mynatt is evangelism and outreach chairman.

30 Years Ago December 1982

Home Mission Board Appointee: Debra Weldon, former youth worker with Southlawn Baptist Church, Montgomery,

and a summer missionary with the Montgomery Baptist Association, was among 62 persons appointed to home missions service by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board recently. She is a graduate of the University of Montevallo and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

20 Years Ago December 1992

Miss Samford University: Jennifer Wilson, 19, a sophomore psychology and theatre major from Childersburg. She was the 1991 Talladega County Young Woman of the Year. Her future plans include attending seminary and pursuing a career in Christian counseling.

10 Years Ago December 2002

Henry Lyon, retired Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) leader, celebrated 50 years in ministry Nov. 10 at Snowdown Baptist Church, Montgomery, where he was ordained on that date in 1952. After preaching his first sermon at the age of 17, Lyon served as pastor of Snowdown Baptist; Pike Road Baptist Church; Eastern Valley Baptist Church, Bessemer; First Baptist Church, Anniston; and First Baptist Church, Selma. He then served the SBOM for 15 years before retiring in 2001. Lyon continues to preach at various churches and revivals.

MARKET PLACE

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT PLACING A CLASSIFIED AD, CALL THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT OF *THE ALABAMA BAPTIST*, 205-870-4720, EXT. 102, OR EMAIL ADS@THEALABAMABAPTIST.ORG. COPY DEADLINE IS TWO WEEKS BEFORE PUBLICATION.

CHURCH POSITIONS

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Ivalee Baptist Church in Etowah County, Ala., (near Gadsden) is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Send resumés to: Pastor Search Committee, 2020 Gallant Road, Attalla, AL 35954.

PASTOR: FBC Gurley, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumés to: ATTN: Pastor Search Team, 111 Hillsdale Drive, Gurley, AL 35748. normanduffell@gmail.com. www.fbcgurley.org. Respond by Jan. 31, 2013.

FULL-TIME SENIOR PASTOR: Beech Haven Baptist Church of Athens, Ga., is seeking an ordained Baptist pastor. If you meet the criteria stated at www.beechhaven.org/srpastor and wish to apply, send a resumé and cover letter by Jan. 11, 2013, describing why you want to be considered as a candidate (hbhbcpsc@gmail.com).

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: West Highland Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational music minister. Information may be obtained at WHBC@Knology.net or by sending resumé to: WHBC, P.O. Box 481, Athens, AL 35612.

PART-TIME MUSIC/YOUTH DIRECTOR: Rock Mountain Lakes Baptist Church, a growing church in western Jefferson County, is seeking to fill a part-time music/youth director position. Check us out at rmlbc.org. If interested, mail resumés to: RMLBC, c/o Joni Holt, P.O. Box 1305, Bessemer, AL 35021, or email them to: joniholt@bham.rr.com.

FULL-TIME STUDENT PASTOR: Edwards Road Baptist Church, an SBC church in Greenville, S.C., is seeking a student pastor. Ministry focused on 6th-12th grades. Seminary degree pre-

ferred. Email resumé and cover letter to: arayburn@erbc-sc.org.

BIVOCATIONAL STUDENT MINISTER: Northwood Hills Baptist Church in Northport is prayerfully receiving resumés for a bivocational student minister through Jan. 4. If you have any additional questions about the position, responsibilities or church, contact our pastor, Rusty Selman, 205-339-3196. Please direct resumés to: NHBC, 3463 Highway 69 North, Northport, AL 35473 or email: office@northwood-hillschurch.com.

FULL-TIME PRESCHOOL & CHILDREN'S PASTOR: The First Baptist Church of Mauldin, S.C., is seeking a full-time preschool and children's pastor. Send resumés to: First Baptist Mauldin, 150 South Main Street, Mauldin, SC 29662, or email: wleonard@fbcmauldin.org. For more information on the job description and profile, visit www.fbcmauldin.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

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

INDEPENDENT SALES ASSOCIATE CONTRACTOR: The 170-year-old *Alabama Baptist* is an award-winning statewide weekly newspaper with more than 200,000 readers. Baptists comprise the largest Christian denomination in Alabama with membership of more than a million. *The Alabama Baptist* is seeking contract sales people with the ability to develop advertising partnerships with businesses and organizations interested in reaching the key demographics of our readers and

growing their business. As an independent sales associate contractor, you would work from your home office with no territory restrictions. *The Alabama Baptist*, Inc. provides a unique working environment. We are partners with the churches of the Alabama Baptist State Convention working together for the advancement of the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Each employee is expected to manage his/her personal and professional life in accordance with this relationship and consistent with the traditions of *The Alabama Baptist*. Send resumés and inquiries to: bgilmore@thealabamabaptist.org.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Bessemer Baptist Association is prayerfully seeking God's man for our director of missions. We are looking for someone with ministry experience, strong leadership skills and a vision for the future of our association. We will be receiving resumés through Feb. 15, 2013. Resumés may be submitted to: Bessemer Baptist Association, 1331 Fairfax Avenue, Bessemer, AL 35020, or admin@bessemerbaptist.org.

AVAILABLE FOR SERVICE

DOUG MOORE — RETIRED PASTOR: Pastored for 46 years — 26 years at First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive. Available for interim, pulpit supply or revival. May be reached at 205-631-7304 (home) or 205-256-1047 (cell).

BUSINESS

FOR SALE NEW & USED STAIRLIFTS: Lift chairs, power wheelchairs, car lifts, scooters and walk-in tubs. We service Alabama. 1-800-682-0658.

CHRISTIAN VALUES BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY: Christian Values Technology Company seeks mature business professionals for high-income op-

portunity. Home-based office. Hands-on support and apprenticeship-style training. For complete information, call Paul at 888-710-6994.

ELECTRONIC GIVING OPTION: egive-usa.com — Good stewardship made easy. Please call or email us for a free brochure. 1-866-303-6623 or brad@egive-usa.com.

MOVING? LOCAL, STATEWIDE OR LONG DISTANCE: Coleman American/Allied Van Lines. Special rate and programs for Alabama Baptist ministers, staff and church members. Call Gary Washington at 205-540-7470.

CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

CHURCH BUILDING PROJECTS: Let Webb Builders help your church expand its facilities. Large or small projects. Your plans or use our custom-design building services. State licensed with 25+ years experience. Call Webb Builders Inc., 334-285-9302. Millbrook, Ala. Numerous church references available.

TRAVEL/VACATION

SMOKY MOUNTAIN LODGE: Can accommodate 56, indoor pool, 20-seat theatre, arcade, conference center, chapel for weddings/worship, views. Visit www.mooseshollowlodge.com. Moose Hollow Lodge. 301-238-5133.

LOG CABIN: Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

FOR RENT/SALE

AUBURN TOWNHOUSE: 803 E Magnolia Avenue, Unit A. 3 BRs, 2 BAs. Call Sam Davidson for information. 205-424-3683.

Want to know God?

By Pastor Robert Parrish
Southside Baptist Church, Fayette

Forgiveness: Almost every person you talk to will admit the need to be forgiven, from all walks of life — those who have knowledge of Christianity and those who have little knowledge of Christianity.

We humans are made to know that we have this need, so we go about seeking to satisfy this need by what we believe will free us, or this need just sits in the back of our minds and we often think about this unmet need.

This is when we should look to the cross of Jesus and the truth of God's Word. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Forgiveness is possible, but only by the blood of Jesus which we trust by faith. He does what we could never accomplish and removes the guilt and shame and puts our minds at peace not having to wonder "if."

Colossians 2:13-14 says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross."

Forgiveness is available for any and all who will turn from their sins and trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. In fact, the cross proclaims this truth to a lost and dying world.

The cross says, "Come, believe, be forgiven and made complete through the blood of Jesus which forgives your sins and receive the promise of God — eternal life."

FOLLOW US ON
twitter
@
AlabamaBaptist

'Destructive impact'

ERLC, other gambling opponents speak out against online poker legislation

The Southern Baptist Convention's ethics entity and other gambling foes are speaking out against legislation to legalize online poker that is a threat to gain U.S. Senate passage before the end of the year.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, of Nevada, and Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., have drafted a bill that reportedly would legalize Internet gambling on poker. They have yet to introduce the proposal, but opponents are concerned Reid may attach it to must-pass legislation that would receive a vote before the "lame-duck" session closes.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) "steadfastly opposes your efforts," the entity's president, Richard Land, told Kyl in a Dec. 5 letter.

"We cannot support any effort that grants government sanction to any form of gambling," Land

said. "Your bill not only does that but also creates a regulatory mechanism that is certain to be used to introduce other forms of Internet gambling in the future.

"No amount of regulation or taxation could make such legalization a winning proposition for America," Land wrote Kyl.

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) also has expressed its opposition to the Reid-Kyl proposal.

NAE President Leith Anderson said in a Dec. 11 statement, "Pastors regularly see the destructive impact of gambling on families and children. Those problems will increase if gambling moves from buildings to home computers."

The online poker bill would weaken a 2006 federal law designed to bar most Internet gambling, Land told Kyl. That measure, the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act, requires financial institutions to block credit card and other payments to online

wagering businesses, which primarily are located overseas. Gambling foes, with the agreement of the U.S. Justice Department at the time, argued that a 1961 law that prohibited wagering over telephone wires also barred Internet wagering.

Blocking payments

Proponents of online gambling gained impetus for their efforts when a late 2011 opinion by the Justice Department contended the 2006 law applies only to sports betting. Georgia and Illinois are now selling lottery draw tickets on the Internet, and other state legislatures are considering bills to legalize online gambling, *The Wall Street Journal* reported Dec. 5.

Kyl, who supported the 2006 law, believes the new legislation will help limit the spread of gambling, according to *The Journal*.

Foes of his bill disagree.

Chad Hills, Focus on the Family's gambling analyst, said in a Dec. 11 online interview, "This is being disguised as a protective bill, if you will, that would limit gambling, but in fact ... this is just

a precursor bill" to opening the Internet to casino gambling a few years from now.

The proposal would aid Reid's home state, Nevada, its opponents contend. The directors of state lotteries are even working to defeat the legislation.

Only Nevada is set up to license Internet poker operators, a state lottery defender told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

The state directors also argue federal legislation is unneeded, since their lotteries are able to regulate Internet gambling.

Kyl and fellow Republican Sen. Dean Heller, of Nevada, say they have enough GOP support in the Senate to approve the bill, the *Review-Journal* reported Dec. 11.

If the bill passes the Senate it still would face a challenge in the House of Representatives. Rep.

Joe Barton, R-Texas, has introduced a bill to legalize online gambling. Land wrote him in October to ask him to withdraw support for his proposal.

Stop Predatory Gambling (SPG), a Washington-based organization that combats government partnerships with gambling, said legalizing online gambling would result in Facebook "casinos" that "would have a devastating impact

on America's children under 18 and deeply worsen the nation's epidemic of gambling addiction."

The organization said America's children are a major target for casino operators seeking the legalization of online gambling. Facebook sees gambling as a significant strategy for the development of new revenue streams, said SPG, citing a July report in the *Daily Mail*.

More than 20 million children under 18, including 7.5 million under 13, use Facebook regularly, according to Consumer Reports, SPG said.

"Legalizing Facebook casinos represents the biggest expansion of casino gambling in history, opening a Las Vegas casino in every home, office, dorm room and smartphone in America, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," according to SPG.

Land told Kyl in his letter, "We know all too well the destructive power of online gambling. It is ruinous not only to those who engage in the practice but also to their families and society as a whole. With its addictive lure, Internet gambling often leads to broken marriages, child neglect and depleted finances, among other devastating consequences." (BP)



LAND

"We cannot support any effort that grants government sanction to any form of gambling."

**Richard Land
president, Ethics &
Religious Liberty
Commission**

Catholics have smallest percentage of 'strong' followers among major U.S. religions

After November's presidential vote, Catholics could cite ample evidence for their renewed political relevance while dispirited evangelicals were left wondering if they are destined to be yesterday's election news. Yet their roles in American spiritual life may be reversed.

New research shows that Catholics now report the lowest proportion of "strongly affiliated" followers among major American religious traditions, while the data indicates that evangelicals are increasingly devout and committed to their faith.

According to Philip Schwadel, a sociologist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in the 1970s there was only a five-point difference between how strongly Catholics and evangelicals felt about their religion.

By 2010, he said, that "intensity gap" had grown to around 20 points, with some 56 percent of evangelicals describing themselves as "strongly affiliated" with their religion compared with 35 percent of Catholics. Even mainline Protestants reported a higher level of religious intensity than Catholics, at 39 percent.

"Sociologists have been writ-

ing about declines in mainline Protestantism for the last few decades," said Schwadel, who details his findings in an article to be published in the upcoming edition of the journal *Sociology of Religion*. Exactly why these changes have been occurring is a matter of conjecture.

Schwadel noted that the decline in religious enthusiasm among Catholics began in the mid-1980s, and that coincided with the first revelations about the sexual abuse of children by clergy — a scandal that has haunted the church ever since.

Evangelical surge

Moreover, Latino Catholics are less likely to report a strong religious affiliation compared with other Catholics, and the number of Latino Catholics in the U.S. has been growing steadily in past decades.

At the same time, Schwadel noted that the surge in evangelical devotion to their faith began in the early 1990s and coincided with their growing presence in the public square. Other experts have noted that political battles can rally the faithful of a particular religious community, and even political losses can unite them in a shared sense of exile.

The changes in religious intensity that Schwadel found in particular religious groups contrasts with an overall stability in Americans' religious views. Since the 1970s, about 37 percent of Americans have described themselves as "strongly affiliated" with their religion, with a brief spike to a high of 43 percent in the mid-1980s.

Schwadel also showed that African-American Protestants report a religious intensity level similar to that of white evangelicals — about 57 percent in 2010.

Schwadel did find one possible bright spot for Catholic leaders: Despite the steady erosion in the strength of religious affiliation among Catholics, it did not necessarily correlate to a decline in Mass attendance by younger Catholics.

"That could be seen as good news and bad news for the Catholic Church," Schwadel said. "Younger Catholics are not being driven away from going to church, but they do still feel less strongly committed to their religion than they did a few decades ago."

Schwadel culled the data for his report from nearly 40,000 responses to the General Social Survey from 1974–2010. (RNS)

"LIFE CHANGING TRAVEL WITH GROWING CHRISTIANS"

(FROM 14 STATES, AGE 40 AND UP)

- Biblical Creation Tours of Grand Staircase, Yellowstone, Alaska & Canadian Rockies, or Pacific Northwest.
- Christian Heritage Tours of Washington, D.C. or New England
- Atlantic Canada

- Many more tours with all expenses included
- "Friendliest Travelers Ever" from 14 States
- Luxury coach with extra leg room and wireless sound system

Call 601-371-8733 for new 2013 catalog or to talk to a guide or better yet — come to our

OPEN HOUSE

Mississippi Agriculture Museum in Jackson, MS
Saturday, Jan. 12 from 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

with "Twice Adopted" from Branson, great food and travelers from at least 4 states.
Only 200 seats left @ \$25 per person.

601-371-8733 • PURPOSE DRIVEN TOURS • wayne@purposedriventours.org

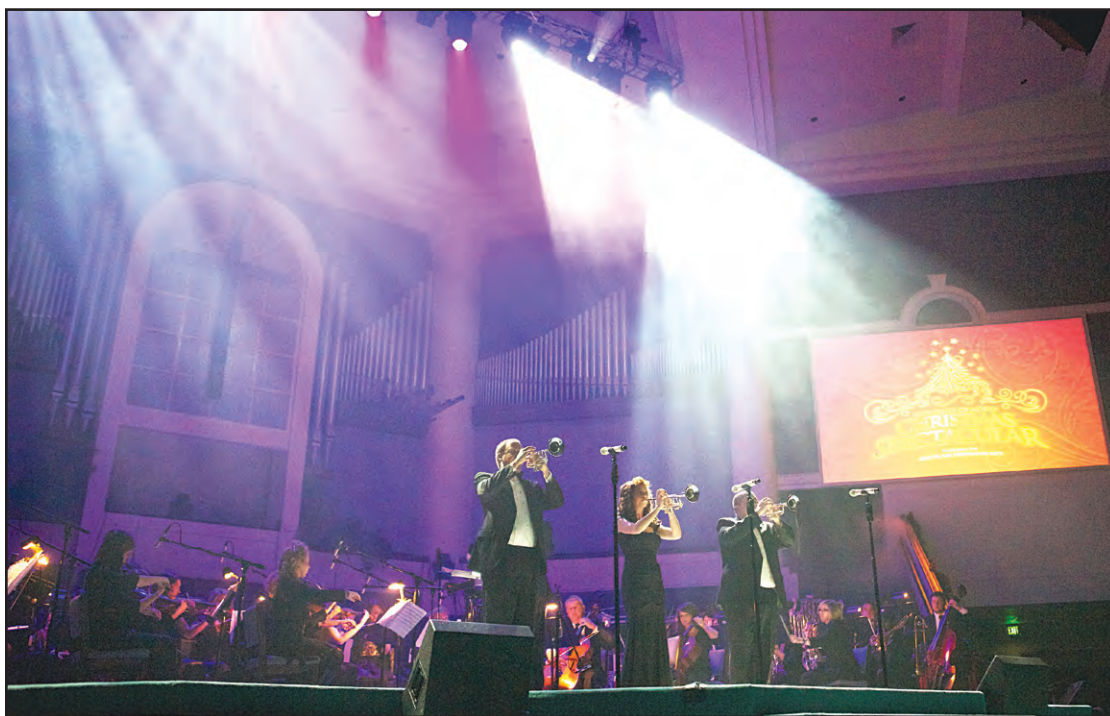


Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

UMobile musicians perform the opening song 'Fantasia of the Christmas Bells.' Pictured are RamCorps alumni trumpeters (l to r) Bradley Threadgill, Kylie Watkins Threadgill and Matthew Squires.

'Truly inspiring'

UMobile's Christmas Spectacular to air on TV

The University of Mobile's (UMobile) 10th annual Christmas Spectacular concert will appear on Mobile-area and international television this Christmas season.

The popular production, featuring a 250-plus member student choir and orchestra, was held at Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, from Nov. 30 through Dec. 2, drawing more than 8,000 people for the three-day event.

"People often stop me and say, 'I just don't see how it improves year after year, yet it just gets better,'" said Al Miller, dean of the university's Center for Performing Arts/School of Music and School of Worship Leadership. "I can answer that by saying that first and foremost, our wonderful Lord

blesses our effort to praise Him." The Christmas Spectacular will air in a three-state region at 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. during Christmas Day on WALA Fox10. It also will air on WHBR TV33 on Dec. 22 at 7 p.m., Dec. 23 at 2 p.m., and Dec. 24 at 9:30 p.m.; and on the Trinity Broadcast Network at various times. In addition it will show internationally on satellite stations Cornerstone TeleVision and The Walk TV (formerly Legacy TV).

Several videos from the 2012 performance also are posted on

UMobile's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/universityofmobile.

"The combination of outstanding faculty and students create a presentation that is fresh, imaginative, traditional, contemporary, a bit zany and truly inspiring," Miller said. "This year, the program goes well beyond our little university and reaches the world."

A DVD of highlights from the event is available. For more information, call 251-442-2420.

(UMobile)

GLASSDESIGNS
www.glassdesignsopelika.com

STAINED GLASS

- Home, church, business
- Free consultation and estimates
- References available

Opelika, Alabama

334-749-5520
achamblee5520@charter.net

Thompson Sound, Inc.

Installing Excellence in
SOUND • LIGHTING • VIDEO

256.974.SOUND (7686)
www.thompsonsound.com

Our goal in business and in life is to glorify Jesus Christ and spread the good news of His grace.

Like us

in Loving
Memory
of Alabama Baptist leaders

Nancy Turner Norton

Veteran IMB missionary to Japan dies at 61

International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Nancy Turner Norton, 61, died Dec. 5 in Birmingham after a courageous yearlong battle with cancer. Born in Miami, Fla., Norton is survived by her husband, John, and two sons, Kevin and Scott.

The couple were appointed as missionaries to Japan in August 1977 and served with IMB for more than 35 years. Norton served in various roles during her missionary career. She loved to mentor other women, prayerwalk, sing and teach children, according to a missionary colleague.

Her ministries included teaching college in Kitakyushu City and serving as missionary associate executive director for the Japan Woman's Missionary Union from 1996 to 1999. She also directed handbell choirs in Kitakyushu and Kansai from 1983 to 2002 and led the team for the Kansai Deaf of Japan from 1999 to 2003. In 2004, she became the strategy coordinator for Kitakyushu/Fukuoka, while her husband continued in his role as language adviser.

Norton was diagnosed with cancer shortly before Christmas 2011 and initially received treatment in Japan before returning to Birmingham for additional care.

"With tears in our eyes, we rejoice that she is pain free, home free and set free — yet all the while not wanting to release her this quickly," said IMB representative Carlton Walker, who serves in Japan. "She was a force, His force, among us.

"The strongest thing that remains in my mind concerning Nancy were her own words," continued Walker. "'In life or death, I want to glorify the Lord in all of this.'" (IMB)

Steeple Etc.
#1 Source for Steeple, Baptistries, & Cupolas

No job too big or too small
Complete satisfaction is guaranteed

- ▶ FIBERGLASS BAPTISTRIES
- ▶ STEEPLES
- ▶ CUPOLAS

Toll-free:
1-888-980-6161

Local
1-205-936-9410

Toll-free fax:
1-800-521-8349

WWW.STEEPLESETC.COM



“TODAY IN THE TOWN OF DAVID A
SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU:
HE IS CHRIST THE LORD.”
LUKE 2:11 (NIV)

The Baptist Foundation of Alabama has been blessed to serve many Alabama Baptist churches and members in 2012.

We look forward to serving you in 2013.

The staff at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama wishes you a blessed and very

Merry Christmas



Front Row: Robbie Willis, Bill McCrary, Paula Smith, Barry Bledsoe, Nathan McCarthy, Stephanie Coston and Sarah Snell.

Second Row: Marie Norrell, Rodney Bledsoe, George King, Jennifer Ogburn, Connie Westover, Donna England and Tom Randall.

The Baptist Foundation of Alabama
P.O. Box 241227 | Montgomery, AL 36124
334-394-2000 | tbfa@tbfa.org | www.tbfa.org
www.kingdomstewardshipalliance.org



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 23

Explore the Bible By Robert Olsen Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

SEEKING THE SAVIOR Matthew 2:1-15

What Are You Looking For? (1-2)

Matthew was written to a Jewish audience, and as such, Matthew emphasized the fulfillment of prophecy to show the Jews that Jesus was in fact the Messiah spoken of by the prophets. It is very likely that these wise men from the east were familiar with Jewish prophecy from the Jews that inhabited parts of former Babylonia from the exile in 586 BC. When they referred to "his star in the east" it is possible that they were referring to the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:17, "A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel," a prophecy that they would have learned from the Jews. Here were non-Jews who recognized the importance of Jesus, whereas His own people failed to do so (see John 1:11: "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him").

These wise men were skilled in following the stars and tracing their movements. The star that arose to point them to Jesus was obviously not a normal occurrence. Since stars follow an orderly and predictable pattern, God intervened to bring about this event. These foreign wise men recognized the importance of this event and left to find this King that they might worship Him.

Just as the wise men sought after Jesus, so should we especially during this Christmas season.

What Is Your Motive? (3-8)

Herod was disturbed by this news about the King of the Jews. Herod was a ruthless tyrant who even murdered some of his own family in order to ensure that he would remain in power. He was not about to accept a rival to his throne. Calling his Jewish scholars, he asked where the Messiah would be born, and once again we can see Matthew emphasizing the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Herod wanted to find Jesus so he could kill Him. How do

we respond when confronted with Jesus? The appropriate response is to worship Him humbly. Some people come to Jesus expecting rewards and seeking personal gain. The only acceptable response to Jesus is one of humble worship.

How Will You Respond? (9-12)

When the wise men saw Jesus, they fell on their knees and worshipped Him and gave Him gifts. The gifts they gave were significant — gold speaks to Jesus' royalty, incense, referring to His priesthood, and myrrh, which is for His death and burial. The three gifts are a foreshadowing of Christ's role and future. He is King, He is our High Priest, and He died and was buried for us. Of course, the greatest miracle is Jesus' resurrection, which shows His victory over death.

It is important for us as well to give to Jesus. We give our lives to Him and serve and obey Him.

Sometimes when we give to God we do this in the form of acts of service and giving of our time.

Other times we give financially to support godly programs and missions. One such missions event that always occurs around Christmas is the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. This offering is used to support Southern Baptist missions all over the world so that others can hear the story of Jesus.

Who Is This Christmas Child? (13-15)

Mary and Joseph were obedient to take Jesus away for His protection. Once again we see the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy from Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt I called My son." This passage alludes to God's rescuing the Israelites from Pharaoh in the Exodus, but like many prophecies, it has a twofold purpose. Here, Matthew shows that it refers to Jesus' trip to Egypt.

For us, Matthew's Gospel shows us God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. God sent Jesus as He said He would, and we celebrate Christmas because of Jesus' birth. ❏

Bible Studies for Life By Michael Wilson Director, Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence, Samford University

JESUS OUR IMMANUEL Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-25

Most of us bemoan how our culture's over-commercialized, secular observance of Christmas detracts from its true meaning.

Each year we grumble and complain about the frenetic pace leading up to Christmas Day. Finding the right gifts, attending social gatherings at church and with friends, arranging travel, even attending a Christmas Eve service add to our stress during this time of year.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to acknowledge that only for brief moments have we slowed our frenetic pace in recent days to ponder again the momentous meaning of Jesus' birth. The story seems simple enough. But Christians understand this birth represents something of life-changing significance. This week's lesson calls us to pause and ponder Jesus the Immanuel, God with us.

Jesus Our Immanuel Was Promised (Isa. 9:6-7)

Isaiah's prophecy of a Messianic King in the line of David follows strong words of gloom and doom regarding God's judgment. "They will see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into deep darkness" (Isa. 8:22). The "former time" of God's judgment for unrighteousness will pass. In the "latter time" there will be restoration and a return to joyful living as God's chosen people. The darkness about which Isaiah speaks represents despair and oppression the people felt at the hands of the Assyrians, God's agents of judgment. Yet, the prophet declares a word of hope for a future time. In those days, darkness will be replaced by light. Gloom and despair will be replaced with joy. Just as God brought light and order from darkness and chaos at creation, God will bring the light of joy and hope and redemption to replace the darkness of oppression and sin and judgment. The promise of a birth, a child in the family line of the great King David, will signal the ar-

rival of this new time. This Messianic King's royal "throne names" describe a wise, powerful, consistent presence that brings peace in anxious times when things seem to be out of control.

Jesus Our Immanuel Saves (Matt. 1:18-21)

At creation, the Spirit was the agent of God's life-giving, purposeful activity turning formless, dark, chaos into earth and sky and living things. The Spirit again served as the agent of God's purposeful activity, but now in the lives of people. God's creative, redeeming activity on behalf of humanity came through an ordinary peasant girl and her righteous fiancé. "You will call his name Jesus." The name is taken from the Hebrew names Yeshua or Yeshu, which are other forms of the name Joshua. "Yahweh saves" is one way to interpret the name. The name choice was not about identification. The name was chosen because its meaning clearly connects Jesus to His mission in God's plan to bring about the salvation of humanity.

Jesus Our Immanuel Is 'God with Us' (Matt. 1:22-25)

The Old Testament emphasizes the holiness of Yahweh. God is considered above all things and set apart from ordinary daily lives of sinful humanity. This idea shows in the design of the temple. Space known as the Holy of Holies was symbolic of the presence of God. Yet, it was inaccessible to all but the high priest and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

In Jesus, our Immanuel, God identified with broken humanity in a new way, one that we can understand. God in Christ experienced challenges and joys of human life. Jesus learned firsthand about the power of evil and broken, hopeless humans.

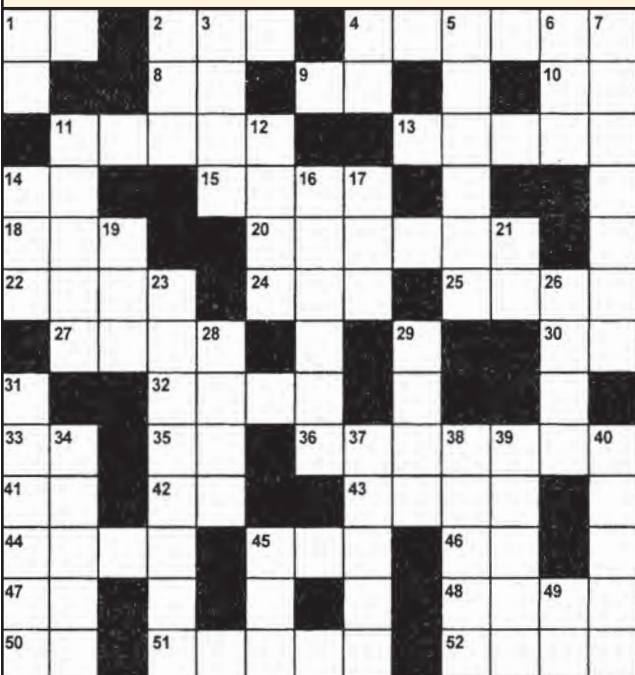
Immanuel means God is not an abstract, cosmic force. God is personal and fully engaged in relationship with us.

"Immanuel" truly is the first and greatest gift of Christmas. ❏

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue Dec. 27. Sunday School lessons for Dec. 30 will be available at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. First person pronoun.
2. An insect abundant in Palestine. (Prov. 6:6)
4. A basket of ___ fruit. (Amos 8:2)
8. A negative reply.
9. Teach thee in the way which thou shalt ___. (Ps. 32:8)
10. In regard to.
11. Hebrew prophet swallowed by a fish.
13. He made the ___ also. (Gen. 1:16)
14. To exist; to live.
15. Which is Christ in you, the ___ of glory. (Col. 1:27)
18. United States of America. (abbr.)
20. Thou shalt not make unto thee any ___ image. (Ex. 20:4)
22. Be ___ your sin will find you out. (Num. 32:23)
24. Mary ... ___ at Jesus' feet. (Luke 10:39)
25. A coarse file.
27. An aquatic carnivorous

animal with flippers.

30. An exclamation of surprise.
32. I am the ___ of Sharon. (Song of Sol. 2:1)
33. Associated Press (abbr.)
35. ___, I am with you always. (Matt. 28:20)
36. Sign of God's covenant with Noah.
41. A prefix meaning "not."
42. Innings Pitched. (abbr.)
43. An early king of Edom. (Gen. 36:37)
44. No man is ___ of life. (Job 24:22)
45. Fire that ___ between the cherubims. (Ezek. 10:7)
46. Rosemary's nickname.
47. Neuter pronoun.
48. Neither too good nor too bad.
50. Hath ___ man condemned thee? (John 8:10)
51. They ... came down to ___. (Acts 16:8)
52. The garden where Adam and Eve lived. (Gen. 2:8)

Down

1. Belonging to me.
2. Popular middle name for girl.
3. Man who built the ark. (Gen. 6)
4. ___ our eyes wait upon the Lord. (Ps. 123:2)
5. A female parent.
6. To sin.
7. Rephah was his son, also ___. (1 Chron. 7:25)
11. God's son.
12. Pigs.
14. Vehicle for public conveyance of passengers.
16. We commune with God through ___.
17. Man did ___ angels' food. (Ps. 78:25)
19. Ye ___ a chosen generation. (1 Pet. 2:9)
21. Symbol for sodium.
23. First.
26. Sung by one person.
28. Ring.
29. To the seven churches which are in ___. (Rev. 1:4)
31. A dried grape.

- (1 Sam. 25:18)
34. One of the planets farthest from the sun.
37. Took away the sheep, and the oxen and the ___. (1 Sam. 27:9)
38. Deborah was Rebekah's ___. (Gen. 35:8)
39. Without shedding of ___ is no remission. (Heb. 9:22)
40. Four-wheeled vehicle.
45. ___ will have all men to be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)
49. Southeast. (abbr.)



RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature

Sound Bites By Rick Sharp



JEREMY VANDERLOOP

All Creation Sings

Mosaic Artistry Group

Jeremy Vanderloop's third album, "All Creation Sings," is an eclectic mix of insightful writing, excellent musicianship and Vanderloop's unusual, barely controlled voice.

Described as melodic rock with orchestral influences, a characterization that's as good as anything I might come up with, the record moves at a plodding, deliberate pace until track five, the rocker "His Prize." I'll admit to being surprised by the sudden rush of really good Latin rock wrapping Vanderloop's always-poetic lyrics. "The Struggle" continues the upbeat rock motif with lyrics questioning our struggle to hear and follow God's call, finishing with the triumphant words, "We're more than conquerors, abiding in Your arms."

This record may not be for everyone, but if you're a fan of raw, personal, Christ-filled writing, you may just find what you're looking for.

KENNY HATCHER

Walking the Old Paths

Chapel Valley

The first time I saw this record, I was sure I knew what it was go-

ing to be. Standard old hymns, performed with standard instrumentation and style. Great old songs we love, songs we've all heard thousands of times, always performed the same way. I was wrong.

Let's start at track one, "Take My Hand Precious Lord." The first thing you hear is toneful, soulful blues guitar that could make the old masters cry, immediately joined by a full horn section belting out even more bluesy goodness. Add some excellent piano, great backing vocals and finally the strong baritone of Kenny Hatcher and ... Wow. This ain't your mama's church music. Reading the liner notes, Hatcher says, "I know they won't sound the way you are used to hearing them, but that's the point." Indeed, that is the point.

As Hatcher works his way through 10 great old hymns, we're treated to new arrangements on every familiar old song; jazzy, soulful, deliberate, always well performed and recorded. There is a definite '50s flavor to some of these songs, but they're all thoroughly modern.

Almost everyone is going to love this music. From Grandpa Melvin to pink-haired cousin Squeaky, there's something here for everybody.

MIKE MAINS & THE BRANCHES

Home

New Day Christian

If you're a fan of raw, honest yet hopeful God-seeking lyrics wrapped up in good rock 'n' roll, look no further than Mike Mains & the Branches' new CD, "Home."

While it's hard to get much information on the evolution of this band, it's clear that Mains struggled early in the music business, losing all sense of direction and purpose. One more thing is clear:



A chance meeting with drummer David Denson was the beginning of a musical collaboration that pulled Mains out of his funk and provided the genesis of the band.

Mains, as the primary songwriter for the band, has produced what can only be described as a masterpiece in introspection. Heavy tracks like "Miracle" and "Stereo" tell you a lot about Mains while lighter, more upbeat tracks such as "Love" and "Stop the Car" give a welcome break from the tough-to-hear look into Mains' head. Not satisfied to leave well enough alone, "Beneath Water" takes us back with Mains' palpable cry for redemption.

If Mains and the band can hold together the momentum and promise of "Home," we're all in

for a lot of really good music. Let's hope they make it.

NORTH POINT MUSIC

En Vivo con Seth Condrey

North Point Ministries, Inc.

North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Ga., and its Dove Award-winning worship leader Seth Condrey have released their first Spanish-language record, "En Vivo con Seth Condrey," a collection of their favorite previously released worship songs translated into Spanish. This record is an outgrowth of North Point's ex-



panding role in Spanish-language ministry, as evidenced by their partnerships with churches in Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Brazil and Spain.

Although Condrey's Dove Award came from a Spanish-language recording of "De Corazón a Corazón" in 2008 (included on this album in both Spanish and Portuguese), he admits to still being timid about performing in Spanish. Condrey said, "If You (God) want me to do this language thing, I'll do it."

The album is well recorded, artfully performed and full of energy. Other standout tracks include "Breathe on Me" and "Bless Your Name." If you don't speak Spanish, it doesn't matter. Give this record a listen. You'll love it.

Christian Marketplace

Top Ten Best Sellers

Fiction

1. *The Bridge*, Karen Kingsbury (Howard Books)
2. *The Harbinger*, Jonathan Cahn (Charisma Media)
3. *Full Disclosure*, Dee Henderson (Baker)
4. *The Bridesmaid*, Home to Hickory Hollow Series #2, Beverly Lewis (Baker)
5. *All Things New*, Lynn Austin (Baker)
6. *Coming Home*, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
7. *A Wreath of Snow*, Liz Curtis Higgs (WaterBrook/Multnomah)
8. *The Sanctuary*, Ted Dekker (FaithWords)
9. *The Fiddler*, Home to Hickory Hollow Series #1, Beverly Lewis (Baker)
10. *A Patchwork Christmas*, Judith Miller, Nancy Moser and Stephanie Grace Whitson (Barbour)

Nonfiction

1. *Jesus Calling*, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. *One Thousand Gifts*, Ann Voskamp (Zondervan)
3. *I Declare*, Joel Osteen (FaithWords)
4. *Praying God's Word*, Beth Moore (B&H)
5. *Jesus Calling, Large-Print Deluxe Edition*, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
6. *Jesus Today*, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
7. *Heaven Is for Real*, Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
8. *Jesus Calling, Deluxe Edition*, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
9. *Grace*, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
10. *Unglued*, Lysa TerKeurst (Zondervan)

Book Reviews By Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D.

Faithful: The Story of God's Faithfulness to Six Baptist Missionary Families

Wally Poor. Bloomington, Ind.: Crossbooks, 2012. 114 pp. (Paperback).

In September 1968, a number of couples spent 16 weeks in training for missions service by what is now known as the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. After the training ended, the couples were sent all over the world — Lebanon, Colombia, Peru, China, Malaysia, Kenya and other places, seven of them ending up together again 33 years later for a retirement service.

One of the men, Wally Poor, felt led to write a book chroni-

cling the experiences of six of the couples. (Since the seventh had already written a book, Poor felt their story had already been told.) This book provides a glimpse into the lives of missionaries and God's faithfulness as they serve on the missions field.

Both inspiring and entertaining, the book is full of interesting anecdotes about the experiences of the six couples told deftly by Poor, a journalist by training.

America Adrift: Righting the Course

John W. Zimmerman Sr. Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, 2011. 178 pp. (Paperback).

Describing the United States as "a nation gone astray," John Zimmerman minces no words in announcing that our nation needs

a return of "sound and positive values to drive decision-making, behavior and relationships." The first quarter of the book focuses on explaining the problem as the author sees it: what is missing, concludes the author, is a sound moral and ethical filter.

Following the lengthy introduction, Zimmerman moves into an explanation of the origin of values, using his own life as an illustration. This section, like all of the others, is packed with well-researched and well-documented information.

The book culminates with a practical chapter on how others have made a difference and suggestions for the reader who is inspired by the book to get involved in putting America back on course.



Photos courtesy of Provident Label Group

Royal Tailor encourages students to shine the light of Christ in their schools and communities.

'Call to action'

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Christian band Royal Tailor aims to connect with students

By challenging students to resist the lies and temptations found in pop culture, the Christian band Royal Tailor is pointing them straight to the truth of the gospel.

"With the name Royal Tailor, we give honor to the King of Kings who acts as a tailor on our behalf — fixing, mending and adjusting our lives," lead singer Tauren Wells said.

"We really want teenagers to realize that their identity and their strength can be found through a relationship with Christ. We want to help them understand what makes them unique also makes them powerful."

In addition to Wells, the group consists of guitarist DJ Cox, bass player Blake Hubbard and drummer Jarrod Ingram. Through their music and message, the band members desire to connect audiences with the life-changing love of Christ.

"I think God is calling us to operate with a spirit of boldness — to communicate the gospel wherever we perform," Wells said. "We have a great opportunity to share about our relationship with

Christ and encourage people to follow Him."

The songs on their debut album, "Black and White," are designed to equip, encourage and engage students. Furthering their ability to connect

with students, the group has launched a national "Get Schooled" campaign with performances at middle schools, high schools and colleges across the country.

"The overarching theme is a call to action," Wells said. "We want to encourage students to be involved in making a difference and that begins by shining the light of Christ in their schools."

Their message is not only resonating with young people, but with all ages.

"A man recently came up to me and shared that one of our songs made him think

about all the things that had been holding him back and preventing him from giving his life to Christ," Wells said.

"This man realized it was time to let go of the past and surrender his life to the Lord. It's so incredible that music can break down barriers, speak the truth to people and open their hearts to the gospel." ❧



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Sudan bombing kills Christians, destroys church

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The Sudanese military in mid-November bombed more non-Arab people in largely Christians areas of the Nuba Mountains — killing three Christians, destroying two relief agency structures and demolishing a Catholic church building, sources said.

Dawla Angalo, 60, a member of the Catholic church in Heiban, died in a Nov. 17 bombing of the town in South Kordofan state. The bombing also killed 40-year-old Khamisa Kuku, whom a local source said was a Christian woman, in the attack on civilian homes and other non-military buildings. The same bomb attack by a Russian-made Antonov airplane injured Mariam Hamdan, 55, breaking both her legs and seriously wounding one of them.

Four Sudanese government bombs hit Al Reka village Nov. 17, killing Suliman Kuku, a 42-year-old Christian. A 6-year-old girl unrelated to him who was injured in the attack, Nadia Tutu, also is a Christian. "It is very sad — we are losing our members," said an area pastor who requested anonymity.

An Antonov airplane dropped six bombs on the predominately Christian town of Heiban on Nov. 20, with three of them hitting the town's crowded weekly market and one destroying the Catholic church building. Heiban Bible College was reduced to ashes Feb. 1 from an Antonov plane bombing.

Maldives deports Christians for bringing in literature

NEW DELHI — Authorities in the Maldives held a Bangladeshi Christian in jail for 23 days before deporting him for bringing Christian literature into the South Asian archipelago that claims to be 100 percent Muslim.

Customs officials found Jathish Biswas with 11 books on Christianity in the Dhivehi language. Arrested on Sept. 27 at Ibrahim Nasir International Airport in Malé, the nation's capital, he was deported Oct. 19.

"While I was not physically harmed, authorities treated me as if I wanted to destroy their nation by bringing in Christian books," he said. The Maldives — the only nation after Saudi Arabia to claim that all of its 300,000 citizens are Muslims — has laws banning the import of any material that contradicts Islam.

The immigration form all foreigners are required to sign warns that pornographic material, idols, alcohol, pork products and "materials contrary to Islam" are prohibited in the country.

A recently implemented regulation under the nation's Religious Unity Act of 1994 states, "It is illegal in the Maldives to propagate any faith other than Islam or to engage in any effort to convert anyone to any religion other than Islam. It is also illegal to display in public any symbols or slogans belonging to any religion other than Islam, or creating interest in such articles."

Uzbek pastor released, reunited with family

ALMATY, Kazakhstan — Uzbek Protestant pastor Makset Djabbarbergenov was released from prison in Kazakhstan's commercial capital of Almaty on Dec. 4 and taken to the airport to be reunited with his wife and four children. They boarded a flight for Germany in the early hours of Dec. 5 and arrived safely in Europe.

Facilitating the release and asylum in Europe was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Uzbekistan has been seeking to extradite Djabbarbergenov on charges which carry a maximum 15-year prison term to punish him for leading an unregistered Protestant community. His friends in Almaty said, "We need to thank the Kazakh government — they did the right thing."

Belarus grants reprieve to charismatic church

MINSK, Belarus — The eviction of New Life Pentecostal Church from its building in the Belarusian capital of Minsk set for Dec. 5 was called off. "There was a document, there was action; the document was withdrawn, the action stopped," said court executor Olga Shcherbovich. The church meets in a former cow barn it bought and renovated, but the authorities have never legalized its use and have been trying to evict the church for a decade.

New Life's administrator Vitaly Antonchikov said, "This isn't the end, of course — the eviction is canceled, but legally our land and building still belong to the authorities." ❧