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SHE OPENS HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM, AND THE TEACHING OF KINDNESS IS ON HER TONGUE. SHE LOOKS WELL TO THE WAYS OF HER HOUSEHOLD AND DOES NOT EAT THE BREAD OF IDLENESS. HER CHILDREN RISE UP AND CALL HER BLESSED; HER HUSBAND ALSO, AND HE PRAISES HER.

PROVERBS 31:26-28



sxc.hu; graphic by Lauren C. Grim

//////////////////// H A P P Y //////////////////////
Mother's Day

Mother's Day church attendance ranks third, LifeWay survey shows

Besides Easter and Christmas, Mother's Day may be the most likely day people will attend church, according to a study by LifeWay Research. In a national poll of 1,000 Protestant pastors, LifeWay Research asked what the three highest-attendance Sundays were throughout the year. Mother's Day (59 percent) ranked third behind the standard religious powerhouse holidays of Easter (93 percent) and Christmas (84 percent).

Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research, said, "Clearly, mothers want to be present for the affirmation that is typically offered in most churches, but families also are present knowing their attendance will honor their mother. Many families make church attendance on Mother's Day nearly obligatory."

Father's Day attendance

Among the seven specific days tested, Father's Day was mentioned the least, falling behind even homecoming celebrations. "The attendance difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day is telling," McConnell said. "Either churches are less effective in affirming fathers, or families believe Christian fathers don't value their participation in worship services."

The study asked the question: "At your church, which day typically has the highest attendance for worship services?" In addition to Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day, three other days were listed: homecoming or anniversary of the church (16 percent), a special day to invite friends (14 percent) and Fourth of July (4 percent). Twenty-six percent of respondents indicated another day.

There was significant variation in responses when filtered by geographic regions and by educational level:

- ▶ Churches with less than 50 in attendance were most likely to select Mother's Day (9 percent) and least likely to select Easter (41 percent).
- ▶ Protestant pastors with a graduate degree (See 'Invite,' page 12)

"Holidays and special days ... offer an opportunity for churches to host guests who might not otherwise attend church."

Scott McConnell
director, LifeWay Research

COMMENT

Helping Fractured Families

For most Alabamians, the most important thing about this upcoming Sunday (May 12) is that it is Mother's Day. For the nearly 4,000 individuals who will be helped by the services of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) this year, the most important thing about May 12 is that it is the annual Day of Prayer for this important ministry.

As churches celebrate the contributions of God-ordained mothering and stress the importance of stable families, Alabama Baptist churches are being asked to remember those unable to experience such a blessing. Through a Day of Prayer, churches are asked to remember the ministry of ABCH, which steps forward with a variety of ministries when families fracture or when stress threatens to tear families apart.

May 12 is also the day many churches will receive an annual offering for ABCH. The offering is important because special offerings from Alabama Baptist churches provide the single-largest source of the ministry's financial support. Last year churches gave \$2,732,718 in offerings. That is a significant portion of the ABCH expenditures of \$8.7 million in 2012.

The Children's Homes provides a wide range of services for children and their families. There are emergency shelter homes, group homes, foster homes, family care homes, family aid, college and independent living arrangements. There is counseling through Pathways Professional Counseling service and programs provided in churches ranging from conflict resolution to marriage enrichment experiences.

'As near normal as possible'

All of this is focused on strengthening families and serving children.

Children birth through preschool who come to the ABCH live in foster homes. So do some other children up to age 18. Foster home children are placed by the Alabama Department of Human Services, and ABCH receives a stipend per child from the state that is passed on to the foster family.

But that stipend is not sufficient to cover expenses, according to ABCH president Rod Mar-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

shall. That is why the ministry adds about 15 percent, on average, to the funds going to foster families.

"If a child has a birthday, we make sure there are funds to have a birthday party," Marshall said. "The state does not do that.

"If one of our children needs braces for their teeth, we make sure they get braces. We go beyond the state's minimum care requirements," he continued.

Going beyond minimum standards is a guiding principle for children living in group homes, as well. Expenses for school or a new outfit for Easter are some of the common ways the ABCH attempts to provide an experience as near normal as possible for each of its residents.

Last year the Children's Homes had a total of 185 children in its residential care program at some point during the year. That equaled 14,307 days of residential care provided. Through its foster care program, the home served 209 children and provided 34,232 days of care in 2012.

In times of emergency, the Children's Homes is able to provide emergency shelter homes where children can stay while families, social workers and courts decide on permanent plans to best meet the child's needs.

The Children's Homes also provides homes for homeless mothers with children. Here the mother finds transitional housing while she gains employment, saves money, receives counseling and learns life skills such as budgeting and parenting. Participation in these programs is

required by ABCH. The mother maintains custody of her children in this program and can stay up to one year.

The ABCH even helps its residents who want to attend college. Currently 19 former residents are in the college and independent living program.

The Pathways Professional Counseling program offers Christ-centered professional counseling. This is usually provided in cooperation with a Baptist association. With 34 counseling sites, practically every Alabamian lives within a one-hour drive of this resource.

Fees for counseling are charged on an ability to pay basis but they do not come close to covering the cost of the counseling program. Last year the ABCH received \$268,935 in fees but spent \$1.267 million to provide Christian counseling to help families.

'Pacesetter program'

The Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries is a pacesetter program. While not the largest child-care program among Southern Baptists or within Alabama, it is unsurpassed in expertise, innovation and Christ-centered service.

That is one of the qualities that has endeared the ministry to Alabama Baptists for more than 120 years. That is why Baptists support the ministry through an annual special offering as well as through the Cooperative Program. That is why thousands of Baptists continue to invest in the ministry in a permanent way.

In 2012, the Children's Homes received \$2.354 million through estates and trusts. That was the second largest source of income for ABCH. Individual donors gave almost another \$1.5 million. Again, many if not most of the individuals and estate gifts came from Alabama Baptists who believe in helping children and their families through ministries such as those provided by the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes.

Administrative costs are kept low; less than 10 percent of expenses. So are communications and development costs. More than 80 percent of the 2012 expenses went into direct services provided to children and their families, according to ABCH-provided information.

This Sunday as you celebrate the mothering you received, as you encourage those still providing this God-ordained investment in others, remember the fractured families around us all. Pray for them. Pray for the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes and other such ministries that step forward in times of trouble. And, as God leads, help undergird that ministry with a financial contribution to the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries annual offering.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

SAVING MARRIAGE

I am now convinced that the only way to save traditional marriage and family values and rights is to protect the birthrights of children.

The promotion of gay "marriage" takes away a child's inalienable human birthright to male and female biological parents only.

Human life is by male and female

only. Without this, there would be no babies, children or human race.

The government did not build the institution of male and female traditional marriage.

Procreating heterosexual males and females built the institution of marriage as a safe place to have their babies and raise their biological children.

Neither the government nor anyone

else has the right to disrupt, alter or destroy this institution that has been in existence since the beginning of civilization.

How can we spread the word?

Bobby Pickron
Birmingham, Ala.





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

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Graphic by Lauren C. Grim

WORST offenders

USCIRF cites 15 countries for religious freedom violations

It can be hard to come up with a list of countries with the most egregious records on religious freedom when some of the world's worst offenders aren't even nation states.

For its annual report of violators, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) counts 15 nations where abuse of religious liberty is "systemic, egregious and ongoing."

But the commission, which was created by Congress in 1998 as an independent watchdog panel, also wants to highlight the crimes of non-nations, which for the first time this year get their own section in the report.

"USCIRF added a special emphasis on non-state actors, as their violent actions are a growing threat to religious freedom," said Knox Thames, the commission's director of policy and research.

"Violence perpetrated by non-state actors against religious minorities and others who conflict with their worldview is increasingly common, with incidents occurring in places as diverse as Pakistan and Nigeria."

Somalia, for example, which doesn't make the list, is home to al-Shabaab, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization that has brutally suppressed Christians and Sufi Muslims who do not subscribe to its radical interpretation of Islam.

"Somalis accused of committing crimes or who al-Shabaab deems to have deviated from accepted behaviors are punished through stoning, amputation, flogging, and/or detention," according to the report.

'Countries of Particular Concern'

On its 15-nation list of the worse offenders, USCIRF includes eight that the U.S. State Department also considers "Countries of Particular Concern": Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

But as in years past, the commission wants the State Department to add seven more: Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.

This year's USCIRF list is one country smaller than it was in 2012.

Gone is Turkey, whose addition caused an uproar among Turks who called the designation unfounded and damaging to USCIRF's reputation.

Orthodox Christians welcomed the 2012 designation after years of arguing that Turkey — home to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of the world's 250 million Orthodox Christians — continues to shutter their seminary in that country and withholds legal status from many religious groups.

Thames said the commission's decision against designating Turkey as a "country of particular concern" this year was unanimous.

The nation can point to a genuine loosening of restrictions on religious communities, but "nevertheless," the report concludes, "the Turkish government's interpretation of secularism requires absolute state control over all aspects of religion in the public sphere."

But the decision to "promote" Turkey to a country "to be monitored" struck several commissioners as too lenient.

Last year, it was "an error to place Turkey among the world's worst violators of religious freedom," four of eight commissioners wrote in a dissent included in this year's report. "But this year's designation has erred in the opposite direction."

The dissenters want it to be designated a "Tier 2" country, just below the most concerning 15. (RNS)

"Violence perpetrated by non-state actors against religious minorities and others who conflict with their worldview is increasingly common, with incidents occurring in places as diverse as Pakistan and Nigeria."

Knox Thames

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

'Do VIOLENT video games produce violent people?'



Researchers, gamers have mixed thoughts

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In 1994, Peter Brown Hoffmeister got caught carrying a loaded, stolen handgun at his Tennessee high school. "Since the owner of the pistol didn't want to press charges, I simply forfeited the handgun to the local sheriff's deputy, then was promptly expelled from the school," wrote Hoffmeister, a former *Huffington Post* columnist, on his blog. "No arrest. No counseling. No follow-up."

A year later, he carried a sawed-off shotgun to his new school, also frequently packing a sheath-knife and a framing hammer.

"Thankfully I never shot or stabbed or bludgeoned anyone," Hoffmeister wrote.

And with support, he "grew up" and "moved past my tendencies toward violence."

Today he's a well-adjusted high school teacher, but as a high school student, he had a lot in common with school shooters, he wrote. "But there is one significant difference between me at 16 and 17 years of age and most high school shooters: I didn't play violent video games."

He never practiced what he thought about, never "walked into a room and killed everyone inside" virtually on a screen in his living room.

And he's sure that made a world of difference.

Hoffmeister's story isn't scientific, and studies and opinions exist to back both sides of the question, "Do violent video games produce violent people?"

A number of lab experiments support "what any gamer knows in his gut," the *New York Times* reported, saying that playing

games like "Call of Duty (COD)," "Killzone 3" or "Battlefield 3" can "stir the blood."

In a recent Iowa State University research project, 47 undergraduates played a violent video game for 15 minutes then were asked to pressure a peer into drinking hot sauce. The students who played "Mortal Kombat" were hands down more aggressive than the ones in the control group, who had played a nonviolent game.

The study is one of many to find that violent gaming makes a person more hostile for at least a few minutes after exposure, the *New York Times* reported.

Opponents of violent video games tout these facts and back them up with poignant stories. Anders Breivik, who gunned down dozens of teenagers at a camp in Norway in 2011, said he trained by playing COD. Adam Lanza reportedly played the same game for hours before killing 20 children and six women at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December 2012.

Many contributing factors

"None of these extreme acts, like a school shooting, occurs because of only one risk factor; there are many factors, including feeling socially isolated, being bullied and so on," said Craig A. Anderson, director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Iowa State University. "But if you look at the literature, I think it's clear that violent media is one factor; it's not the largest factor, but it's also not the smallest."

Matt DeLisi, a professor of sociology at Iowa State, agreed.

When Iowa State's research controlled for things like antisocial behavior, age, sex, race and past record of delinquency, "the video game measure still mattered," DeLisi said, according to WOWT Channel 6 News in Nebraska.

But some researchers contend that violent video games may actually lower the crime rate, perhaps by keeping potential troublemakers off the street by giving them something to do or providing "an outlet" for violent behavior, the *New York Times* reported.

"We found that higher rates of violent video game sales related to a decrease in crimes and especially violent crimes," said Michael Ward, a researcher at the University of Texas at Arlington, noting that they controlled for seasonal game sales and other factors in their study conducted in 2011.

Other researchers say that even though shooters and other violent criminals are often involved in violent gaming, it doesn't mean that the games cause the violence. They cite the thousands of other gamers who play without committing crimes, the *New York Times* reported.

With the mixed research conclusions, parents may decide violent media isn't a big enough problem to spend time monitoring their teens, Anderson said.

"What parent would go through the pain and all the effort it takes to really control their child's media diet, if they don't really think it makes any difference? That is why it is so important to get out the simple and clear message that media violence does matter," he said.

Donnie Sisk, pastor to students and recreation at First Baptist Church, Pelham, said that even if people who play violent games don't become "serial killing psychopaths," parents shouldn't be "comfortable allowing them to sit in front of a screen shooting up a scene or grabbing a fake car so they can drive it like they stole it."

False realities

Sisk said he is against our society being so technology obsessed that youth can practically live in false realities.

"We are teaching them new life is just a click away. Redo, reset, no harm — just start over," he said.

"In the world there are consequences for our actions. Our choices affect the lives of others."

Hoffmeister wrote that he worries most about his "troubled male students" who play violent video games and brag about "violent actions that they've never done in the real world."

He recalled walking down the hall behind two teenage boys and hearing one of them say, "I just came up behind him, pulled out my knife so quietly and cut his throat."

The second boy said, "Yeah, then I killed everyone else in less than, like, 10 seconds. Just slaughtered them."

Hoffmeister talked to one of them later, and the teen confessed to playing COD at least 40 hours a week.

"Is this what we want angry adolescent boys to do? Do we want to give them this practice?" Hoffmeister asked.

"Especially with teenage boys, we have to decide what we want them to do, what we want them to love, what we want them to emulate."

Even if they aren't preparing to carjack or kill someone in real life, he wrote, what is it that they actually are preparing to do?

"Will these video-game practice sessions make them better husbands or fathers? Will these boys become patient and understanding friends? Better coworkers?" ❧

"We are teaching them new life is just a click away. Redo, reset, no harm — just start over."

Donnie Sisk
pastor to students and recreation, FBC Pelham

“Can we pursue Spirit-led critical thought that calls our students to decide who they will be? Will they be a generation of voyeurs, effectively reducing the value of life, or will they consider the great value God places on life?”

Steve Walters, minister to students and missions, Camden Baptist Church

10 VIOLENT games to avoid

1. Dead Space 2

This takes players through a scary battle for their lives in an alien-infested world.

2. Mortal Kombat

It's a wildly popular franchise in the violent video game category that includes the most realistic and gory graphics that go way beyond what you'd expect.

3. Medal of Honor

Hyper-realistic graphics recreate modern-day war zones in Afghanistan, soldiers' bodies crumple authentically and gush blood when shot, kill counts are often high enough to populate a small town, not to mention the rampant profanity.

4. Call of Duty: Black Ops

Set during the Cold War in the late 1960s, its urban and rural firefights are among the most frenetic and intense ever created for a video game.

5. Fallout: New Vegas

Players can select dialogue options that may be rude or result in sexually suggestive conversations. They also choose which part of their enemies' bodies they want to shoot in slow motion, potentially wounding or blowing off specific limbs.

6. Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

The game's hero, a member of a brotherhood of holy warriors, wields a crucifix-shaped whip handle that contains a long length of chain blessed with holy water that he uses to lacerate enemies, creating fountains of blood in the process.

7. Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

Lifelike sword fights see players slashing and skewering foes with realistic blood.

8. Dead Rising 2

The violence is wildly over-the-top; a motorbike with chainsaws duct-taped to its handles is just one of the scores of weapons used to dismember the dead.

9. Halo: Reach

It's all about finding your favorite weapon and using it to tear holes in your enemies.

10. Naughty Bear

A sociopathic bear spends his time choking his peers with golf clubs, slamming their heads in car doors and frightening them until they commit suicide.

Source: Parenting.com



Student pastors say it's about teaching them to think like Christ

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Are violent video games a potential problem for students? James Hollis says absolutely. But Hollis, minister of youth and discipleship at Sixth Street Baptist Church, Alexander City, said he doesn't spend much time focusing on that with the teens he leads.

"I don't see teaching them not to play or to play certain things or watch certain things as helpful," he said. "Changing behavior is not my goal."

The issue, he said, is a much deeper one. "My job is to expose them to God's Word and help them see and savor Christ alone," Hollis said, noting that as teens grasp who God is, they begin to think like Him.

"I have had students begin to play these games less ... as a result of just not finding pleasure in that anymore. I encourage my students to love what God loves and hate what God hates," Hollis said. "These things last; not our temporariness."

Bruce Crockett, minister of students at Agape Baptist Church, Scottsboro, agreed that violent video games definitely have an impact, but the main problem he sees is their addictive nature.

"They become time wasters and idols," he said.

Crockett doesn't talk much with his students about whether or not to play them but instead about the "issue that when we want to spend more time with technology than with the Creator, then something is wrong."

Donnie Sisk, pastor to students and recreation at First Baptist Church, Pelham, agreed. He asks the questions "why?" and "what?" when he talks with his students about game consumption:

- ▶ Why are you playing?
- ▶ Are you attempting to fill a void in your life?
- ▶ Are you lonely?
- ▶ Are you trying to get attention or affirmation from your friends?
- ▶ What are you communicating by playing?
- ▶ What value does the game have for you?
- ▶ What benefits do you gain for God's Kingdom?
- ▶ What else should you be doing?
- ▶ What is the ratio of time spent playing to time spent with God?

"What we feed becomes our need," said Keith Beatty, worship and youth pastor of First Baptist Church, Fairfax.

And consuming violent video games in mass quantities "is not only derogatory in their walk with Christ but affects their inter-

action with the world around them," Beatty said.

At what point, he asks, did society stop evaluating the content of what children and teens mentally consume?

"The bigger question is why parents look the other way while their children spend countless hours playing games that glorify death, hate and hostility," he said. "God should be honored in all that we do, all that we say and in all that we play. We should fight for the minds of our children and defend their future by guarding their present."

Andy John King, minister of senior high youth/college and career at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, said he teaches his students to "evaluate everything they take in by the standard of the Word of God," and he teaches them why.

"Filling their minds with violence, sexual images or terrible language may show itself in their lifestyles, and if it does, they can expect damage to their reputations and relationships and worse, their witness," he said.

Parents should be aware that students today "can gain access to just about anything — more than they (parents) probably think," King said.

"It is important that parents safeguard what their children are taking in and have real discussions about the dangers of allowing anything and everything into their minds," he said.

It's time for parents to up their game, said Steve Walters, minister to students and missions of Camden Baptist Church.

"Students are flooded with violent imagery, and simply telling them to turn it off may be good advice, but it falls short of thinking critically on the matter; moreover, such an approach will do little to influence an increasingly thoughtless, entertainment-hungry culture," Walters said.

'Battle for our hearts'

Parents have to train their teens to question the ideas that the culture presents and not just accept them, he said.

"Our battle against the message of entertainment violence is a battle for our hearts," Walters said. "Whether intended or unintended, our value as God's created people is diminished through violence vending, and God's values are assaulted."

If what God says about His love for the world is true, then "life is so valuable it is worth dying for," he said.

That thought should drive parents and students to think critically about entertainment violence, Walters said.

"Can we pursue Spirit-led critical thought that calls our students to decide who they will be? Will they be a generation of voyeurs, effectively reducing the value of life, or will they consider the great value God places on life?" ■

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

BESSEMER

▶ **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host a concert by the area-wide children's choir, the Young Western Voices, on May 22, 6:15 p.m. Bill McCalla is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

▶ **The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham**, will hold the Pursuit young singles conference May 10 starting at 7 p.m. and May 11, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Speakers will be Pastor David Platt, Jim Shaddix and Marian Jordan Ellis. To register, visit www.brookhills.org/youngsingles. ▶ **Hilldale Church, Center Point**, will hold a southern gospel concert with Awakened on May 19, 2 p.m. Ron Pate is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

▶ **First Church, Florence**, will celebrate its 125th anniversary May 17–19. Services Friday and Saturday will be at 6:30 p.m. and Sunday at 10:30 a.m. Speakers will be W.C. "Nick" Garland on Friday; Barry Sneed on Saturday; and Roy Hill on Sunday. For information call the church office at 256-764-4921.

EAST CULLMAN

▶ **Stanley Kilgore**, pastor of **Center Grove Church, Cullman**, was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree by Southern Bible College & Seminary in Lenoir City, Tenn., in honor of his many years of devoted, godly service to missions, evangelism, theological research and pastoral ministry. In addition, he was admitted to the seminary's alumni association and named "Pastor of the Year."

SIPSEY

▶ **Arbor Springs Church, Northport**, will hold a camp meeting May 12–17, 6 p.m. Sunday and 6:30 p.m. weeknights. Shannon Knight will speak and provide the special music. Ted Sessoms is pastor. ▶ **Bevan Chapel Church, Berry**, will sponsor a tent meeting May 16–18, 7 p.m. nightly in downtown Berry. Randal Trimm is pastor and will be the evangelist.

TALLAPOOSA

▶ **Sandy Creek Church, Camp Hill**, will hold revival May 8–10, 7 p.m. nightly. Gary Wiggins will speak and James

Mynard will provide music. Rick Hall is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

▶ **The First Church, Auburn**, 40th College Choir Reunion will be May 24–26. Activities begin May 24 at 7 p.m. with registration and fellowship and an 8 p.m. rehearsal. Rehearsal on May 25 will begin at 9 a.m. A special concert will be presented during morning worship May 26. For information visit www.auburnfbc.org.

WASHINGTON

▶ **Chapel Hill Church, Millry**, will celebrate homecoming May 20, 10 a.m. Mike Roberts and Jacob Holston will be the guest singers and former pastor Kenneth Henson will speak at 11 a.m. A business meeting will follow the worship service and lunch will be at noon. Ferrell Mills is pastor.

OTHER

▶ The former **85th Street Church, Birmingham**, will hold a reunion May 18, 1–5 p.m. at its former location, 8440 5th Ave. North, Birmingham. All former members are invited.



Choccolocco's Harmony Baptist marks 175 years

Harmony Baptist Church, Choccolocco, was chartered on April 21, 1838, and on April 21, 2013, the church celebrated its 175th anniversary.

Several former church members united with the current choir members to form a reunion choir for the anniversary event. The group practiced together the day before the anniversary service, noted Sandra Boyd, Harmony Baptist's ministry assistant.

On April 21 during the worship service, Sid Nichols, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association, presented the Calhoun Association church with a plaque on behalf of the association.

Pastor David Jones preached on Joshua 4, and lunch followed in the Christian life center.

That afternoon an additional service was held at 1 p.m. Several people performed solos, special music and duets, and the reunion choir sang.

Jerald Hicks, who grew up in Harmony Baptist and is now a pastor in Orlando, Fla., spoke during the afternoon service.

A skit on the church's history written by a church member also was presented that afternoon, and several members shared their experiences at Harmony Baptist through the years, Boyd said.

"Our church obviously has a very long history, (and) it's just a privilege to be a part of the church," Jones said. "We don't want to rest on the past, we want to look forward to the future."

(Julie Payne)

Robinwood Baptist celebrates 75th anniversary

Robinwood Baptist Church, Birmingham, celebrated 75 years of ministry April 7 with about 100 people in attendance.

Pastor Dale Creel, who has led Robinwood Baptist for eight years, said "people had a good time and enjoyed the day."

Jim Parker, associate professor of biblical interpretation at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a beloved former interim pastor, shared the message at the morning service. Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Johnnie Sentell presented the Birmingham Baptist Association church with a commemorative plaque, as did Margie Duncan of Birmingham Association. Special music group New Ground sang in the morning service and in the afternoon concert that followed the fellowship luncheon.

Creel noted that it was good to see several former members who attended the anniversary celebration.

Looking forward, Creel said, "Our dream is probably a dream everybody has but we'd love to be able to reach the community and communities around us. There are people ... praying for revival and spiritual awakening to come to our area."

(Neisha Fuson)

Someone You Should Know



By Christine Kapurch
Correspondent, TAB

TERI LYNNE UNDERWOOD

Calvary Baptist Church, Russellville
Franklin Baptist Association



UNDERWOOD

FAVORITE VERSE: Psalm 19:14

FAVORITE HYMN: "My Jesus I Love Thee"

HOBBIES: Reading, learning to crochet and spending time with

family and friends

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Scott (minister of music) since 1996; mother of Casiday

Teri Lynne Underwood (www.terilynneunderwood.com) is a writer, women's ministry speaker and social media coach. She is the author of two books: "Parenting from the Overflow" and "Prayers from the Pews: The Power of Praying for Your Church." She also co-authored "Self-Publish: Moving from Idea to Product" and writes a column for her local paper.

Q: What influences pointed you to Christ at the beginning of your faith journey?

A: As a pastor's daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter, I suppose the more difficult question would be what influences didn't point me to Christ. I'm one of those church kids who has been attending since nine months before I was born. In addition to my family's

strong influence, I have also been nurtured and encouraged by other faithful adults throughout my life.

Q: When and how were you led into the ministry?

A: Having grown up in the ministry, I knew what sort of stress and demands this life entails. In fact, like many pastor's kids, I had promised I'd never marry a pastor. But the Lord had better plans, as always. When Scott and I married, I had begun my career in marketing and public relations and anticipated that my job would be my area of ministry. However, once we had our daughter ... I realized those gifts and abilities God had given me ... had been preparation for the speaking and writing ministry He has unfolded for me.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: As a women's ministry speaker and Christian writer, the biggest demand I have found is making sure I'm keeping my priorities in place. It's very easy to let reaching out to other women become the focus of my days. The Lord has been guiding me gently (and not so gently sometimes) to find the ideal blend of ministry both outside and inside my home.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: I love the opportunity to encourage women. ... One of the themes the Lord has really stirred in me is to offer women permission to live well, to experience the abundant life He offers us. I find such joy in sharing that message and reminding women that having a full life sometimes means having a not-so-full calendar.

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'Missionally strategic'

Alabama associations work together

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The 2 million unchurched people in Alabama can look pretty different. In Marshall County alone, they could be Haitians, Ethiopians or Hispanics. "And we also have a lot of cowboys — yee-haw," said Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Baptist Association. "The Lord has brought the missions field here, and we are an association of churches working together to get it done."

Christians in Marshall County want to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission, Stoner said, and the association's 103 Baptist churches "can do a lot more with one another to reach the 2 million lost in Alabama."

Six cowboy churches are meeting now in

Marshall County, and a Haitian church has gotten started recently too.

"An Ethiopian group is meeting at Victory Baptist in Guntersville, and we saw two of them saved two weeks ago," Stoner said. "We couldn't speak their language, but they understood enough English to know they wanted the Jesus we had."

The association also has ministries running that provide housing for the homeless, as well as job-skill training and medical treatment for those who need it. Recovery churches, aimed at helping people who struggle with addictions, have now grown from 19 people to more than 1,000 meeting each week in cell groups.

"We couldn't do it by ourselves," Stoner said. "One church could not handle all these ministries."

This is exactly what associational missions is all about, said Rick Barnhart, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama

What associational missions looks like

I think the adage that 'we can do more together than we can separately' applies. In Shelby County, missions takes many forms. It is expressed in ministries like our Daily Bread Shop, which assists families with needs and offers them the gospel. It will be expressed in assisting a weekday Bible ministry at a YMCA, another church with a migrant ministry and helping another church minister in a housing project. It is literacy ministry. It is chaplaincy. Mission takes many forms. In one sense, the mission philosophy for Shelby Baptist Association has been 'meet a need and share Jesus.'

Hugh Richardson
Director of missions
Shelby Baptist Association

Missions has become the central focus of our association in the past decade. Missions teams — local, national and international. Thrift stores. Food pantry. Church planting with African Americans. And most recently creation of a new congregation in the prison camp of the newly opened Women's Federal Correctional Institution at Iceville. Disaster relief projects. Block parties. As a family of smaller churches, the association makes it possible for every Baptist in our area to be a Great Commission Christian."

Gary Farley
Director of missions
Pickens Baptist Association

Judson Baptist Association is involved with different missions/ministries. We have two Christian Ministry Centers. Both have the same mission — feed the hungry and present the gospel. Judson has two home repair teams responding to needs. Most of our churches

are involved in various events/ministries assisting in fulfilling this theme — block parties, car shows and rodeos, to name a few. The Judson Baptist Association actively and intentionally exists to serve by encouraging, strengthening, mobilizing and partnering together."

George Thompson
Director of missions
Judson Baptist Association

Missions in Bigbee Association looks like the Cooperative Program, Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong and Kathleen Mallory offerings. It looks like several individuals going on missions trips to Central America and other areas, as well as encouraging and supporting two local young women serving in Third World countries. It looks like ministering to foreign students, especially Chinese students enrolled in the University of West Alabama. It looks like sponsoring various evangelistic events like Horse Whisperers to reach the lost community in our area."

Larry Potts
Director of missions
Bigbee Baptist Association

In the hills and valleys that mark our region of service, there are many physical needs that are not being met. We strive to help our neighbors, to make their lives safer, healthier and more peaceful, always in the name of our Lord. When anyone asks them 'who did this for you?' we always want the answer to be, 'Oh, don't you know, it was someone from down at the church.'

Lloyd Borden
Director of missions
Lookout Mountain Baptist Association



Photo courtesy of Mobile Baptist Association

People from different countries gather at a celebration at Mobile Association's International Ministries Center. The center aims to reach internationals for Christ.

Baptist State Board of Missions.

"The association is truly to be a uniting of likeminded churches established for the welfare of spreading the gospel in a particular area of the state," he said. Churches that might not be able to handle a load of varied ministries themselves can team up to do ministry evangelism — food pantries, homeless shelters, counseling centers and a whole host of other things, Barnhart said.

And the association is to be "missionally strategic" in its approach to reaching its area, he said.

"Directors of missions must think like a missionary as they look at the needs ... and as they look specifically at the churches that they are charged and privileged to serve with," Barnhart said. "Thinking missionally means developing strategies that are specific to the communities and people groups we are honored to reach."

For Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA), that strategy looks like partnerships aimed at reaching "Jerusalem" first, said Mike McLemore, BBA executive director of missions.

"We here in the Birmingham Baptist As-

sociation see our mission as one of assisting and resourcing our churches to fulfill the Great Commission," he said, noting the association serves as a channel to help churches reach the metropolitan area.

It does that through a range of inner-city ministries that do things like feed the hungry, help underprivileged children and take the gospel into elementary schools, provide medical equipment to people who need it and mobilize teams of students to help with home

repair. The Church's mission is "a global mission, but it begins here at home and spreads throughout the world," McLemore said.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association, agreed. Through the International Ministries Center — aimed at seafarers, refugees and other immigrants — Mobile Baptists hope to get the gospel to the world.

"Missions can be defined as the redemptive activity of God's people," he said, noting that the association provides opportunities for churches and their members "to use their gifts locally, nationally and internationally." ❧

Associational
Missions Week
is May 19-26



Photo courtesy of DeKalb Baptist Association

CLEMENT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN MINISTRY

Wendell Dutton (right), director of missions for Cherokee Baptist Association, presents Ken Clement (left), director of missions for DeKalb Baptist Association, and his wife, Cecilia, with a letter of commendation from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission for 50 years in the ministry April 14.

State Bible Drill, Speakers Tournament winners

The 2013 State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament were held April 27 at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery. The winners of each division are listed below.



Photo by Bethany Rogers

YOUTH BIBLE DRILL — (Left to right) Second place, Jacob Fink, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile; first, Paul Last, Harmony Baptist Church, Huntsville; and third, Caroline Merck, Grove Hill Baptist Church.



Photo by Bethany Rogers

HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE DRILL — (Left to right) first place, Chance Gray, FBC Lexington; and second, Michael Last, Harmony Baptist Church, Huntsville.



Photo by Bethany Rogers

SPEAKERS TOURNAMENT — (Left to right) third place, Rebecca Smith, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile; first, Rachel Sinclair, Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham; and second, Joy Henley, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville.



Photo by Danny Tindell/Dothan Eagle

Katy Mitchell of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Ozark, reads from the Bible on April 28.

God's word

Statewide Bible Reading Marathons reach communities

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For the past 10 years, the coming of spring for Wilma Hart has meant reading the Bible around the clock outside the courthouse in Ozark.

Starting April 28 and culminating on the National Day of Prayer on May 2, Hart and fellow participants in the Bible Reading Marathon gathered and read God's word aloud.

And this year, for the first time, there have been participants who have read in other languages. One man used sign language to share a passage in Genesis while someone else read it aloud, and the next day a woman from Thailand opted to read in Thai from a Bible she'd brought with her.

The event draws volunteers from several local churches of different denominations. It also attracts the attention of passersby, which is one of Hart's favorite parts.

"We share the gospel plenty of times with people [who watch and listen to the] Bible Reading Marathon," said Hart, organizer of the event and a member of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Ozark. "We're prepared to tell the Word when it's needed, and we're right on the sidewalk next to the traffic and we have a microphone so people can easily see and hear us."

Being at the courthouse offers a unique opportunity, Hart said, noting that the event is seen by people heading into court, often facing serious situations.

Many times, as people are walking into the courthouse, they'll stop by the Bible Reading Marathon tent to ask for prayers.

Meanwhile, in Troy, a similar marathon celebrated its seventh anniversary this year. As in Ozark, the Troy event attracts readers from a variety of different Christian denominations.

Though the marathon is quite an undertaking to coordinate, there's always a worthwhile outcome, said Linda Adams, a member of Good Hope Baptist Church, Troy.

"There's always someone who comes and tells you how much they appreciate it, how glad they are you're doing this," she said. "This event helps us plug them into a church, pray with them — the possibilities are endless."

She especially looks forward to the moments when she or another volunteer is able to pray with someone in need.

This year, a man who had been recently diagnosed with cancer stumbled upon the reading and told the volunteers that he felt such peace listening to God's word.

"Those moments make it worth it, those people who come with tears and are filled with the spirit," Adams said. "It's given us the dedication to continue with this. Seven years — that's pretty good."

Becoming familiar with the event

Ninfa Austin, a member of Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, helps spearhead the Birmingham Bible Reading Marathon, now in its third year.

She said local churches are beginning to become more familiar with the event, helping to make their volunteer base more robust.

"We're seeing certain people who want to return and who make it a priority in their schedules," she said. "We even had people call us back in January to make sure we were still having the event this year, which we were thrilled about."

This year's event — held at Southside Baptist Church in downtown Birmingham — garnered support from a variety of denominations but also from a variety of cultures. There were readings in several languages, including Korean, German, Mandarin and Swahili.

"Our goal for this event hasn't changed: It remains, of course, to honor God's word," Austin said. "We've added a specific Scripture for our readers — 1 Timothy 4:13 — which calls us to devote ourselves to public reading, so here's an opportunity to do just that." ❧

praying **ACROSS** Alabama

II Chron. 7:14



Photo by Scotty Goldman
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BUTLER COUNTY



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Photo by Jeff Gardner
MOBILE COUNTY

Baptists conclude statewide prayer effort

For more than two months Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) leaders, directors of missions and Alabama Baptists have gathered at or near every courthouse in the state as part of Praying Across Alabama (PAA). From Mobile to Jackson to Houston to Lauderdale counties, Alabama Baptists have covered the state, literally and figuratively, in prayer.

The statewide prayer initiative began Feb. 24 and ended in Blount County on May 2. Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, and other State Board leadership helped lead and coordinate each county's prayer event. The emphasis included three regional prayer rallies as well as the daily email resource "A 60-Day Prayer Guide for Revival and Spiritual Awakening."

Mike Jackson, PAA prayer coordinator and SBOM director of leadership and church health, said PAA was a "huge success."

"God has used [PAA] to call His people to a season of prayer," he said. "My hope is that the end result will be that Alabama Baptists gather on a regular basis to seek God through prayer for the promises of 2 Chronicles 7:14."

Lance said PAA has been "an encouraging time" for state Baptists.

"As many as 7,500 people participated in the more than 75 ven-

ues. ... People from all walks of life assembled for this special time of intercessory prayer."

Jeff Gardner, pastor of First Baptist Church, St. Elmo, attended the Mobile County event. While there, he noticed a woman walk toward the group, he said.

"This lady 'just happened' to be walking down the sidewalk pulling a cart with some of her belongings (in) it," Gardner said.

"We were singing 'How Great is Our God' and she stopped, obviously moved by the singing. ... After a moment, a young lady from the crowd moved over to her and spoke with her. I saw the woman (with the cart) give an affirmative nod and then she began singing with us," he continued.

"If Praying Across Alabama touched this one woman's life then it has been worth the effort."

Lance expressed his gratefulness to "Alabama Baptists for making [PAA] a priority."

"Now we need to continue to ask our Lord for a spiritual awakening in our nation. May this effort be a step in that breakthrough." (TAB)



Photo by Jim Rooks
LAMAR COUNTY

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Bill to increase penalty for illegal gambling fails

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Hundreds of bills die each year in the state Legislature. That is not unusual. What is unusual is when one party has a supermajority in both houses and a high-ranking official in that same party endorses legislation as his "top priority" but the bill ends up being killed by a member of that party.

Senate Bill (SB) 446 experienced this fate in the Senate on April 30.

The bill would have increased the penalty for promoting, conspiring to promote or possessing an illegal gambling machine from a Class A misdemeanor to a Class C felony for those making profits over \$10,000.

"This bill was not whether we are for or against legalizing gambling," said bill sponsor Sen. Bryan Taylor, R-Prattville. "It is whether we are for or against enforcing the law. ... We have casino bosses, casino lawyers and some of the largest out-of-state casino machine makers in the world who are mocking Alabama's law."

Attorney General Luther Strange said the bill, which was his top priority for the session, would have given law enforcement officials the tools they need to enforce the law.

"People ignore the laws because they don't have enough teeth," he said. "We seize their machines, they put up a half-hearted defense and then abandon them. They bring in new machines, claim they are better and are back in business again."

"It was very disappointing the vote never came up," Strange said. "We had the votes to pass the bill but we didn't have the votes to stop Sen. Gerald Dial's filibuster."

Dial, R-Lineville, was the only Republican to publically oppose the legislation. When the bill came up for discussion April 30, he offered an amendment on the floor. The amendment would have made law enforcement officers who failed to enforce "gambling offenses" guilty of a Class C felony.

The amendment failed, but Dial did not give up the microphone, thus leading to a filibuster. The only way to stop a filibuster is with a two-thirds vote of the members (21 votes). The vote to cloture (or stop the filibuster) was 18 for and 13 against. The 18 in favor of cloture were all Republican senators. The 13 against were all Democratic senators plus one Republican, Dial.

Four senators did not vote either way on the cloture.

Two were not present that day

— Sen. Shadrack McGill, R-Scottsboro, and Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Guntersville.

Two senators were present but chose not to vote — Sen. Tom Whatley, R-Auburn, and Sen. Jerry Fielding, R-Sylacauga. Both had indicated their support for the bill but chose not to shut down the filibuster. Attempts to reach Fielding and Whatley were unsuccessful.

Multiple attempts to reach Dial also were unsuccessful.

It is not clear why he opposed the legislation, but he has disappointed many in the Republican party.

Dial is known for his long his-

tory of supporting gambling efforts when he served in the Democratic party, but he had given his word to top Republican leaders including former Gov. Bob Riley that he would not be involved in gambling issues when he switched parties, said Dan Ireland, director emeritus of Alabama Citizens Action Program. "When he switched parties he told me he was through doing anything for the gambling crowd," Ireland said. "I told him I was proud of him ... and then he leads the campaign to virtually destroy this bill, which would have increased penalties on illegal gambling."

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Want to know God?

By Ken Bush, minister
of education and outreach
Central Park Baptist Church, Decatur

As great a man as King David was, he was also a sinful man. He stood one night on his roof and before him saw a lovely woman bathing in what she would have thought was a private moment. David sent for the woman, Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, and essentially committed sexual assault.

Not only did he commit this sexual sin, he tried to cover it up, eventually by having Uriah killed at the battle front. One sin had led to another. David probably thought he had gotten away with it, but God sent Nathan to confront David with his sin (2 Sam. 11-12). David knew he was guilty of a travesty and his heart was overwhelmed with guilt for his actions. Psalm 51 is David's appeal to God for forgiveness of his sins. He acknowledges that his sin is against God, and only He could remove the stain of David's actions — "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (v. 7b). His plea to the Lord includes a great statement of desire for restoration that many today still pray to the Lord when they acknowledge their sin before Him.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (vv. 10-12a).

Sin results in guilt, not because God likes making us feel dirty, but because His love compels Him to do that which will lead us to desire restoration in our relationship with Him. Many times I have called out to the Lord to cleanse my heart from the sin and guilt burdening me. The Lord's promise is that He will create in us a new heart, that is, He will forgive us and rebuild our lives.

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, you have sin you need to confess. You can't have a right relationship with God through any means other than confessing from a heart broken for what you have done and accepting Jesus' gift of forgiveness. David knew he could offer God nothing other than this: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Economist believes young people persuadable on gay 'marriage'

Jennifer Roback Morse, an economist, rejects the notion that increasing support for homosexual "marriage" among young people means that its legalization is somehow inevitable.

She is founder and president of The Ruth Institute, a pro-marriage group that promotes traditional marriage to college students and other young adults. The arguments for marriage can work with that group because they've never heard them, she said. Presented well, the case is "extremely powerful."

Following is a transcript of an interview Les Sillars did with her for World News Service:

Q: Do you focus on college students because they seem to be shifting in favor of homosexual "marriage"?

A: When I started The Ruth Institute in 2008, Prop 8 was going on around me in California, but I have always wanted to talk to young people about the whole range of issues. ... Certainly young people have been swept away with the argument that gay "marriage" is inevitable. Also they know kids who are openly gay. ... But that doesn't in any way diminish the case for man-woman marriage, that the essential public purpose of marriage is to attach mothers and

fathers to their children, and to one another. That is still true no matter how much you love your gay neighbor or your lesbian classmate.

Q: What kind of a reaction do you get when you step onto the campus of some place like Berkeley?

A: To go to a secular university and make a scientific argument, to make natural law arguments, it's extremely powerful, both for the students who are inclined to agree with you and for the students who have never heard anything like it before. Often they're sitting there with their mouths open, and they'll

come up to me afterwards and say, "I didn't know these arguments existed." That makes it worthwhile.

Q: How do you approach the issue?

A: Often with young people I'll start off with no-fault divorce. Marriage is no longer presumed to be permanent. It's a huge structural shift and young people have already been wounded by divorce. You go on any college campus, religious or not, and kids in that audience have been hurt by two or three divorces, or their mom going through a series of boyfriends. A lot of the arguments for homosexual "marriage" today are quite comparable to the arguments for divorce in the late 1960s.

Q: You've said that the cultural left is determined to abolish marriage and gender differences. Why? And what are the "fiscal and freedom" consequences of this agenda?

A: Let's start with the second question. I saw as an economist that the whole society is depending on the family getting the job done. If children have been in too much foster care or in orphanages too long often they have difficulty developing a conscience and developing attachments to other people. If that happens, you've got a person who is a real social problem. ... By one estimate we're spending over \$100 billion a year on dealing with the consequences of out-of-wedlock childbearing and family breakup and family breakdown.

For people on the radical left, equality is their primary value. But it doesn't even make sense to think about families in terms of equality because babies are never the equal of the parents and men and women can never be equal in the sense of baby-making and childrearing and development. So if egalitarianism is your biggest thing, this whole enterprise of baby-making is offensive and disruptive to your ideology. ... The home itself becomes politicized. To level all differences between men and women they have somehow to sterilize the sexual act, which is why so many of them see abortion and contraception as absolute values.

Q: What happens if the Supreme Court rules in favor of homosexual "marriage" in the recent cases on the constitutionality of Proposition 8 in California and the federal Defense of Marriage Act?

A: It would be the Roe v. Wade of the marriage issue. ... It will tell millions of people that they don't matter in the political process — go home, sit down, shut up.

Also the pro-marriage movement will have to figure out how to deal with the fallout of the redefinition of marriage. Just as the pro-life movement has spent a lot of effort helping women deal with the physical and psychological fallout of abortion, we need to deal with the victims of the sexual revolution and help them to be whole so that we can move forward in society, whatever the political structure may turn out to be. (BP)

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'New beginning'

Samford launches campaign for new business building

Samford University's Brock School of Business announced the launch of a campaign to build a new state-of-the-art business school on Samford's campus.

The campaign was announced April 26 with the pledge of a \$12.5 million gift from Birmingham insurance executive Gary Cooney, a 1974 Samford graduate.

Cooney — vice chairman of McGriff, Seibels and Williams, Inc. — said he wants the building to become a reality as soon as possible to honor the business school's namesake, retired Birmingham banker and Samford trustee Harry B. Brock Jr.

"I don't want to see us pass this opportunity and not allow [Brock] to see that building finished," Cooney said. "I want him to be the guy that gets to cut the ribbon when it is finished."

"We offer something at Samford that is difficult to find anywhere else in the world," Cooney added. "This city and this university have the chance to add a crown jewel that will attract businesses and will attract students."

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland expressed appreciation to Cooney for his pledge and his involvement in Samford.

"I want you to know the depth of my appreciation to you on behalf of everyone at Samford University," Westmoreland said. "We love you and are grateful beyond measure to you."

Westmoreland called the building a "new beginning" for Samford and the business school.

"My favorite thing about a uni-



Photo courtesy of Samford University

'TRANSFORMATIONAL OPPORTUNITY' — Samford University's Brock School of Business announces the launch of a campaign to build a new state-of-the-art business school on campus.

versity is that it is a place of beginnings," he said. "[The faculty] have pledged their lives to this place because they want to assist with those beginnings. Every single day it is about beginnings. This will allow us more new beginnings."

'Investing in students'

The new building will be located to the north of Harwell G. Davis Library and to the east of Mamie Mell Smith Residence Hall. It will include a community resource forum that can hold up to 400 people, classrooms with interactive breakout rooms, the student business incubator and the Bulldog Investment Fund room.

"This is a transformational opportunity to invest in our current students and in future students for generations to come, so that

they receive the highest quality business education," said Howard Finch, dean of the Brock School of Business.

Harry Brock Jr. also noted what a new building would mean to him and his family and the legacy he is leaving for the future.

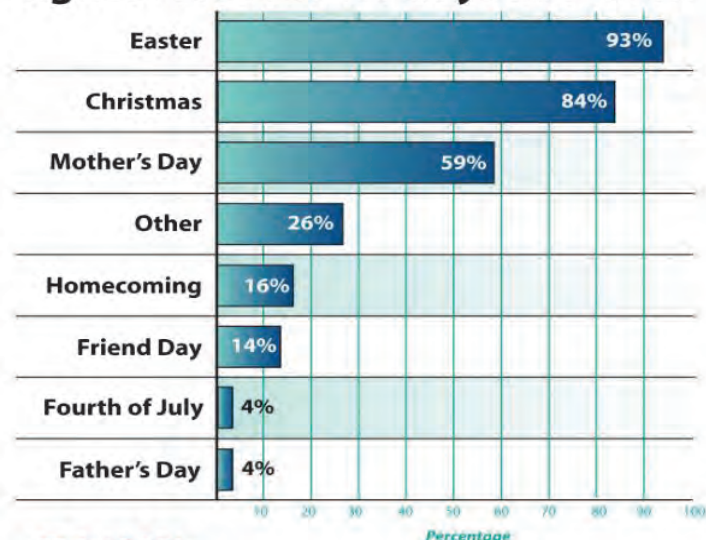
"It goes without saying that the new building would be a big boost for our faculty and would help attract students," Brock said. "Any time you have something this beautiful and nice, it helps the general community. Brick and mortar is where it starts. It's a winner in almost every respect."

The project is part of the university's multiyear, multimillion dollar "Campaign for Samford." The campaign already has received more than \$158 million in gifts and pledges. (SU)

Invite your family, friends to attend church worship services on special days

Reported among Protestant pastors

Days selected as one of the three highest attendance days at church



LifeWayResearch.com

(continued from page 1) were less likely to select Mother's Day (3 percent to 8 percent) than pastors with at most a bachelor's degree.

► Protestant pastors of churches in the South were most likely to select homecoming (9 percent). No other region had more than 1 percent of pastors making this selection.

► Churches with attendance up to 49 people (8 percent) and between 50 and 99 people (7 percent) were more likely to select homecoming.

"Holidays and special days, regardless of which ones, offer an opportunity for churches to host guests who might not otherwise attend church," McConnell said. "Encouraging attendees to invite family and friends for services on these special days is a natural time to ask since many people will be considering attending." (BP)

World of Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Court upholds women's prayer rights at Western Wall

JERUSALEM — Women who want to wear prayer shawls while praying in the women's section of the Western Wall are not breaking the law, according to a landmark decision handed down April 25 by the Jerusalem District Court.

Israeli police arrested five women April 11 who were dressed in prayer shawls while praying with Women of the Wall, an activist group that prays at Judaism's most sacred site once a month.

Immediately following those arrests, a lower court judge ruled that the women had not violated "local custom," a legal concept intended to keep the fragile peace at holy sites. The Western Wall is a remnant of the Second Temple that was destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago.

The ruling by the higher court upheld the lower court ruling and rejected an appeal filed by the police, who argued Women of the Wall's practices violate a 2003 Supreme Court decision and disrupt the public order.

Israel's ultra-Orthodox religious establishment has long maintained that the group's practices offend more traditional Jews, who believe only men are allowed to lead group prayers or wear prayer shawls.

British prime minister pushing for Internet porn ban

LONDON — British Prime Minister David Cameron is pushing a ban on pornography on public Internet networks, drawing the praise of an anti-pornography organization.

"It is good to see that the UK is addressing the harms of pornography — which feeds into violence, sex trafficking, addiction and abuse," said Patrick A. Trueman, president of Morality in Media, Inc., in an April 30 news release.

Morality in Media focuses on "opposing pornography and indecency through public education and the application of the law." Trueman previously served as the chief of the child exploitation and obscenity section at the U.S. Department of Justice, where he supervised the prosecution of child pornography, obscenity and child sex crimes.

The news release said that although the United States has passed laws banning the distribution of hardcore adult pornography, Attorney General Eric Holder disbanded the Obscenity Protection Task Force and will not initiate new obscenity cases.



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'A story of God's love for anyone'

Mountain Brook Baptist member tells story of how God delivered her from drugs, alcohol

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

It wasn't that long ago when Janet Gillispie's life was on the fast track to destruction. In the quest for love, she married a boyfriend at 15 years old. That marriage ended abruptly soon after and a life of drugs, alcohol and unhealthy relationships ensued.

Gillispie was spiraling out of control and traveling down an extremely difficult road — one where she really didn't see a way out of the looming darkness. Her days were filled with getting high, alcohol, stealing, bingeing and purging, homelessness and at one point prostitution.

"I had become comfortable with that life and resolved myself to that life," she said.

But one day everything changed.

Gillispie went into labor with her fourth child, now 12-year-old daughter Brittany, one night in a crack house. "I kept putting the contractions off and just going through them and saying, 'I've got to get one more hit before having this baby.'"

While lying in a hospital delivery room the next day about to deliver her daughter, Gillispie was fully prepared to give the baby up and walk out after giving birth.

"All I could think about and all I lived for was the crack and alcohol and my next adventure to get it," she said. "I was hopeless that day and had been hopeless many years and had given up on ever having a different kind of life. I felt like it's just who I am — I'm a street girl. I'm a homeless thief, liar, cheat ... prostitute, whatever I had to be for that day or that night is what I was to survive ... and to get my hit and another drink. That's how I lived for many years."

But it was in that hospital room that Gillispie suddenly felt an unavoidable presence around her that she couldn't see and heard a voice saying, "Let Me love you. You've tried everything but Me." She remembers as snapshots of her life then played in her mind

from a little girl to that point on the table.

"I felt the guilt and I saw the sin. My eyes were opened and I said, 'It's too late' ... and I heard God say just as clear, 'Just believe in Me. I offer you life today, Janet.'"

God opened Gillispie's eyes that day and she accepted His love and believed. Her cravings for drugs and alcohol disappeared and she knew from that point forward she was different, she said.

Seeing her miraculously healthy newborn daughter, Gillispie admitted that she needed help while still in the hospital. "They didn't take her from me ... they cleaned her up and brought her to me and my life has never been the same since that day."

Gillispie immediately began turning her life around, admitting herself into a rehab program and then connecting with Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC), a ministry of national Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) that serves women by equipping them with both job and life skills. Through CWJC, she was paired with mentor June Whitlow, a woman who is now "like a mother" to her.

"Sometimes when I thank God for her, which is every day, I reflect on what my life would've been like without CWJC and meeting June," Gillispie said. "I just think I would not have such a filled, blessed life."

Gillispie once worked as an X-ray tech in the Birmingham area but had lost her license on her downward spiral. After being reinstated, she was honored in 2006 as Employee of the Year out of more than 18,000 employees of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

Today Gillispie continues her work at UAB Hospital as a radiology technologist and is a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, with Brittany. She also serves both on the board of directors at Pathways in Birmingham, which helps homeless women and children through services like transitional housing and life and job skills, and on a local board of an Emergency Food and Shelter Program of the United Way.

Gillispie's "new life with Christ" also has her sharing her story with others. "He's had me go around ... to tell of what He did



Janet Gillispie

Photo courtesy of Janet Gillispie

for me on the delivery table and how He changed me and delivered me as well as a ... healthy, newborn baby with no addiction to the crack and the alcohol even though it was flowing through her bloodstream," she said.

Book release

In addition to speaking to groups across the country, Gillispie's story is also available through her new book with Sammie Jo Barstow titled "Delivered, a Memoir: My Dark Path Through Addiction." The book, published by New Hope Publishers, details Gillispie's life in a first-person account beginning as a young girl, her life on the streets and her amazing story of forgiveness and deliverance. She also shares about losing her other children she gave birth to during that dark and difficult period of her life.

"A lot of this is the realization of (how) I made the choices that led to that dark life," she said. "I did try everything to fill that void and that emptiness. ... And what I filled it up with just lasted a little while. But ... the 12 and a half years in Jesus has lasted and I know He's not going to stop being there."

During the process of compiling the book's content, Gillispie would record

her story on cassette tapes whenever she had time and send the completed tapes to Barstow, who several years prior had written a story about Gillispie and Whitlow for WMU's *Missions Mosaic* magazine. "When I first heard Janet tell the story of God's miracle in her life, I knew her testimony could have an amazing impact on other women who are traveling the same sinful path," Barstow said. "We both pray that many lives will be influenced by this book."

Of the book's content, Gillispie said, "God just brought it out of me. It was in order (and) it flowed." There were about 26 tapes when Gillispie finished that Barstow then edited down for the book.

Gillispie noted that "Delivered, a Memoir" is a story of God's love for anyone. "It's for anybody at any age no matter where you're at in your life," she said, adding the book has "nothing to do with Janet except Janet got to live that little story and ... tell it. But it's all His doing and it's all because of Him. This book is His and it's for His purpose and plans, not mine."

For more information about Gillispie's book, as well as a list of where it is available, visit www.newhopepublishers.com.



Photo courtesy of New Hope Publishers

"The 12 and a half years in Jesus has lasted and I know He's not going to stop being there."

Janet Gillispie
speaker, author

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 12

Explore the Bible By Dale Younce Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

LOOK FOR QUALIFIED SPIRITUAL LEADERS Titus 1:1-16

Questions of leadership arise at all levels of society. Adults everywhere have experienced the difference between good leaders and ineffective leaders. In the life of the local church, effective leadership is just as important. In Baptist life, many questions are apparent: What is the relationship among the terms used in the New Testament for leaders, such as pastor (shepherd), minister (servant), elder and overseer (bishop)? What about pastors who become too autocratic? What should happen when leaders seek to lead people away from biblical teaching? What spiritual qualifications should be expected of volunteer leaders, such as Sunday School teachers? All adults will be helped by looking at the instructions Paul gave Titus on this timely topic.

Build Up Believers (1-4)

Titus was one of the young men who trusted Jesus under Paul's personal ministry and later traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys. At the time this letter was written, Titus was on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, south of Greece. Paul had left Titus there to help guide the young church. In this letter, Paul gives Titus wise instruction and practical advice for building a spiritually healthy church with a quality spiritual leadership.

In a lengthy greeting, Paul emphasized the importance of preaching and teaching God's Word. The faith of God's people is built up by the knowledge of the truth found in Scripture. This truth, practiced in daily living, results in godliness and a confident expectation of experiencing eternal life. Paul wanted Titus to know the importance of preaching and teaching the Bible. We can trust spiritual leaders who firmly grasp God's promises now revealed through Christ in the gospel.

Guard Your Character (5-9)

Paul was especially concerned about having qualified spiritual leadership in the churches of Crete. He instructed Titus to appoint spiritual leaders in every town. These leaders are called by different terms, each

stressing a different aspect of spiritual leadership. "Elder" emphasizes maturity, especially spiritual maturity. "Overseer" and "bishop" refer to the task of supervising the spiritual ministry of the church. "Pastor" (shepherd) points to the task of caring for the church primarily by means of teaching. "Steward" is one who manages spiritual truth on behalf of others. "Minister" stresses the aspect of serving God's people. Each of these leaders has a unique ministry in the Body of Christ.

These men rise to places of leadership because of their godly character. They are "blameless," which means their personal lives are beyond accusation and public scandal. This means that a man qualified for spiritual leadership will be humble (not arrogant), slow to anger, consistently devoted (both inwardly and outwardly) and faithful to his wife. He will not be given to alcohol or other addictive substances, and he will not be addicted to money.

Positively, he will be a family man, guiding his children to faith in Christ and Christian behavior, possessing a love of strangers and a man with the right priorities. He knows the Scriptures and how to use them when confronting sin and error. We can trust spiritual leaders who are biblically qualified and faithful in their responsibilities.

Correct False Teachings (10-16)

It does not take long for false teachers to arise in the church. Wherever God sows the gospel, Satan quickly shows up to sow lies. Here it was a mixture of Jewish legalism, man-made tradition and mysticism. These false teachers were rebellious, full of empty talk and deception, destroying families in order to get money. Paul quoted one of the sixth century B.C. Greek poets, Epimenides, himself a Cretan, to point out that false teachers at Crete were the dregs of Greek culture. They were detestable, disgusting and disqualified for any good work, corrupt on the inside ("mind and conscience") and on the outside ("works and disobedient"). We can trust spiritual leaders who correct false teachings because they are concerned for believers' purity.

Bible Studies for Life By Scott McGinnis Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

BUILDING THE HOME I NEED

Proverbs 31:10-12, 15-20, 25-31

This famous passage that concludes the Book of Proverbs comes in the form of an acrostic poem wherein the first letter of each verse follows the Hebrew alphabet. (A similar pattern may be observed in the stanzas of Psalm 119.) The subject of the ode is the capable or virtuous wife, making it an appropriate choice for study on Mother's Day.

Yet the chapter also sits more generally as a fitting capstone to a book of wisdom. Indeed, in last week's lesson we saw how wisdom, personified as a woman, is herself judged to be "more precious than jewels" (3:15), the same phrase used here to speak of the capable wife (v. 10). Since wisdom is not the special possession of any one group, everyone — man or woman, married or not — can emulate the virtues of this wise woman who "fears the Lord" (v. 30).

Be Trustworthy (10-12)

The patriarchal culture of ancient Israel can be seen throughout much of Proverbs: chapters 1-9 are couched in the language of a parent's advice to son, including the instruction to manage desire carefully so as not to be seduced by the adulteress, who represents folly (chapter 7). Similarly, in chapter 31 King Lemuel — otherwise unmentioned in the Bible and unknown in history — relates the advice that his mother gave him concerning a suitable spouse.

A good wife is a trustworthy wife. Her merit may be measured in that she wishes her husband good and not ill. The result of her support is that he will be "known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders" (v. 23). In ancient cities the gate was the place of commerce as well as justice: deals were made and disputes resolved. Lemuel's mother thus advises him that public prominence requires family stability and support.

Be Responsible (15-20)

The heart of the poem is a list of ac-

tivities and attitudes that mark the capable wife. She is industrious and entrepreneurial, even to the point of engaging in real estate transactions (v. 16). This last item is a curious highlight inasmuch as women in ancient Israel generally did not own property.

Beyond her economic identity, a wise and capable wife also exhibits charity toward the poor. In a beautiful turn of phrase, the hands that spin thread (v. 19) are also "open to the poor" (v. 20). As seen in last week's lesson, the general outlook of Proverbs stresses the relationship between actions and consequences. However, this is not to be equated with a wholesale condemnation of the poor.

Be Godly (25-31)

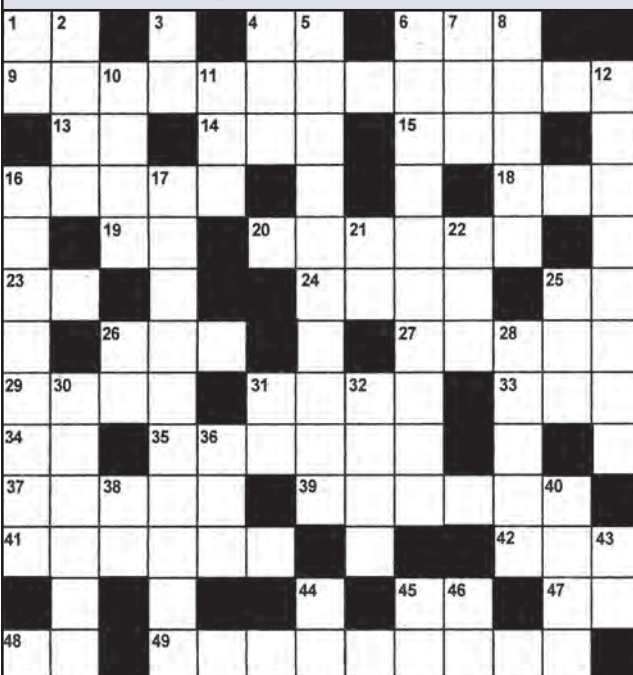
Wise living has the potential to free one from anxiety. Again, the poetic image is striking, with the wise wife as one who "laughs at the time to come" (v. 25). Making wise choices does not guarantee outcomes or avoidance of hardship but simply indicates the kind of resiliency and peace that comes from dwelling on the ways of God.

The wisest among us often go unnoticed, and the ode concludes with a call for her children, husband and even the community itself to praise her (vv. 28, 31). As a society we tend to find greatness in those who do great things — large acts of public generosity or notable acts of bravery or sacrifice — but there is much about this godly woman's life that is ordinary. She works with her hands, makes clothes, tends daily for those she loves and is responsible. There is much to be said for godliness in small things.

The English poet William Blake said that "he who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars: General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite and flatterer, for Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars." Proverbs encourages us to tend to the particulars of our lives and in so doing discover the wisdom of God.

Christian Crossword

By David Greenlee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. I _____. (name of God)
4. Father.
6. A deity or idol.
9. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
13. Satan went _____ and fro. (Job 1:7)
14. Small, humanlike mythical being.
15. Prefix of negation.
16. _____ from God the Father. (Gal. 1:3)
18. Moses' second book. (abbr.)
19. _____, every one that thirsteth. (Isa. 55:1)
20. _____ fell from Saul's eyes. (Acts 9:18)
23. Peter wrote _____ the scattered Jews. (1 Pet. 1:1)
24. I will ... have mercy on _____. (Jer. 33:26)
25. Indefinite singular article.
26. Hiram's navy brought this animal to Solomon. (1 Kings 10:22)
27. Traveled with Rebekah.

Down

2. Something small in the eye.
3. King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
4. King of Assyria. (2 Kings 15:19)
5. Set your _____ on the things above. (Col. 3:2, plural)
6. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
7. Gold. (Spanish)
8. Eats.
10. A just and perfect man. (Gen. 6:9)
11. The pure in heart ... shall _____ God. (Matt. 5:8)
12. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
16. Sound in faith, charity and _____. (Titus 2:2)
17. Jesus was moved with _____. (Matt. 9:36)
21. _____, Lord God! (Jer. 4:10)
22. Ostrichlike bird.
25. Donkey.
26. Alabama. (abbr.)
28. Brought food to Elijah. (1 Kings 17:6)
29. Ancient city.
31. The King descended in this form. (Matt. 3:16)
33. This animal spoke to Balaam. (Num. 22:28)
34. In him is _____ darkness. (1 John 1:5)
35. Used to kill Stephen. (Acts 7:58)
37. Pilate found no _____ of death in Jesus. (Luke 23:22)
39. Relationship of Martha and Mary to Lazarus. (John 11:1)
41. _____ his money. (Gen. 42:27)
42. Built the ark. (Luke 17:27)
45. Peleth's son. (Num. 16:1)
47. Year of the Lord. (Latin abbr.)
48. Ye shall be _____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
49. Love thy _____. (Matt. 5:43)
30. My soul _____ in the Lord. (Ps. 34:2)
31. It is lawful to _____ well. (Matt. 12:12)
32. Rebekah's face covering. (Gen. 24:65, modern spelling)
36. Golf ball supporter.
38. Opposite of down.
40. Lion's call. (1 Pet. 5:8)
43. Name of an altar. (Josh. 22:34)
44. See 3 down.
45. 21-verse prophet. (abbr.)
46. If we say we have _____ sin. (1 John 1:8)



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Sudan intensifies arrests, deportations of Christians

JUBA, South Sudan — Sudan has stepped up its arrests and deportations of Christians, with interrogation including threats to bury them alive, sources said.

Besides the deportation to South Sudan of the secretary general of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference on April 12, other Christians have been targeted in the past several weeks for arrest, interrogation and/or deportation. On April 21, as a South Sudanese church elder was worshipping at a Sunday service in Khartoum, officials from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) detained him to pump him for information, the elder told Morning Star News. "They told me to reveal to them 12 names of Christians who are active in evangelism in Sudan, but I told them I have no idea," said the elder, whose name is withheld for security reasons.

NISS officials also have required staff members of a university campus-based ministry to report to them weekly following their arrest Feb. 23; initially they were held and interrogated for a week, one said. "The security officers verbally threatened to bury us alive if we did not give information on who was supporting these Christian activities," the Christian worker said.

After the Christian workers were released, for two weeks security officials ordered them to report to NISS offices on a daily basis for interrogation about links with Christian organizations, said the worker, whose organization's name is withheld for security reasons. NISS officials confiscated the organization's equipment, vehicle and documents. They also went to the home of organization members and took academic papers, laptops, digital cameras, mobile phones and iPads, among other personal belongings, he said.

Authorities deported three of the group's workers to South Sudan in March after monitoring their movements and telephone calls, another member told Morning Star News. South Sudan's secession has served as a pretext for Omar al-Bashir's regime to bulldoze church buildings once owned by South Sudanese and deport Christians based on their ethnicity, sources said.

Kazakhstan tightens government control of religion

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — As part of its controls on free speech in the area of religion, Kazakhstan's government agency controlling religion — the Agency of Religious Affairs (ARA) — is stepping up pressure on religious communities to instruct their members not to speak about their faith with others in public. The ARA has already instructed people to report those who do to the police.

With compulsory prior censorship of all printed and imported religious literature, controls on where religious literature can be sold or distributed, restrictions on who can lead or address worship services and a ban on discussing faith with other people in public — and punishments for those who ignore these bans — human rights defenders and religious communities have concluded that religious free speech does not exist in Kazakhstan.

The ARA has refused to allow some religious publications to be imported and distributed. Confiscation of religious books from individuals in the country and arriving in the country appears to be increasing, as are fines for those who discuss their faith with others. Two courts have ordered religious literature confiscated from individuals sharing their faith — including Bibles — to be destroyed. However, after widespread outrage both decisions were overturned, though fines on the individuals remained.

Discussing or sharing faith with others is punishable under law, with a maximum penalty for Kazakh citizens under this Article \$1,150. This is currently equivalent to nearly two months' average wages as measured nationwide by the state.

Kazakh police raid Easter service, fine participants

ZHASKENT, Kazakhstan — Within 48 hours of a claim by Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev that "religious freedom is fully secured," seven members of a small Pentecostal Church — four of them in their 60s — were given heavy fines for meeting for Easter worship. The leader, Aleksandr Balaev, said he was fined the equivalent of six months of his pension. Galina Gileva, who is 73, complained that the police "brought me to such a position of stress that I suffered a heart attack."

The raid on the church in Zhaskent was one of four recent raids on religious worship.

CAMPUS News



SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Caroline Harbin Named Samford's Student Employee of the Year:** Caroline Harbin, a senior English major from Dalton, Ga., is Samford University's 2013 Student Employee of the Year.

Harbin, an employee in Samford's English department since September, received the award at a ceremony April 18. She was presented a \$200 cash award and other gifts by Samford President Andrew Westmoreland.

In her job, Harbin is well-known for her punctuality, dependability and accuracy.

But perhaps her most appreciated quality is her adaptability. When Harbin had only been on the job for a week, the department's administrative assistant, who was her immediate supervisor, retired.

Harbin singlehandedly organized an English honor society picnic, resurrected a book sale and initiated a series of coffee conversations with alumni, English department chair Mark Baggett said, citing her "extraordinary loyalty and commitment to Samford and to the efficiency of the department."

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College to Sponsor 51st Annual Ministers' Golf Tournament:** Judson College will sponsor its 51st annual Ministers' Golf Tournament May 13-14.

The tournament will be played at the nearby Marion Military Institute course and is open to all ministers serving Alabama Baptist State Convention churches or agencies, including pastors and ministers of youth, music and education.

"We welcome ministers from

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

An assortment of prizes provided by local businesses will be given away at the traditional banquet dinner May 13. Flights will be assigned after Monday's round and prizes will be awarded to first and second place golfers in each flight. Additionally prizes will be awarded for closest to the pin, longest drive, birdies and eagles.

► **Cyclists Complete 9th Annual Old Howard 100 Bike Ride:**

The 9th annual Old Howard 100 Bike Ride took place April 20 commencing at Judson College in Marion. The ride includes historic sites in the Black Belt area of Alabama. According to registration secretary Ken Kirby of Samford University, 272 riders gathered from around the Southeast to participate in planned routes of 34, 43, 75 and 101 miles. All proceeds from the rides benefit Sowing Seeds of Hope, Perry County's interfaith initiative for community improvement.

► **Judson equine student awarded internship:** Judson College equine student Olivia Breimhorst, of Gardendale, has been awarded a summer internship with Dr. Jud Easterwood of the Easterwood Equine Hospital in Calera. The internship begins July 1. Breimhorst is a member of Unity Baptist Church, Kimberly.

► **Judson Named to Community Service Honor Roll:** Judson College was named to the 2013 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The Honor Roll recognizes higher education institutions that reflect the values of exemplary community service and achieve meaning-

ful outcomes in their communities.

The award winners were announced at the American Council on Education annual conference in Washington. The Corporation for National and Community Service reported some 690 schools were named to this year's honor roll. A total of seven Alabama colleges were included on the honor roll, including Judson.

The honor roll, launched in 2006, is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development, Campus Compact and the American Council on Education.

Susan Jones, Judson's director of Faith-Based Service and Learning, said, "We've believed for a long time that the Judson experience prepares students to change the world in a way that is at least comparable to, if not better than, any educational experience in the country. The significance of the Honor Roll commendation is that an outside, objective group also believes that fact."

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **16th Annual UMobile Classic Golf Tournament to be Held at Lakewood Golf Club:** The 16th annual University of Mobile (UMobile) Classic golf tournament, honoring coach Terry Hopper, will be May 17 at Lakewood Golf Club in Point Clear.

Registration will begin at 8 a.m. with a shotgun start at 9 a.m. Awards, dinner and prizes will follow at 1 p.m.

To register or become a sponsor, visit www.umobile.edu/Alumni/GolfTournament.aspx or contact Tonya Gollotte at 251-442-2917 or tgollotte@umobile.edu.



Photo by Chris Mills

SBOM commissions student missionaries

Nearly 100 college and high school students were trained and commissioned to serve all over the world this summer as One Mission Students (the missions sending component of the office of collegiate and student ministries of the State Board of Missions). Students were trained in evangelism, safety and missions strategies/cultures in North America and abroad. The weekend was capped off with a commissioning service celebration with their family and friends and commissioning charges by Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, and Dustin Willis of the North American Mission Board. (SBOM)

Combining theology and practical faith



RNS photo

Singer-songwriters Keith and Kristyn Getty continue to gain success with hymn writing, even in the newer churches being planted.

Gettys revive lost musical art with modern hymn writing

Most songwriters in Nashville want to get their songs on the radio. Keith and Kristyn Getty hope their songs end up in dusty old hymn-books.

The Gettys, originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland, hope to revive the art of hymn writing at a time when the most popular new church songs are written for rock bands rather than choirs.

They've had surprising success.

One of the first songs that Keith Getty co-wrote, called "In Christ Alone," has been among the top 20 songs sung in newer churches in the United States for the past five years, according to Christian Copyright Licensing International. It also is a favorite in more traditional venues.

The Gettys got their start writing music about a dozen years ago when they were living in Northern Ireland. Keith Getty, now 38, was an aspiring songwriter. His wife, now 32, was a student. She sang on his demo recordings in exchange for fajita dinners at a Mexican restaurant in Belfast. They married nine years ago and have a 2-year-old daughter, Eliza.

Keith Getty wrote the tune for "In Christ Alone" on the back of an electric bill and sent it to his friend, Stuart Townend, another modern hymn writer. Townend wrote the lyrics and began playing it in churches in England, where people would line up to get the sheet music afterward.

Today it's often sung in churches where young people congregate, like the Axis Church, Nashville.

Jeremy Rose, the pastor of Axis who is in his 30s, said most new songs focus on how worshippers feel about God but don't contain much theology. Older hymns often have good theology but lack a personal touch. But "In Christ Alone" has both.

Similar to hymns such as "Amazing Grace" or "Be Thou My Vision," the song makes people want to sing along.

That's a lost art, said Mark Hosny, artistic director of the National Praise and Worship Institute at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville.

Newer Christian music often makes the band or lead singer sound good but doesn't engage the congregation. That's missing the point, Hosny said.

"A lot of today's melodies are not singable."

Hymns are supposed to allow people to sing along, said Dave Clark, director of creative development, publishing and A&R for Nashville-based Lillenas Publishing. Hymns make space for people to join in.

"There is a familiarity in hymns — that even if you are hearing it for the first time, you feel like you know it," he said.

The Gettys, who moved to Nashville in 2011, were in Orlando, Fla., recently to lead worship at the Gospel Coalition conference, which drew about 5,000 people.

One of the songs they played was called "A Rich Young Man." It's an Irish tune that recounts the story of Jesus telling a rich young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor.

The song had the congregation clapping and singing along while focusing on a serious topic. It was another example of the Gettys' gift of combining theology and practical faith, all wrapped up in a catchy tune.

"We learn our faith through what we sing," Keith Getty said.

The Gettys plan to take a sabbatical for a few months to write more hymns. Keith Getty said he tries to write five new ideas for melodies a day, trying to find just the right combination of notes and rhythm.

He said he doesn't just want people to sing along. He wants to connect with their souls when they sing one of his songs.

"You want them to breathe deeper. You want them to stand taller," he said. "If you can't do that, you have lost them."

Pulling from the past

The Gettys find much of their inspiration these days in their collection of old hymnbooks, which stands not far from the piano in the living room of their Nashville home.

Kristyn Getty said she often thumbs through the indexes of those hymnbooks while she's working on new lyrics and looking for ideas.

The daughter of a pastor, she grew up singing hymns in church. She said there's something powerful in singing the same words and music that have been passed down from generation to generation.

"Not everything you write will last," she said. "And you won't know which ones do, because you'll not be here. But you hope that some of them will stick." (RNS)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Falling fertility rate poses problems, author says

WASHINGTON — Benches built to push couples to sit closer together, special holidays and monetary incentives are all ways other countries have tried to boost fertility rates, author and demographer Jonathan Last told a Washington audience recently.

The "bad news," said Last, is there are few examples of effective public policy to nudge fertility rates upward. Other countries that have tried to do so failed, the author of "What to Expect When No One's Expecting" said during an April 3 lecture at the Family Research Council.

The world population will peak before the end of this century and then quickly contract, Last predicted in a February opinion piece for the *Los Angeles Times*. This would be the first time this large and quick of a contraction took place since the Black Plague hit Europe in the Middle Ages.

Today, 97 percent of the world's population lives in countries where the fertility rate is falling, Last said in the article.

In 1965, 4 percent of all births were to single mothers; today, it is 47 percent. It is not that America is unwilling to produce children; the problem is broken homes and the dropping fertility rate, Last said. America's ideal fertility rate is 2.5; it is currently 2.1.

Pentagon confirms 'evangelization is still permitted'

WASHINGTON — Christian conservatives have grown increasingly alarmed in recent weeks over reports and rumors that the Pentagon is considering new policies aimed at discriminating against Christians and disciplining those who share their faith.

But the Department of Defense on May 2 sought to debunk that speculation, saying that while aggressive proselytizing is barred, evangelization is still permitted and the rights of all believers — and non-believers — will be protected.

"The U.S. Department of Defense has never and will never single out a particular religious group for persecution or prosecution," Pentagon spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen said in a statement. "Service members can share their faith (evangelize) but must not force unwanted, intrusive attempts to convert others of any faith or no faith to one's beliefs (proselytization)," Christensen added.

The latest statement was aimed at refuting widely circulated reports in conservative media outlets that Christian soldiers could be court-martialed for sharing their faith.

Rhode Island becomes 10th state to approve gay 'marriage'

WASHINGTON — Rhode Island on May 2 became the 10th state to approve same-sex "marriage," and the Delaware Legislature holds a key vote on May 9 on the same issue. But Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage, denies there is a national tide in support of marriage rights for gay couples.

"I don't know that I would say Rhode Island is a trend," Brown said, also questioning victories for supporters of gay "marriage" initiatives in Maine, Maryland and Washington state last November. "Again, we're talking about states that are not necessarily indicative of the rest of the country."

The Rhode Island House of Representatives voted 56-15 on May 2 to give final approval to a bill legalizing gay "marriage." Legislators then broke out in a spontaneous singing of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and Gov. Lincoln Chafee signed the bill in a ceremony on the steps of the state capitol.

All six New England states now allow same-sex "marriage."

The Delaware Senate is slated to vote on a bill authorizing same-sex "marriage" that has already passed the House.

Hinn asks donors to bail him out of \$2.5 million in debt

IRVING, Texas — Prosperity gospel preacher Benny Hinn is asking his donors to help bail him out of debt.

According to *The Christian Post*, "Hinn has asked supporters of his ministry for \$2.5 million in donations, which he says an anonymous donor will match dollar by dollar to help him get out of debt."

The anonymous man, whom Hinn calls a "long-time and beloved" friend, said, "God wants your ministry to be completely out of debt, and I want to plant an anointed seed that will help you take a giant step toward becoming totally debt-free."

This is not the first time Hinn has been embroiled in controversy regarding money. He was one of the "Grassley Six" televangelists the Senate Finance Committee investigated in 2008 and 2009. Hinn repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and no charges were ever filed as a result of that investigation.