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Toxey Baptist Church member hand makes one-of-a-kind dolls for Guatemalan children

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Photo by Larry Holloway

A TIME OF PATRIOTISM

An American flag raising re-enactment from the Battle of Iwo Jima was part of Big Hurricane Baptist Church's God and Country Celebration on June 2. The "Howlin' Mad Smith" detachment of the Marine Corps League presented the live re-enactment in honor of the men who sacrificed so much on that island in February 1945 during World War II. The team uses appropriate weapons, equipment and uniforms. Big Hurricane Baptist is in Brookwood, near Tuscaloosa. Choir director John Bush organized the event. Kenneth Kalinich is pastor.

Religious Liberty Today

An interview with political scientist and Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland

Liberty can keep church from 'cloud of oppression'

Q: What do you mean when you use the term religious liberty?

A: I'll try to answer this question as I would in my introductory course in American politics. Let's begin with the language of the U.S. Constitution, found in the first amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." As with most governing documents created over the centuries, this

phrase left room for interpretation. The two clauses of this portion of the first amendment relate to "establishment" and "free exercise." In the first case (establishment), the writers of the Constitution appear to have been intent on avoiding the creation of a "state church." Our Baptist forbearers in Virginia were leading advocates of a similar provision when it was adopted by the General Assembly in 1786, and John Leland, a Baptist preacher, was an influential proponent of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution (See 'Tension,' page 4)

COMMENT

The Sweet Taste of Liberty

Sometimes it is important to remind ourselves that this United States of America is a special place. Like no other nation before or since, this land symbolizes freedom to a world teeming with people longing for the sweet taste of liberty.

From earliest times people flocked to these shores to be free from economic oppression, to strive for cherished dreams, to worship God according to the dictates of their own hearts, to become all within their power to become.

In 1776, when the Second Continental Congress shared the proclamation that “all men are created equal,” it gave voice to the American experience. Heritage in this land was something one built for one’s self. It was not a birthright. It did not depend on family name or title. All were welcomed to participate in equal standing.

The members of that historic assembly declared, too, that men were “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” These rights included the right to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Before that day kings, princes and other government officials controlled such rights. One lived at the whim of the king.

Whatever freedom one had came at the largess of the king. Life was lived to benefit the king, certainly not for something as trivial as “the pursuit of Happiness.”

‘All men created equal’

No longer. Princes of the Old World could become paupers in America and paupers from the Old World could become princes of finance. In the Old World the king determined one’s religion on penalty of death for nonconformers. Here each individual was free to choose whether or not to worship and how.

The ideals of the Declaration of Independence provided the framework for goals toward which this nation still struggles. People have fought wars and endured bitter social struggles as they gallantly toiled to translate these ideals into reality. In some ways, those struggles continue today.

That “all men are created equal” remains a



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

commitment of America. The nation’s political system incorporates that value in the “one man, one vote” principle. All are equal before the law. Both principles affirm the Bible teaching that “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

Equality, however, can be guaranteed by none. Some social systems attempt to guarantee equality — both economic equality and social equality. Some argue that wherever there is a gap between rich and poor, that is evidence of injustice. A few utopian-type communities based on this principle have sprung up in the United States from time to time, but such movements never found fertile soil here.

One writer contends that a commitment to equality for all fails to consider “the role played by talent, character, ambition, initiative, daring, work and spirit in producing unequal outcomes in ‘the pursuit of happiness.’”

A few years ago one who usually comes down on the side of economic equality, a political socialist, told William F. Buckley Jr. that “those nations which have put liberty ahead of equality have ended up doing better by equality than those with the reverse priority.”

Liberty provides hope that one can change tomorrow so that it is not like today. Freedom assures that one is not trapped in some endless cycle based on who one’s parents are. The American dream of improving life through hard work is still a reality for many and a possibility for all.

Unfortunately, that which we value most — freedom — can also guide us toward a negative outcome: selfishness. People laugh at the joke that there is no such thing as being “too rich.” If one has lived the American dream one might conclude that those who fail are responsible for their situations. People are poor because they choose to be poor, some say.

Often one is tempted to embrace positive personal characteristics such as ability and hard work but deny the reality and results of characteristics like prejudice, discrimination, isolation from resources, disappearing jobs and such.

More than one social scientist has observed that “love of money was the most conspicuous and most common trait of the American character.”

When that happens, it is a tragedy. It is more than that. It is sin. One cannot be possessed by love of money (selfishness) and love of neighbor (compassion) at the same time.

They cannot live together

Israel understood that God was the champion of the orphan, the widow, the alien, the lonely, the prisoner (Ps. 68:4–6). They understood the command of Exodus 22:21–24 that to mistreat such people was to provoke God’s wrath.

Jewish society was structured to care for the poor and for the needy (Deut. 14:28–29; 24:17–22). These social structures were commandments ordered by God. Obedience not only showed concern for one’s neighbor, it evidenced a love for God.

So deeply was this principle woven into the fabric of Jewish life that Proverbs 29:7 declares, “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.”

It was not enough to refrain from doing harm to the poor. Because God was on the side of such people, those rightly related to Him were to be proactive on behalf of the poor. Lack of concern for the poor evidenced a wicked heart.

Again, selfishness and compassion cannot live together in the same heart.

Alabama Baptists, like other citizens in this great nation, love America. We love its liberty. We cherish its commitment that all are created equal. We value the opportunities it provides. And we affirm with those great patriots of yesterday that God is the source of our freedoms.

But commitment to freedom for our nation and for ourselves can never callous our hearts to the command of God to love Him and to love our neighbor. Personal actions evidence our obedience to that command, but as in Jewish society, so do the social structures we help construct.

God, help us to love You, to love our nation and to love our neighbor in Your blessed name. Amen.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

CALVINISM REPORT

I read with interest the Calvinism Advisory Committee report [that stated], as I understood their finding, that Calvinists and non-Calvinists can co-exist and accomplish the Great Commission.

First, God’s Great Commission will be accomplished with or without us. Second, it has been my experience

that when Calvinism enters a church, it divides that church.

In the next to last paragraph of their report, they said, “If we stand together in truth, we can trust one another in truth, even as we experience tension.”

First, why would we want tension in the church, which is supposed to be a unified Body?

Second, which truth are they re-

fering to? Calvinism or non-Calvinism? Which is truth? Baptism by immersion or sprinkling? Which is truth? Praying in Jesus’ name or Mary’s name?

Truth is not like a slice of bread on
(See ‘Letters,’ page 11)





"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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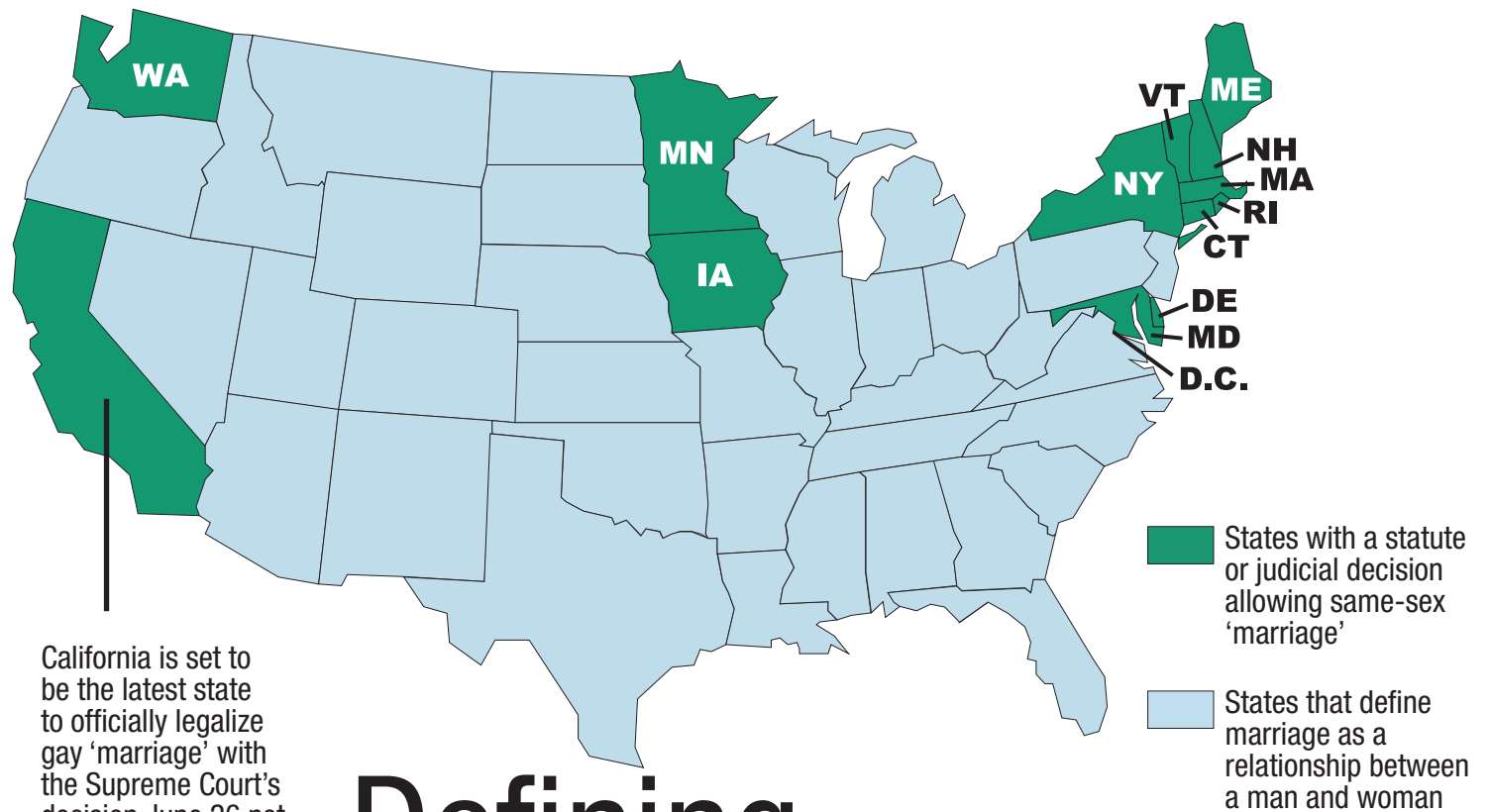
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California is set to be the latest state to officially legalize gay 'marriage' with the Supreme Court's decision June 26 not to review a lower court decision that overturned Prop 8, which banned gay 'marriage.'

Defining marriage

Federal ban on gay 'marriage' removed by High Court; focus moves to states

Sometimes a court opinion is more than just a court opinion. Justice Anthony Kennedy's 26-page decision June 26 striking down a federal ban on same-sex "marriages" offers a window into Americans' rapidly shifting views of same-sex relationships — a shift that increasingly relies on matters of law and fairness, not moral or religious views.

At the same time, Justice Antonin Scalia's biting 26-page dissent in *United States v. Windsor* reflects a set of cultural, religious and social arguments losing ground in America.

For now, Section 2 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) — which wasn't part of this case — allows states not to recognize gay "marriages" performed in other states, said Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange.

Gay "marriage" is legal in 12 states and the District of Columbia. California is set to become the next state to legalize it with the Supreme Court's decision (also June 26) not to review the lower court ruling, which overturned the state's ban on gay "marriage."

"The ruling by the Supreme Court does not have any effect on existing state definitions of marriage," Strange said. "The definition of marriage — as between one man and one woman — was overwhelmingly adopted by Alabama's voters and remains in effect."

And while same-sex "marriage" proponents celebrated their victory of the section of

DOMA that was struck down by the court, they made it clear they were after more — the full recognition of gay "marriage" across the land.

"Federal recognition for lesbian and gay couples is a massive turning point for equality, but it is not complete until every family is guaranteed complete access to the protections they need regardless of state borders," said Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the country's largest organization promoting civil rights for homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people.

Jon Davidson, legal director for Lambda Legal, said, "We will not rest until same-sex couples are treated equally not only by the federal government but in every state and community across the nation."

HRC's Griffin urged the Obama administration to implement the DOMA ruling broadly.

Ordered to move swiftly

In a statement June 26, Obama said he already had directed Attorney General Eric Holder "to work with other members of my Cabinet to review all relevant federal statutes to ensure this decision, including its implications for federal benefits and obligations, is implemented swiftly and smoothly."

On June 27, Obama appeared to move toward calling for nationwide recognition of gay "marriage," even in the states that have not legalized it.

"My personal belief, but I'm speaking as

a president as opposed to a lawyer, is that if you've been married in Massachusetts and you move someplace else — you're still married, and under federal law you should be able to obtain benefits," he said.

The relatively subdued reaction June 26 by House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor was a reminder of the balancing act GOP leaders are playing on divisive social issues such as immigration and gay "marriage."

They need to satisfy base supporters who strongly oppose same-sex "marriage" but be mindful that language that seems intolerant harms the national GOP brand and the prospects for regaining the White House. That is a tightrope that the GOP's 2016 presidential contender also may have to walk.

"A robust national debate over marriage will continue in the public square, and it is my hope that states will define marriage as the union between one man and one woman," Boehner said in a written statement. The House had paid to defend DOMA in court when the Obama administration refused to do so.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, of California, and Rep. Jerrold Nadler, of New York — senior Democrats on the House and Senate Judiciary committees — reintroduced a measure to repeal the parts of DOMA that survived the court's scrutiny.

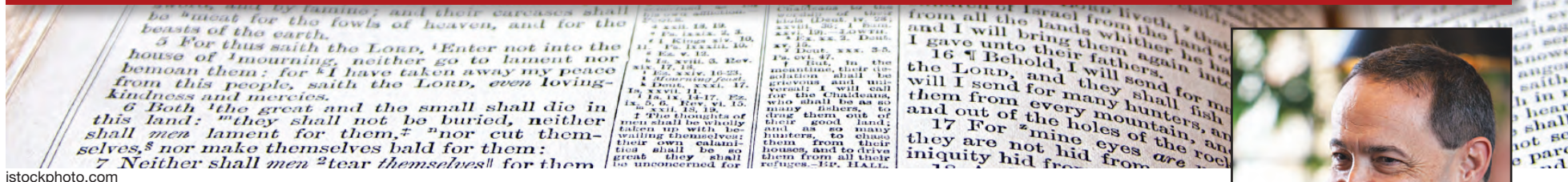
Meanwhile Rep. Tim Huelskamp, a Kansas

(See 'Justices,' page 11)

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue July 11. The next available issue will be July 18.

Religious Liberty Today

An interview with political scientist and Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland



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Tension between ‘liberties’ explains deep divisions in America

(continued from page 1)

to safeguard religious (and other) liberties. In the second case (free exercise), the amendment appears to offer protection from governmental interference as citizens practice their religious beliefs. We should note that the next clause of the first amendment protects the right to free speech, as the protection of speech is important to the practice of religion. Although the word “liberty” does not appear within either the establishment or free exercise clauses, “religious liberty” has evolved as the phrase to describe this segment of the amendment. It is at this point that a widely shared definition becomes a problem because Americans hold two very different views of liberty. One view is characterized as “negative liberty,” the belief that government should stay out of as much human activity as possible. (In my opinion, this seems to be the orientation of those who wrote the Constitution.) The opposing idea is known as “positive liberty,” which promotes the notion of government as an affirming actor in helping citizens to achieve personal fulfillment. These views create inevitable tension, which explains many of our deep divisions in American society today. My personal view of religious liberty is that the government should be severely restricted from inhibiting the faith practices of citizens. The “right” to pursue God existed before the adoption of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Q: In what ways is religious liberty

important for the church; for civil government?

A: Religious liberty is important for the church because it means adherents do not have to live under a cloud of oppression in practicing their faith. In our case, that means that we are free to focus on doing the things Christ commanded us to do rather than fighting from day to day for our very survival. Religious liberty is beneficial for government because free people are less likely to revolt than those who are oppressed. As we see in so many totalitarian regimes around the world, people will find ways of practicing their religion, even in the most difficult circumstances. As a Christian, my primary commitment is to God through my relationship in Christ, whether I am a citizen of the United States or of any other nation on the globe. We find liberty in Christ, regardless of perceived freedoms found through the various systems of government. That knowledge ought to bolster our confidence in moments of despair.

Q: How can a non-religious person have religious freedom?

A: Through the protections of the establishment clause, all citizens are free from the requirement of any state-imposed religion, including those with no religious (or anti-religious) viewpoints. Of course, this has been a flash point over the past 50 years

as citizens have tested the extent to which government can be perceived as endorsing religion, resulting in the debate over whether the intent of the Constitution is to offer freedom of religion or freedom from religion. In my view, the government has no place in the formal endorsement of religion, but the sometimes irrational pursuit of a strict wall of separation appears to result in the loss of unfettered speech for adherents to religion. In a free society, nonreligious voices and religious voices have equal standing. Another emerging question in this context is the provision of tax-exempt status for churches and religiously affiliated charities and educational institutions. Critics claim that the exemption constitutes direct governmental endorsement of religion. In the years ahead, I believe we will be called upon to defend this element of public policy as an important societal benefit. Of course, as the president of a church-related university, you would expect me to make the case that our country has benefitted from the longstanding practice of allowing tax deductions for gifts to churches and institutions. I do not believe that this is a violation of the establishment clause.

Q: Why can't the majority decide what a person can or cannot do in religion as is done in other areas?

A: We function in the United States with guiding principles that are under the head-



WESTMORELAND

ing of “majority rule and minority rights.” Without doubt, majorities (or pluralities, in some cases) determine the course of public policy, but we have also agreed as a society that certain rights are so important that they are protected against the possible tyranny of the majority. The establishment and free exercise portions of the first amendment afford this protection to religion. Perhaps there were times when Christians in the United States took this protection for granted. We may be entering an era in which our rights as a minority will become more important than ever.

Q: What are some examples of how religious liberty is protected in society?

A: On a day-to-day basis, we notice the protection of religious liberty most often through the parallel protection of speech. On weekends along Lakeshore Drive in Homewood, near a major shopping center, I regularly see a man (see photo, page 5) who has parked his vehicle and placed signs

nearby, advocating his Christian faith. The displays may be irritating to some passersby, but I smile each time I see them because I am reminded that this gentleman is free to make his case. And despite the challenges we face today, few would argue that there are stronger havens of religious liberty than the United States.

Q: You have said that religious liberty in higher education is under attack. Can you give us examples of how it is being attacked, by whom and why?

A: Perhaps a better way to express this view is that religious liberty in higher education is in a long period of decline. Regardless of the terms employed to quantify this era, postmodern or even post-postmodern, it is clear that respect for Christian thought has declined within most colleges and universities. To those of us in the trenches, it can sometimes feel like an attack. At the heart of the divide is that adherents to religion — practically every religion — maintain affinity for a few core beliefs. In an academic world in which everything is relative, all arguments are accepted ... except those based in distinctions of faith and especially those based in faith in Christ. Laws that make no or insufficient allowance for the religious convictions of those who serve in institutions connected to faith communities will also serve to erode our religious liberty. A fully engaged and powerful government is best at one thing: promoting sameness. If institutions such as Samford become exactly like every state-managed university, we will have lost an important thread of diversity from the fabric of higher education.

Q: How are you defending religious liberty in Christian higher education against the current erosion?

A: I believe our best defense of religious liberty is for our faith-related institutions to produce such exceptionally strong graduates that those outside our walls are drawn to a deeper appreciation of our values. That means we must prepare our students with sufficient intellectual heft that they are known for their minds and their spirits. Too often in evangelical life we have neglected the significance of academic rigor with breadth and depth. Years ago my friend Mark Noll authored a book called "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind." The scandal, he said, "is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." We advance religious liberty and the Christian faith when Christians are fully equipped to thrive within the public square. There are no shortcuts.

Q: How can individuals protect religious liberty in America today?

A: The first requirement of a democracy is the continual education of the citizenry. At great peril, at least in my view, we have abandoned the teaching of history and the study of government. We owe it to ourselves and to those who laid down their lives for our

country to regain our status as people who are educated in the history of nations and ideas. The precepts of our government may still be discovered by scraping away the layers of political spin, simplification and reinterpretation applied over the years. Our origins weren't all pretty, they weren't necessarily fair and in a few cases they were morally abhorrent, but the founders managed to create an exceptional framework for governing the lives of American citizens. The old story, perhaps apocryphal, about Ben Franklin emerging from the Constitutional Convention and responding to a question from a lady about the government they devised, sums up our present and future: "A republic," Franklin said, "if you can keep it." Keeping the republic is the challenge of every generation. If we don't fully understand what we have inherited, how can we successfully hold on to it?

Q: What should churches be doing to teach the importance of religious liberty?

A: First, and I suppose that I am preaching to myself on this point, I think we need to be careful with entangling alliances that threaten our integrity and undermine our message. When Christians are called upon to speak truth to power, our influence is compromised if we are perceived as mere agents of political faction. We are free as citizens to voice whatever view we may hold, but we should avoid wrapping every public policy position within the banner of Christ. Second, I believe members of churches should be regular and faithful in reminding public officials at every level of the significance of religious liberty so that those who serve in government remember they have an obligation to continue to secure these freedoms. Authentic worship is always best when free of the control of government. Third, I think every church member should vote in every election and should enter the polling place fully informed on all issues and candidates.

Q: What role does religious liberty play in a pluralistic society?

A: It is a truism to say that the United States of today is vastly different than the nation of 1791, the year in which the first 10 amendments to the Constitution were ratified. Even at that time there were pervasive cultural and political differences throughout the country, but nothing to match the diversity of the nation today. In the face of these differences, and as a way to "just get along," I see an emerging bumper sticker philosophy built around the virtues of tolerance and coexistence. Without doubt, these are important qualities to maintain in civil society, but I believe they pale in comparison to the significance of liberty. Tolerance implies acquiescence, perhaps offered grudgingly, to another point of view. But liberty precedes tolerance because without the freedom to develop and advance an opposing view there would be nothing to tolerate. The grinding away of differences in pursuit of an elusive harmony will lead to the dilution of thought — and ultimately to the erosion of many of the doctrinal distinctions upon which we base our faith. So how do we bridge this gap between Christ and culture? Follow Christ, understand and embrace the authority of Scripture and show God's love to all in our path. Love trumps tolerance and outstrips

the need for coexistence. We need to remember that nowhere in Scripture are we assured that it is an easy task to follow Christ.

Q: In a pluralistic society, how can universal truth among the majority be determined and acknowledged in light of religious liberty?

A: This seems to become more difficult each day. Perhaps we could once make a claim to an understanding of "universal truth" in the broader society, but that does not appear to be the case today. In a rush to accept everything, we have valued nothing.

Q: On what basis does a community base its legal system in a pluralistic society committed to religious liberty?

A: Whether or not we choose to admit it, public policy is a complex web of winners and losers. We would hope that lawmakers arrive at decisions based on noble constructs, but the real basis for a legal system in a democracy is a functioning majority over a sustained period of time. By and large, evangelical Christians have fit within that functioning majority throughout the history of the United States. Whether we remain in the majority is the question of the moment. If not, we will be more reliant than ever on the constitutional rights established through the First Amendment.

Q: How does one bring moral and ethical conclusions into the public square in a pluralistic society committed to religious liberty?

A: I am afraid that our current pluralistic society may not have an abiding commitment to religious liberty, but that only escalates the importance of raising our voices in the public square. How do we do that? Perhaps we need to look at the techniques that have not worked and then strike those from our list. In any debate in any age, the qualities of preparation, respect for your opponent, temperate speech and wisdom have helped to win the day. Jesus also modeled for us the effectiveness of a ready and apt parable.

Q: Religious liberty and pluralism seem dedicated to the value of the individual. How does this emphasis relate to the value of the group?

A: Actually, I think pluralism may be tied more directly to the group identity of individuals rather than isolated human beings, but exploring that idea would lead into an even longer answer to your question. In discussing the distinctive value of individuals and groups, we again face the friction between liberty and equality. Speaking broadly, claims for liberty are often identified with individuals, whereas the impetus for equality usually stems from a larger identification with a group. Perhaps it is easier for everyone to grasp and support religious liberty for the individual because Americans are fond of saying that "we are all entitled to our opinion, even if it is wrong." But differences are more difficult when groups clash because the stakes are higher and the debate has a wider audience. My great concern at this moment is for the preservation of religious liberty for groups. As Christians we must understand that we can only claim this protection if we are willing to support it for other groups within society, even if our beliefs are in stark contrast. My perception is that many, perhaps a majority, of Americans do not see Christians as advocates of the rights of free speech of their adversaries. This is a distorted view, I think, but the label has been fastened to us and perception has become reality. 🙏



Photo courtesy of John Gilpin Brown

John Gilpin Brown, founder of Power Of God Deliverance Ministries, preaches along Lakeshore Drive in Homewood on the weekends.



Close to the action

Istanbul pastor ministers amid tear gas, water cannons

While protesters and police furiously clash in Istanbul, there is a pastor who quietly continues his ministry.

Nicholas lives and works in Taksim, the epicenter of the increasingly violent encounters of recent days in Istanbul. In the most recent clashes, Nicholas' home filled with so much tear gas that his children had to abandon their bedrooms to sleep in the living room, where it was bearable.

Despite the turmoil, Nicholas said he and his family are not afraid. He is concerned about the uncertainty of the future of Turkey but believes it is a blessing to lead a church so close to the action.

"It is important that the church continue normally and demonstrate our faith," he said. "God is the ultimate authority to whom we submit."

Nicholas said he believes his nervous neighbors need to see the peace that is evident in the lives of followers of Christ. On Father's Day, Nicholas led 30 people in a subdued worship service despite the brewing threat of violence on the street.

Refusing to be distracted by the events swirling around

him, Nicholas said, "Our mission is beyond this neighborhood and really beyond this world."

He said he admires the passion and commitment of the Gezi Park protesters but sees a lack of clear purpose and goals. That is a sharp contrast to his mission of sharing the real hope that comes from having a personal relationship with God, he said.

A few days earlier, Gezi Park was the site of tens of thousands of protesters singing, dancing and drinking in defiance of the prime minister. That party is clearly over; driven out of the park by the police, the protesters have fled and taken to the streets. In addition to being battered and shaken they are angry and defiant, demanding a change in the country's leadership. To the protesters Nicholas says, "Ultimately we find our confidence in God."

Victory over fear

There is a growing fear among Christians in Turkey, but Nicholas said there is always something to fear because Christians live in a broken world.

"Every day there is something to fear — tear gas, cancer, flu and other illness," he said.

But Christians shouldn't overcome fear by "self-righteousness or willpower," he explained. Victory over fear, Nicholas said, only comes from God.



IMB photos

While violent clashes go on in Istanbul, Pastor Nicholas, whose church is in the epicenter of the protests, carries on his church's ministry.

"If we live life in fear and depression, we've stopped living," he said.

The church will continue on as it always has, because there needs to be a place for people to hear the gospel. "There are many more dangerous places in the world where our brothers and sisters in Christ meet faithfully," Nicholas said.

Nicholas asks for prayer for Turkey's leaders to rule with wisdom and justice. For the citizens of Turkey, he prays they would discover the true hope that can be found in God.

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

Contraceptive concern still on radar of church leaders

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (new health care law) expands the preventative health services provided for women. One of those services — contraceptives — has been hotly debated by faith-minded organizations because the definition of this term in the law included abortions and abortion-inducing drugs.

An exemption to the law is now in place for religious organizations that object to the contraceptives mandate on religious grounds. Religious employers are defined as organizations that operate as a nonprofit entity and are referred to as “churches, their integrate auxiliaries and conventions or associations of churches.”

But it is unclear whether the exemption is for abortions and the drugs that could cause an abortion or if it is an “all or nothing” type exemption for all forms of contraceptives.

GuideStone Financial Resources also is working with legislators and regulators on a separate accommodation rather than an exemption for “eligible organizations.” The details on this proposal are unclear, but more information will be provided as regulations are clarified. (TAB, SBOM)

Calculating what 50 or more means

Does your church have 50 or more full-time equivalent employees?

If so, it is required by law to provide minimum essential and affordable health insurance by Jan. 1, 2014, or face a tax penalty.

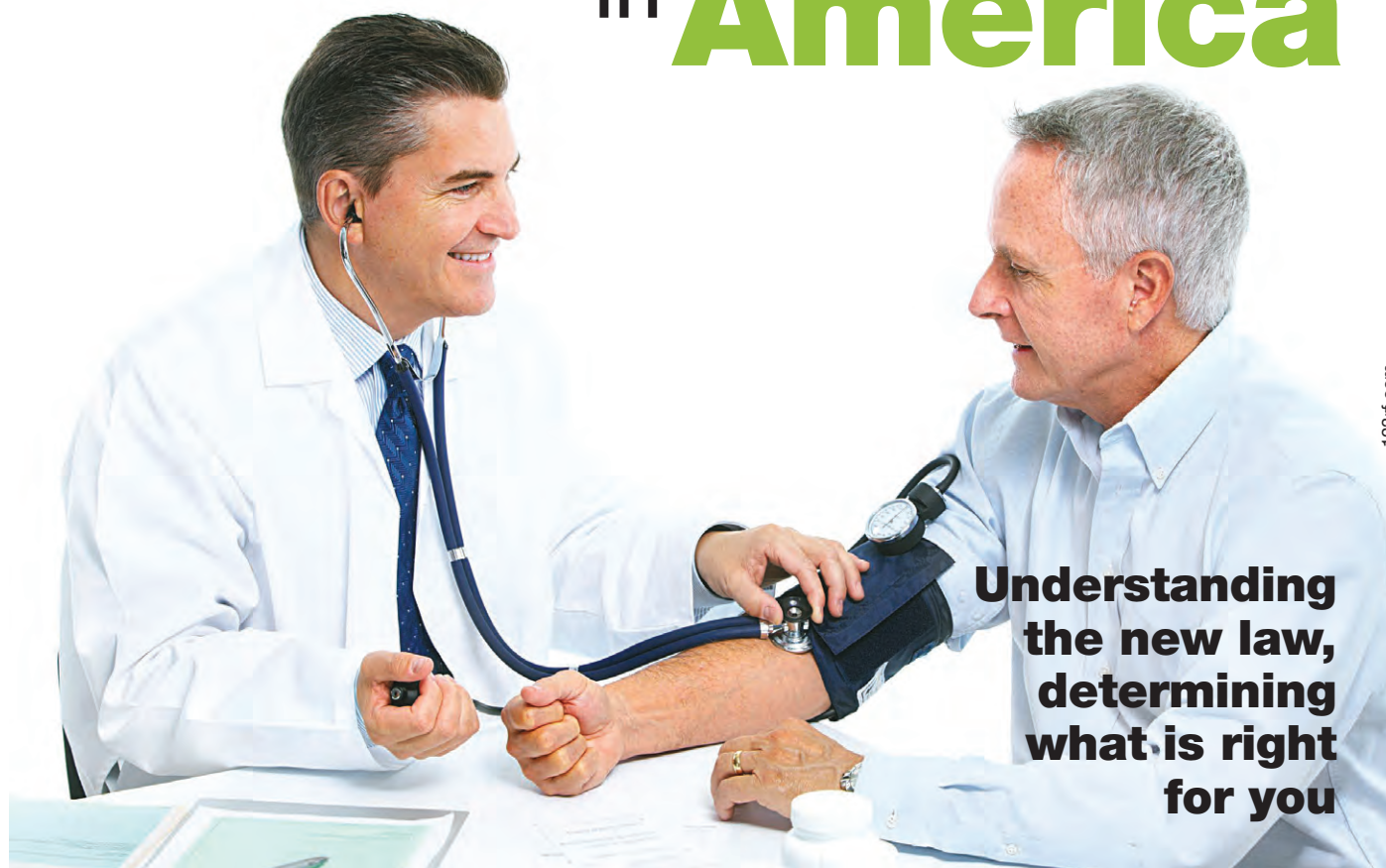
To calculate:

Full-time employee — works 30 hours or more. Each full-time employee counts as one equivalent.

Equivalent — The hours of part-time employees (those working less than 30 hours per week) are to be added together. Divide the total of part-time hours worked in a month by 130. Then add this number to the number of full-time employees to determine the total amount of equivalents working for the church (or business). (TAB, SBOM)

With a law as big in scale and scope as health care reform, things are always changing. Regulations, additional guidance and the like are continually being issued. To stay up to date on individual provisions and the latest news, visit www.guidestone.org/healthreform and sign up for the email updates.

Health care in America



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Second of Six in a Series

Churches ‘under the law’ with health care regulations

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Church administrators across the state face some tough decisions as the new health care law begins taking effect. If they have 50 or more full-time equivalent employees, then they must provide minimum essential and affordable health insurance to the full-time staff by Jan. 1, 2014, or face tax penalties. If they have fewer than 50 full-time equivalents, then they do not have to provide health insurance.

“Most of our churches have too few employees to be required to provide health insurance,” said state missionary Lee Wright, who works in the church compensation services office of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “But some will because of the extra ministries with paid employees they have connected to the church, such as day cares or food banks.”

A Birmingham-area church administrator agreed.

“It’s a dilemma,” he said. “We don’t know what to do yet.”

The church’s ministry and support staff plus the staff of the church’s day care/pre-school ministry equals 85 employees with around 60 being full-time.

“How can we be legal without hurting the employees?” he asked, noting the church’s options are to lay people off, reduce the hours of existing employees, dissolve the school or take the penalty. Providing health insurance for all employees is not an option financially, he explained.

A second concern relates to tax credits.

Beginning in 2014, premium tax credits will be made available to eligible individuals who purchase their health coverage from commercial health care exchanges, but those credits will not be available to pastors and others who get their health care coverage from church health plans.

Legislation has been introduced in the U.S. Senate (Senate Bill 1164) to remedy this, but currently there is a discrepancy, according to GuideStone Financial Resources.

Pastors should not have to choose between tax credits available to other Americans and proven health care plans designed with the unique needs of ministers and other church employees in mind, GuideStone officials said.

A third issue deals with self-funded church plans and the unique benefit of being able to “discriminate” among employees.

Many churches in the less than 50 full-time equivalents category (not forced to provide insurance) will still offer health insurance to their ministers, but most in this category can’t provide it to support staff.

“The (existing) law says we are supposed to treat everyone alike. If we are providing insurance, then we should provide it for all our employees,” Wright said. “But we as a church are not under the penalty of that provision of the law, so we can continue to do what we’ve been doing — provide insurance for ministers and not for support staff (in the under 50 full-time equivalents category).”

Noting that churches might want to consider moving toward a more balanced approach with health insurance for all em-

ployees, Wright confirmed it is not illegal to provide it only for the ministers if the church has less than 50 full-time equivalents.

He did warn that business people sitting on church committees dealing with these questions might not understand the church exemption for this particular penalty because the penalty does exist in the business world.

GuideStone attorneys have concluded the health plans offered through GuideStone fall within the law and can be organized by class (ministerial and nonministerial), but it is unclear how all of this works if a church goes with another type of plan.

Important to stay informed

The deadline to work out health insurance for employees is marked as Jan. 1, 2014, but several who are researching the law noted that other required aspects of the law are falling behind schedule and could possibly impact this deadline. And even if the deadline stays the same, some are questioning how it will be enforced.

Church administrators are encouraged to stay informed and pay attention to the development of the health care law. Talking with insurance consultants and payroll and benefits specialists is one way to stay informed. Another helpful resource can be found at www.guidestone.org (click on Health Care Reform to the right just below center and read the “featured provisions” information).

Wright also will deal with the topic in his church financial workshops taking place across the state beginning in July. For more information, visit www.alsbom.org or call 1-800-264-1225. (BP contributed)

Be salt & light

Judson President David Potts (left), assisted by vice president and dean of students Sandra Fowler, places the honorary degree hood on Mark Foley (center).



Photo by Bill Mathews

Foley urges Judson graduates to influence dark world

Family, students and friends filled Alumnae Auditorium on the campus of Judson College in Marion on June 22 for the college's 175th annual commencement. College President David Potts presided and awarded diplomas to the graduating seniors.

Potts noted that the class of 2013 had distinguished themselves in and out of the classroom. "I know I say this every year, but this is an outstanding group of young women," Potts said.

"They volunteered personal and community service at record levels. Some 85 percent of these women served in this community or other places in the world."

Potts noted that the graduates included the college's first nursing class. Nursing graduates participated in a pinning ceremony earlier in the week and received their Judson College nursing pins — a long tradition symbolizing an invitation into the profession of nursing. Students who received their associate degree in nursing

June 22 are eligible to take the National Council for Licensure exam and become certified registered nurses.

University of Mobile President Mark Foley served as commencement speaker and received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Judson.

'Citizens of faith'

Foley said his honorary Judson degree was a secret for him until 15 minutes before. "I'm almost speechless, but not quite," he said with a laugh.

Foley said he's passionate about two things: following Christ and working for the healing of America.

"We're citizens of faith, and we baby boomers owe you an apology," he told the graduates. "We've seen our world darken and this is the world we leave to you. This nation was established to honor God and we've stopped doing it."

Foley challenged the graduates to use their influence for Christ. "You'll take some tactical assignments from Christ in your study, your work and in your marriage," he said. "All of you are exhorted by

Christ to be salt and light for Him in your world. ... The question is not 'if' but 'how' you'll use your influence."

Foley urged the graduates to be courageous in using their God-given influence. "I'm excited to see what comes next," he said.

After conferring student degrees, Potts presented an honorary degree to Mary Sue Bennett, special assistant to the executive secretary-treasurer of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). SBOM Executive Director Rick Lance presented a proclamation honoring Bennett from Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley.

Awards given

Potts presented the national Algonon Sydney Sullivan Non-Student Award to Judson alumna Dorothy Burdeshaw ('51), of Columbus, Miss.

Burdeshaw spent most of her professional career at Mississippi University for Women and was named Mississippi's

"Outstanding Teacher" in 1988. She received Judson's "Outstanding Alumna Award" in 1981, served as president of the Alumnae Association from 1998-2000 and served on the Board of Advisors for more than 20 years. She more recently became a member of the Judson Development Board.

Heather Howell, of Dora, received the Student Algonon Sydney Sullivan Award; Elizabeth Velazquez, of Smiths, received the Faulkner Award; Katlin Bailey, of Hartselle, received the Scholarship Award for earning the highest academic average in the senior class; and Paula Fendley, of Thomasville, received the Bible Award for outstanding Christian service.

Biology professor Kristopher McConnell was awarded the Lula and Alton Holley Award for Excellence in Classroom Teaching. (JC)

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'Amazing opportunities'

Voices of Mobile performs at Pentagon, Brooklyn Tabernacle during summer tour

Voices of Mobile, one of more than 21 ensembles in the University of Mobile (UMobile) Center for Performing Arts/School of Music, performed at the Pentagon in Washington and the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City during its summer tour.

The ensemble has performed concerts across the nation since May 12, according to Roger Breland, vice president for project development and executive director of the UMobile Center for Performing Arts/School of Music and School of Worship Leadership. In past years, Voices of Mobile has performed at the White House; toured Europe, the Cayman Islands and the Middle East; and presented concerts featuring contemporary Christian music across the United States from Hawaii to Alaska.

Voices performed at the Pentagon chapel for the Pentagon Prayer Luncheon on June 20, hosted by the Pentagon Chaplains Office. "We had an absolute delightful time. ... And were invited back to do a Christmas concert," Breland said.

The group also performed at the Brooklyn Tabernacle on June 23. "Just the opportunity to stand on that stage was a life-changing experience for the 17 members of Voices," Breland said.

The Voices summer tour began in Mobile at Luke 4:18 Fellowship and concludes July 7 in Baton Rouge, La., at Greenwell Springs Baptist Church. At tour's end, they will have traveled more than 5,500 miles in seven weeks through nine states, performing more than 30 concerts including at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.; Green Acres Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas; and Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga.

Other concerts

UMobile vocal and instrumental groups performed before more than 12,000 people during major events in just five weeks during spring semester 2013. That doesn't include weekend concerts by the more than 21 ensembles in the Center for Performing Arts.

"Our students have amazing opportunities in the classroom to study with world-class professors, then gain extensive performance experiences in all types of musical styles,



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

Voices of Mobile performs at the Pentagon chapel for the Pentagon Prayer Luncheon on June 20 as part of the ensemble's summer tour.

from contemporary Christian to opera, from worship leadership to classical guitar," Breland said.

Among the many concerts and productions performed during spring semester were a Passion Play sacred music and theatre production, "Godspell" musical theatre production, "Pirates of Penzance" opera production and concerts featuring jazz, classical music, the university's Steinway Artist performing on the famed Horowitz piano, piano ensemble, guitar ensemble, RamCorps choreographed brass and percussion group and the annual Spring Spectacular featuring all 21 ensembles.

Breland said the Christian university's music program provides the flexibility to add ensembles based upon students' interests and talents. (UMobile, TAB)



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

During its summer tour, Voices of Mobile sings at the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City on June 23.



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BESSEMER

► The gospel singing ministry of **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will host Fields Trio and Southern Heritage on July 12, 7:30 p.m. Scott Bush is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Mark Enoch** has resigned as associate pastor of worship for **NorthPark Church, Trussville**, to become associate pastor of worship at Magnolia Avenue Church, Riverside, Calif. His last day to lead worship at NorthPark was June 23. Bill Wilks is pastor. ► **Raleigh Avenue Church, Homewood**, will host Wes Hampton, a member of the Gaither Vocal Band, in concert July 21 at 6 p.m. Doors will open at 5 p.m. A nursery will be provided. For information call the church office at 205-942-8060. Larry Roberts is pastor.

CAHABA

► **Pisgah Church, Selma**, will celebrate homecoming and revival July 21. The morning speaker will be former pastor Arthur Thomas. Sunday School will be at 9 a.m. and morning worship at 10 a.m. Lunch will follow. Revival services will be July 22-24, 7 p.m. nightly. Bobby Hopper, director of missions for Bethel Association, will speak. Praise and worship leaders for the services will be Miriam Hart and

Karen Gosselin. Harold Arnold is pastor.

CALHOUN

► **Richard Robertson** will sing at **Nances Creek Church, Jacksonville**, on July 21, 11 a.m. A nursery will be provided. For information call 256-310-7216. Garry Brown is pastor.

CHEROKEE

► **Shiloh Church, Leesburg**, will host Family Night on July 12, 5:30 p.m., a conclusion of God's Dynasty Vacation Bible School. The church also will host gospel singer Kathy Sosebee Nunley, from Chatsworth, Ga., in concert July 14, 11 a.m. All are invited. Danny Farley is pastor.

EAST CULLMAN

► **East Side Church, Cullman**, will host gospel singer Ivan Parker on July 19, 7-9 p.m. For information call 256-734-6144. Ken Allen is pastor.

MADISON

► **Mable Hill Church, Ardmore**, will hold a Grief Following Trauma CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) Course with instructor Tina Brooks on Aug. 16, 6-10 p.m. and Aug. 17, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Space is limited and early

registration ends after Aug. 3. For registration information call 256-420-8172. Mike Clark is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Terry Trivette** is the new pastor of **Sharon Heights Church, Brookside**. He is a graduate of Covington Seminary in Fort Oglethorpe, Ga. He previously served as pastor of White Oak Church, Trenton, Ga. He and his wife, Angel, have two children.

WINSTON

► **First Church, Arley**, will hold a one-day revival with Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Church, Memphis, Tenn., on July 21. A men's breakfast with Gaines will be at 7:30 a.m., worship with Gaines and the AFBC worship team at 11 a.m., ladies luncheon with Donna Gaines at 12:15 p.m. and evening worship with Steve Gaines at 6 p.m. Call the church office at 205-384-4667 to RSVP for the men's breakfast or ladies luncheon. Zac Reno is pastor.



GAINES

SHELBY

► **Enon Church, Montevallo**, will celebrate homecoming July 14. Wilburn and Wilburn will be the musical guests. Bob Terry, editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, will be the pulpit guest. All members and former members are invited. Dinner will follow. Bill Trawick is pastor.

Body 4 Believers

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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR: First Baptist Church, New Hope, Ala., a congregation size of 250 is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Send resumé to: Terry Rice, c/o First Baptist Church, 535 Bearden Road, Grant, AL 35747.

PASTOR: First Baptist Church, Avondale Estates, Ga., is seeking a full-time pastor with five or more years of pastoral experience. Degree from an accredited seminary is preferred. Send resumé to: pastorsearch@afbc.com.

PASTOR: First Baptist Church of Bridgeport, Ala., is now receiving applications for a pastor. Please send resumé to: First Baptist Church of Bridgeport, P.O. Box 277, Bridgeport, AL 35740, ATTN: Pastor Search Team. Deadline for receiving resúmes is July 26.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Maple Springs Baptist Church in Clanton, Ala., is currently searching for a bivocational pastor. We are a very small congregation with ages ranging from 6 to 65. We are a loving close knit church family desiring growth to fill our new church building. Please contact Anita Griffin at 205-389-3443 or email alsunshine07@aol.com.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC: Rangeline Baptist Church of Demopolis, Ala., is seeking a part-time minister of music. We enjoy a blended mix of worship music. Mail resumé to: Rangeline Baptist Church, ATTN: Music Committee, 5805

County Road 19, Linden, AL 36748.

STUDENT MINISTER: Bethel Baptist Church is seeking a student minister to lead, coordinate, plan and promote its student ministry with an emphasis on reaching students with the gospel of Jesus Christ and training them to serve Him. Resúmes should be mailed to: Bethel Baptist Church, 2245 Bethel Road, Sycamore, GA 31790, ATTN: Staff Search Committee. To learn more about Bethel Baptist Church, please visit www.bbcysycamore.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER: Send resumé to: Westlawn Baptist Church, 2515 17th Street SW, Huntsville, AL 35805 or aderholts@bellsouth.net.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR: Church seeking a bivocational youth pastor. Send resumé to: Calvary Baptist Church, 601 N. Main Street, Tusculumbia, AL 35674, or email: donna-calvary.baptist@comcast.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

FULL-TIME DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Marion Baptist Association in Hamilton is currently seeking a director of missions. We are a missions-minded association made up of 22 churches. Please submit resúmes to: ATTN: Laura, Marion Baptist Association, P.O. Box 521, Hamilton, AL 35570, or email to: mcbac@centurytel.net. Deadline to receive resúmes is July 31.

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Want to know God?

Pastor Mack Morris
Woodridge Baptist Church, Mobile

I have always been a person who asks a lot of questions. Some things puzzle me. For example, I have asked: "How does a person who operates a snowplow get to work?" "If nothing sticks to Teflon then how does Teflon stick to a pan?" "Why is something transported by a ship called cargo and something transported by a car called a shipment?"

I grew up in an era where people suggested you shouldn't ask a lot of questions.

That was particularly true as it related to God. I am sure folks meant well, but because we are made in the image of God there is a desire to know and understand.

Here is a question for you to ponder:

Isn't everybody going to Heaven? The Bible teaches that Jesus was God in human flesh.

As such He was a master teacher, preacher and healer. As wonderful as these things are they do not represent why Jesus came to earth. They do validate that He was God in human flesh.

His purpose was to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. This He did on the cross. Jesus was either who He said He was or He was the ultimate hoax. You must make that personal decision and ultimately choose whether or not Jesus will become your personal Savior.

I am the youngest of nine children. There are only two of us left. Not long ago my brother started going to church.

My godly Mama had prayed for him and my other siblings all of her life. She died without knowing whether or not he would be going to Heaven.

My brother accepted Jesus as his Savior when he was 80 years old.

I had the privilege of baptizing him.

I am so glad my brother is going to Heaven. You can go to Heaven too. To do so you must ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Scripture says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Are you going to Heaven?



David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, preached on *The Cross and Christian Sexuality* in a June 23 sermon developed out of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. Below are excerpts from that sermon. To hear the full sermon, visit <http://ht.ly/moLzu>.

PLATT

Dealing with a 'sex-crazed culture'

Are you flirting with adultery or having sexual relations outside of marriage?

Are you dabbling in pornography? Are you experimenting with homosexuality? If so, then flee, urged David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, in his latest sermon series out of 1 Corinthians 6. Flee from sexual immorality and “turn to Christ,” he said. “No other sin a person commits has more built-in pitfalls, problems and impending destructiveness than sexual sin.

“According to the sure judgment of God, unrepentant sexual sin leads to hell. ... Every time you have these lists of sins that lead to hell, sexual immorality is mentioned, most often at top of the list. ... This is not saying that if you’ve ever committed sexual immorality of any sort, you are going to hell ... those whose lives are characterized by sexual immorality, those who refuse to repent of sexual immorality will experience eternal condemnation from God.”

Platt preached more than an hour in the first of two parts on *The Cross and Christian Sexuality* on June 23. Part two was scheduled for June 30. “We have all ... rebelled against God’s good design for us in every way including sexually,” Platt explained. “But God loves you and me, and God sent His Son to ... live among us to show us what purity looks like and then go to the cross ... to pay the price for your sexual immorality. “We all have a bent toward sexual deviation ... in some way,” he said. “We have got to be really careful not to be guilty of selective moral outrage.”

Platt’s words garnered national attention because of the timing with the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the federal ban on gay “marriage” (see story, page 1). “So much sexual sin is justified, rationalized today by Christians who say, ‘Well, this is just who I am.’”

But, he said, “sex is only celebrated ... in the Bible in the context of ... husband and wife. Period.” (TAB)

These developments have fueled a reassessment of marriage that undergirds Kennedy’s opinion: “DOMA instructs ... all persons with whom same-sex couples interact ... that their marriage is less worthy than the marriages of others.”

Scalia’s arguments, too, are illuminating but more for the fact that they once were considered mainstream and are now losing ground.

Justices: ‘New perspective’ on marriage; ‘Waiting for other shoe’ to force it nationally

(continued from page 3)

Republican, said he would push Congress to adopt a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

In the 17 years since Congress passed DOMA, many Americans have gained “a new perspective, a new insight” on the meaning of marriage, Kennedy said in his opinion for the 5–4 majority. He described DOMA’s impact on gay families with terms such as: Disparage. Degrade. Demean.

Observers noted how things have changed in a decade.

In 2003 at the time of *Lawrence v. Texas*, the court’s last major gay rights case, support for gay “marriage” was 32 percent; today, that figure is 51 percent.

In 2003 gay “marriage” didn’t exist and the Episcopal Church was shell-shocked by the election of an openly gay bishop. In 2013 the election of the first openly gay Lutheran bishop in May was met with mostly shrugs, and on June 26 the bells of Washington National Cathedral pealed in celebration.

A recent Gallup Poll found a 19-point swing on the “moral acceptability” of gay and lesbian relations since 2001 — the largest shift on any social issue. As Gallup put it, “U.S. acceptance of gay/lesbian relations is the new normal.”

These developments have fueled a reassessment of marriage that undergirds Kennedy’s opinion: “DOMA instructs ... all persons with whom same-sex couples interact ... that their marriage is less worthy than the marriages of others.”

Scalia’s arguments, too, are illuminating but more for the fact that they once were considered mainstream and are now losing ground.

Decision has implications for witness

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said the Supreme Court’s June 26 decision has “profound implications for our gospel witness.”

Gay and lesbian people in the community are not enemies but are “like all of us, seeking a way that seems right to them,” Moore said.

If marriage is as strong and resilient as Christ proclaims it to be in Mark 10:6–9, the court can’t wipe it out, he said.

“Some (gay and lesbian people) will be disappointed by what they thought would

answer their quest for meaning. Will our churches be ready to answer?” Moore asked.

“Those with same-sex attractions who follow Christ will be walking away from what their families and friends want for them. Following Jesus will mean taking up a cross and following a hard narrow way. It always does.”

To preach that kind of gospel, Christians must be clear that self-denial is not just for “homosexually tempted” Christians but for all believers, Moore said.

To read the full text of Moore’s message, visit www.russellmoore.com. (RNS, BP)



MOORE

DOMA supporters did not act “with hateful hearts,” he said, and Americans who oppose same-sex “marriage” are neither “mean-spirited” nor “unhinged members of a wild-eyed lynch mob.”

Scalia appealed to tradition, saying he and other conservatives are looking to enshrine an understanding of marriage that was “unquestioned in our society

for most of its existence — indeed had been unquestioned in virtually all societies for virtually all of human history.”

Scalia warned that “as far as this Court is concerned, no one should be fooled; it is just a matter of ... waiting for the other shoe” to drop and force states to accept gay “marriage” from other states or Washington. (BP, RNS, TAB)

Living with a Reverse Mortgage

By Jimmy Dixon

“What is it like to have a reverse mortgage?” Max and Carolyn Youngblood (a retired pastor and wife) have answered:

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Max and Carolyn



Jimmy Dixon

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LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

which you can spread butter on both sides. Truth is absolute and the biblical truth is that all have the

opportunity to accept Christ — not a chosen few.

Larry E. Beauchamp
Ashford, Ala.

‘DISAPPOINTING’

The statement from the Calvinism Advisory Committee, which appeared in the June 6, 2013 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, was very disappointing. It was a fence-straddling attempt at political correctness intended to retain great numbers in the membership of the SBC.

In the words of a country song, “You have to stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.” We can’t, with honesty, say we believe in both positions. Must we sacrifice our core beliefs out of fear that the size of our organization will shrink?

Max Till
Repton, Ala.



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Feds release first written guidelines for confronting a church shooter

For the first time, the federal government has issued written guidelines for houses of worship that are confronted with a homicidal gunman.

Vice President Joe Biden released the new rules June 18, six months after the school shooting in Newtown, Conn., that left 26 dead, including 20 children.

Beyond seeking shelter and waiting for police to arrive, the new rules also advise adults in congregations to fight back — as a last resort — in a bid to stop the shooter. The new federal doctrine is “run, fight or hide.”

Though shootings at churches and other houses of worship remain relatively rare, they can make inviting targets for shooters — particularly disturbed individuals — who are looking for a highly visible target to settle a grudge or make a political statement.

‘Concrete direction’

Last year a gunman killed six people inside a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis. In 2008, a gunman killed two inside a Unitarian church in Knoxville, Tenn. In 2007, a gunman killed two people inside the New Life megachurch in Colorado Springs, Colo., before being killed by an armed volunteer.

As federal officials worked with education officials in crafting new school safety rules, they also consulted clergy, Biden told a White House auditorium filled with federal officials who have worked on the issue.

“The faith leaders not only want us to talk about making schools safer,” Biden said. “They’re worried that their congregations are at risk. So they wanted to know, what should they be thinking about when someone stands up in the middle of the congregation and decides to do something similar as we saw in the schools.”

In response, Biden said, “we gave concrete direction.”

The guidelines’ basic run-fight-hide advice is similar to that given to schools faced with active shooters: Congregants should first try to flee the scene, taking people with them but not waiting for those who refuse to leave. If flight is not possible, hide — the guidelines describe some of the best hiding places. Fighting back is a last resort.

According to the new rules, gathered in a 38-page document called “Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship,” fighting back is advised for “adults in immediate danger,” who should:

“Consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items in their environment, such as fire extinguishers or chairs. In a study of 41 active shooter events that ended before law enforcement arrived, the potential victims stopped the attacker themselves in 16 instances. In 13 of those cases, they physically subdued the attacker.”

Armed in church?

The question of how best to subdue a gunman is likely to rekindle a debate within many churches, particularly in parts of the country where it is common to carry weapons: Should congregants bring guns to church?

“Each house of worship should determine, as part of its planning process, policies on the control and presence of weapons, as permitted by law,” the guidelines say.

It also says that individuals must make their own decisions about how best to respond when confronted by an active shooter.

Though the booklet was unveiled at an event on gun violence, it focuses on emergency preparedness in general, whether for a shooter, an arsonist or a hurricane. A special section focuses on “active shooter situations.” (RNS)

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Unique ministry

Toxey Baptist Church member hand makes one-of-a-kind dolls for Guatemalan children

By **Dee Ann Campbell**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The living room of 87-year-old Margery Clark is filled with little fabric faces, each belonging to a doll with a dress and bonnet of its own

and each one fashioned from the skills and imagination of a lady who creates them by hand.

In mid-July, each of her dolls will make its way to the waiting arms of a needy child in Guatemala.

For the third consecutive year, Clark has committed her

time and effort to create dolls for her church, Toxey Baptist in Choctaw Baptist Association, to be distributed to Guatemalan children during the church's annual missions trip to the Central American country.

The first year, she created 40 dolls, making another 54 in 2012.

But this year, Clark committed to create 80 dolls to send with four members of her church when they go on their annual trip July 13-20.

Using a nearly century-old sewing machine that her mother used to make her clothes as a child, Clark spends countless hours perfecting the dolls, using pieces of fabric and lace that she has collected over her lifetime and adding distinct facial features to each creation.

"I don't know how, but each one seems to have a different expression on its face," she said.

"No two dolls are the same. They are all different and they seem to have their own personalities."

Clark has been working on the dolls for the missions trip since early January.

Although she has performed the majority of the work herself, this year members of the church helped stuff some of the dolls, and others donated cotton for the project.

The dolls are among thousands that she has created for family members, friends and others



Photo courtesy of Margery Clark



Photo by Dee Ann Campbell

Margery Clark, a member of Toxey Baptist Church, uses a nearly century-old sewing machine to create unique dolls to be distributed in Guatemala during the church's annual missions trip.

through the years. "I don't really know how many I have made," she said. "It would be hard to even guess."

Slight change

Although they have remained basically the same in size and appearance, Clark's dolls have changed somewhat over the past three years, partly due to the aging of her hands.

"I used to put hair on all of them," she explained.

"But that's pretty hard on my hands, so now I put bonnets on most of them instead."

This year, in addition to making dolls for Guatemala, Clark will be sending others to a children's cancer center in Houston, Texas, to help provide a little cheer for those who need it.

Although she admits that her age may push her to slow down one day, she doesn't intend to stop soon.

"I just can't sit and do nothing," she admitted. "I have to be busy, and I can't imagine not sewing."

"I don't care who it is — if a child needs a doll, I'll make it for them," she added, saying that using her skills to reach the needy is just an outgrowth of her faith and her desire to serve her church.

"I may not be able to go on a missions trip, but this is something I can do," she said.

"I just believe we are put on earth to do things for others when we can." ☞

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 7

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson Jr. Dean, School of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

AM I ON THE RIGHT PATH? Job 33:13-22; 36:8-12

This week's lesson introduces readers to a new character. Elihu is a young man well-schooled in etiquette, waiting patiently for continual indictments from Job's companions to wane and allowing Job to speak his own defense. Elihu's previous silence culminates in anger as Job fails to repent and Zophar, Bildad and Eliphaz are unsuccessful in convincing Job of his impertinence before God. From Job 32-37, his theological diatribe is recorded, in which he respectfully yet passionately seeks to convince his elder about the error of his ways and attitudes.

Who is this Elihu, whose words are followed immediately by the chastising words of Yahweh in chapters 38 and following? His name means "He is my God." Scholars lack unanimity as to his identity. He is not included in the original list of companions, and he is absent from the final list, prompting critics to suggest that this section was added to the text sometime after the original composition. Others simply view him in light of the present canon as another companion whose courtroom prosecution of Job lacks the authority of God's testimony. Whoever he is, it is his words that are the focus of our lesson.

Receive God's Revelation (33:13-16)

Elihu cites personal revelation for God here, confronting Job for his apparent obstinance: "God speaks time and again, but a person may not notice it" (33:14). Throughout the Old Testament, writers regularly refer to the general revelation of God through His creation and the special revelation of God through His prophets. Here, Elihu directs Job's attention to visions and dreams, which were common occurrences prior to Moses but seldom afterward.

God's handiwork is evident all around us. The heavens declare His glory (Ps. 19:1). Creation announces His order and design so clearly that no one can reasonably deny the existence of our Master Designer. By witness of special revelation through the prophets and apostles, God bears witness of Himself, His

purposes and His ways. As we receive His words by faith and submit to God's revelation, we will learn to trust Him more, regardless of our immediate circumstances.

Recognize God's Reasons (33:17-22)


Elihu speaks wisdom and truth in the midst of his accusations against Job. God gives men ears to hear what He is saying. Why? "In order to turn a person from his actions and suppress his pride" (33:17). God has His reasons for allowing humanity to suffer. One of those reasons is chastisement. Here we find the accuracy in Elihu's testimony.

Job suffers as a result of his poor behavior and pride, according to Elihu. This man assumes he is God's apologist, unaware of the real reasons behind Job's suffering. Herein is the danger of presuming to speak for God. By assigning motive to God without His expressed revelation, we become guilty of transgressing the third commandment. We misuse the Lord's name when we speak on His behalf without His revelation to us (Deut. 5:11; 18:20).

Christians know that God works all things together — including suffering — for our good (Rom. 8:28). This statement is not a guarantee of health, wealth and temporary prosperity. Rather Paul continues by explaining God's eternal purpose: "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (8:29).

Respond to God's Refining (36:8-12)

According to Elihu, financial security demonstrates right standing with God. He implies that God is obligated to grant justice within our lifetime (36:11). Once again, Elihu presents an incomplete picture of God and presumes to speak for Him.

The "Messenger of the covenant" is like a refiner's fire (Mal. 3:2), separating precious metal from worthless dross. Jesus is the Messenger, initiating the New Covenant, establishing it with His blood (Luke 22:20). The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). Like refining fire, suffering is an instrument to purify authentic faith. Are you ready? 

Bible Studies for Life By Jeffery M. Leonard Assistant Professor of Religion, Samford University

GOD ESTABLISHES A KINGDOM FOR HIS PEOPLE 2 Samuel 7:8-17, 22-24

Establishing a Place (8-11a)

The road that led from Israel's earliest days to the great kingship of David was a rocky one. The historical traditions preserved in the Bible suggest rule by kings was a concept alien to ancient Israelite society. Like the patriarchs who went before them, Moses and then Joshua served the Israelites as charismatic leaders more on a par with Scottish chieftains than with Oriental dynasts. This tradition persisted in the time of the judges as individuals rose to meet specific challenges, leading the people as first among equals not as kings.

As the Book of Judges outlines the tenures of the leaders raised up during this period, though, it also reveals the growing inadequacy of this form of leadership for a developing nation. Unable to unite the warring tribes in support of their own defense, the judges were largely ineffective in repelling the military assaults of their neighbors. Lacking the bully pulpit of the throne, judges could only watch as the nation slid into the religious and moral anarchy (Judg. 19-21). Even the great judge Samuel could not rein in the wayward sons who were to succeed him (1 Sam. 8:1-5). The stage was set for Israel's first king, Saul.

Tall enough to look the Philistines in the eye, handsome enough to win the hearts of the people, the scion of a notable family, Saul seemed well-suited to be king. Unfortunately, the Bible records that Saul never lived up to the great promise he once held for leading the people. Failing to deliver the people from their enemies, Saul finds his popularity undermined and slowly descends from jealousy into madness. His end is as tragic as his reign as he dies next to his son Jonathan in a battle on Mount Gilboa.


Establishing an Eternal Kingdom (11b-17)

The deaths of Saul and Jonathan catapult David to the throne. The unlikelihood of this

ascent to power is recalled in God's words to the king: "I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock and appointed you ruler over my people Israel" (2 Sam. 7:8). There is, of course, a high level of political shrewdness in the consolidation of David's power and in the success of his reign. Israel would be ruled by other kings, though, who were equally shrewd and decidedly more powerful. Yet none of these kings would touch David's revered status in the nation's memory. In part, at least, this reverence is explained by the unmatched passion of David's commitment to Israel's God.

For all of his many flaws, David remained unflinchingly devoted to God, as powerfully so in his failures as in his successes. Even his impertinent request to build a house for God stems from the devotion of his heart. Yet David's great loyalty to God is dramatically superseded by God's own loyalty to David. God promises to make David a great king, to empower him to give rest to his people, to be David's father and take David as His son. And while God refuses to let David build a house for Him, He promises instead to build an eternal house for David.

Establishing a Divine Purpose (22-24)

Regrettably God's great covenant with David was no guarantee that the king and his descendants would remain loyal to God. In just a few short chapters, David will spiral into adultery and murder. Those who follow David on the throne will prove false as often as they are true. Finally the line of Davidic kings will seem to stop altogether, and David's once great kingdom will be reduced to a hollow shell of its former glory. In a confusing blow to hope, God's promise to David will seem scandalously to have failed. It is just at this point, though, that a much later generation of Israelites will hear words that breathe new life into God's ancient promise: "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David" (Matt. 1:1). After so many years of expectation, God's word to David is finally, unexpectedly fulfilled in this newly anointed king. 

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue July 11. Sunday School lessons for July 14 will be available at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

- Now the Lord said unto _____. (Gen. 12:1)
- Are not _____ and Pharpar rivers of Damascus? (2 Kings 5:12)
- Abraham ... _____ the wood. (Gen. 22:3)
- Athenian woman who believed. (Acts 17:34)
- In charge of King Ahasuerus' women. (Esther 2:3)
- The Lord sent him to meet Moses in the wilderness. (Ex. 4:27)
- Infant's first word for daddy.
- Joseph's wife. (Gen. 41:45)
- The works that are done _____ the sun. (Eccles. 1:14)
- I am, you are, he _____.
- Dialect for get.
- Eli heard the noise of the _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
- Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
- Descendants of Eri. (Num. 26:16)
- Sarah shall bear unto

- _____ this set time. (Gen. 17:21)
 - Not bow down thyself to them, _____ serve them. (Ex. 20:5)
 - I _____ the marathon.
 - Place of 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
 - _____ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
 - The sons of Aaron, took either of them his _____. (Lev. 10:1)
 - They went forth _____ go. (Gen. 12:5)
 - King of Greek gods.
 - Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
 - God said, _____ shall not eat of every tree. (Gen. 3:1)
 - Bright _____.
 - Strong people set in battle _____. (Joel 2:5)
 - And, _____, the angel of the Lord came. (Luke 2:9)
 - Melts.
 - Upon the great _____ of their right feet. (Lev. 8:24)
 - For it is the _____ of _____ flesh. (Lev. 17:14, two words)
 - Ahian and Shechem
 - and _____. (1 Chron. 7:19)
 - Led him away to _____ first. (John 18:13)
 - An _____ the hole. (two words)
- ### Down
- Gallio was the deputy of _____. (Acts 18:12)
 - Thou shalt be a _____. (Gen. 12:2)
 - Why do the heathen _____? (Ps. 2:1)
 - The Lord is the _____ of all such. (1 Thess. 4:6)
 - _____, myself and I.
 - And _____ bare Jabal. (Gen. 4:20)
 - Candy or ice cream _____.
 - Loves.
 - Mary Poppins was one.
 - Pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
 - Joseph's brothers didn't know his _____.
 - "Hey, _____." (Beetle Bailey's call.)
 - Dresses. (verb)
 - The fowl of the _____. (Gen. 1:26)
 - The sun _____ of Ahaz. (Isa. 38:8)
 - And the _____ of pure gold. (1 Kings 7:50)
 - You get this at a beach.
 - Leak out slowly.
 - Flighty, capricious.
 - _____, Larry and Curly.
 - The tents of _____ in affliction. (Hab. 3:7)
 - Give _____ to his commandments. (Ex. 15:26)
 - Has thou _____ of the tree? (Gen. 3:11)
 - So that it went _____ with Moses. (Ps. 106:32)
 - The noise of them that sing _____ hear. (Ex. 32:18; two words)
 - Pointed tools for piercing holes.
 - Broken bands of your _____. (Lev. 26:13)
 - Order _____ carte. (two words)
 - Benjamin's son. (Gen. 46:21)
 - Cleanseth us from all _____. (1 John 1:7)
 - Do, re, mi, _____.
 - Syllable to sing when you don't know the words.



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



15 injured in explosive attack on church in Kenya

MRIMA, Kenya — Assailants on a motorbike threw an explosive device into a church compound in southeastern Kenya on June 9, injuring 15 people.

Two pastors were among the wounded from the explosion at an evangelistic service of Earthquake Miracle Ministry Church in Mrima village, near the coastal town of Likoni, Mombasa District.

David Njoroge, pastor of the Worldwide Gospel Church, told Morning Star News that both legs of assistant pastor Collins Maseno were broken in the blast and he was in critical condition, and senior pastor Dominic Osano sustained serious injuries to his hand and the back of his neck.

The blast occurred at 7 p.m., Njoroge said, adding that the weapon appeared to be a homemade fuel bomb, though area press quoted police as saying it was a hand grenade. A 10-year-old boy, Dominic Maseno, was reportedly among the injured.

Islamic extremists from Somalia's rebel group Al Shabaab have been suspected in previous attacks in the coastal areas of Kenya. Mombasa police said they were searching for the assailants.

Christians fight to be reunited with orphans in Morocco

AIN LEUH, Morocco — Expatriate Christians who ran an orphanage in Morocco until they were deported on charges of proselytism said they will take their fight to be reunited with the children to the Supreme Court if necessary.

In early May, an appellate court delivered a verbal ruling in favor of the Moroccan government, which had deported Village of Hope staff in 2010 as part of a larger purge of Christians from the country. The May 7 ruling by the Administrative Court of Rabat stated that Village of Hope has no legal status to file any claims. Village of Hope seeks to resume operation of the orphanage, near Ain Leuh, 50 miles south of Fez.

The state's appeal in May came after an October 2012 oral ruling, released in writing in January, stipulating that the association was a legitimate legal entity with the right to seek legal redress of grievances.

The deportation of the staff members was part of a 2010 purge in which the government rounded up foreign Christians, interrogated them and expelled them with little or no warning. Village of Hope was caring for 33 children when the deportations happened.

House church leader denied medical help in prison

HUBEI PROVINCE, China — Gong Shengliang, imprisoned in China since 2001 for his leadership of a large house church movement, is suffering from lack of medical treatment after suffering a stroke, according to his daughter.

In an open letter to Chinese President Xi Jinping published on the websites of China Ministries International and China Aid Association, Gong Huali states that her father suffered a "cerebral infarction" (ischemic stroke) in late 2012 that has rendered him unable to walk or speak. "Because (of) the complete absence of minimal medical care, his cerebral and cerebellum functions have been severely affected," she wrote. "His life is in serious danger."

The daughter of the former leader of the South China Church movement, which reached 50,000 members before China banned it, wrote in the April 23 letter that she has asked officials in Hubei Province for him to be released on bail for urgent medical treatment.

Islamic extremists shoot man for being Christian

JILIB, Somalia — Islamic extremists from the rebel group Al Shabaab in Somalia publicly shot a young man to death after identifying him as a Christian, sources said.

The insurgents in Jamaame district in southern Somalia had been monitoring 28-year-old Hassan Hurshe since his arrival from Kenya in 2010 and determined that he had become a Christian while in Kenya, area Muslim sources said.

Al Shabaab members brought Hurshe to a public place in the town of Jilib on June 7 and shot him in the head, they said.

A leader of the Somali underground church in Kenya who had heard of the murder said Hurshe converted to Christianity in 2006, married in 2008 and fathered a baby boy in 2009.

Playing for an audience of One'

Minnesota Timberwolves guard Ridnour gives God glory

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A full-court press by security guards made Luke Ridnour call for backup during his rookie season in the NBA. "I could never get to the locker room, because they didn't think I played because of the way I looked," said Ridnour, a 6-foot-2-inch, 175-pound guard for the Minnesota Timberwolves. "I used to have to get the manager or trainer to tell them I played. That was funny."

Even now, Ridnour, who has been in the league for 10 years, gets stopped by security guards telling him he can't go to the team bus.

But Ridnour says he's not playing for the recognition — he's playing to give God glory.

"When you play for the Lord, you just let your light shine," he said. "I am playing for an audience of One. That's all that matters. I want to represent Him and speak of His goodness while I'm here. I think that is why I'm here, to give Him glory."

He wears a blue and white bracelet that states, "In Jesus Name I Play."

Ridnour first played for the Seattle SuperSonics during the 2003-04 season after being chosen 14th overall in the 2003 NBA Draft.

Later in two seasons with the Milwaukee Bucks, he averaged 9.6 points in 2008-09 and 10.4 points in 2009-10 while sinking a career-high 91 percent of free throws.

Ridnour was traded to the Timberwolves in 2010 and hit .440 percent of 3-pointers (fourth best in the NBA) during 2010-11. He averaged a career-high 12.1 points in 2011-12 and dished out his 3,000th assist. During the 2012-13 season, he reached another milestone, scoring his 7,000th career point. He averaged 11.5 points.

"You play to get better and better each year," he said. "You continue to stay consistent night in and night out."

Staying faithful to God

Through the ups and downs of a long season, Ridnour stays consistent in his spiritual life. His goal is to "stay faithful to God" and allow God to minister to him and his family.

Ridnour and his wife, Kate, faced some uncertain moments when their twins were born two years ago. There were complications with Kyson and Beckett.

"We continued to trust in Him," Ridnour said. "You just have to keep persevering like the Word says. Perseverance is huge. You just continually look at Him and not circumstances."

Ridnour desires to have a Christlike home. "My wife is awesome," he said. "Us having three boys (their oldest son, Traden, is 3) and trying to raise them in the Lord has been a lot of fun."

Ridnour wants to be guided by the Holy Spirit and uses the Bible to assist him.

Among "tons" of favorites are Romans 8:28, John 1:8-9, 1 Corinthians 10:31 — "So whatever you eat



Photo by David Sherman/NBAE via Getty Images

Luke Ridnour

or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" — and Micah 6:8 — "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Ridnour believes God's purpose for his life is to share the gospel and do ministry by loving people, which he says Christians need to do more.

Ridnour, 32, became a Christian when he was 7 through the influence of his parents, Rob and Muriel Ridnour. When he was a child, he saw a movie about LSU legend "Pistol" Pete Maravich, which taught him of Maravich's commitment to play for Christ.

Throughout the season, Ridnour invites teammates to chapel services and speaks with them about spiritual truths.

'Incredible' faith

Ridnour's faith is evident to Minnesota teammates and opponents. Timberwolves center Greg Stiemsma called it "incredible."

"We know that he does a lot of stuff off the court, going to prisons and sharing his testimony," said Stiemsma, who is a Christian.

Forward Chris Johnson said Ridnour is "an all-around good person. He is somebody you want to be like on and off the court. He is definitely real, how he carries himself. He is a great family person."

Memphis point guard Mike Conley was not surprised to learn of Ridnour's faith.

"He seems like a good, genuine person," Conley said.

On the court, the Timberwolves have relied on Ridnour's ball-handling ability, open shot selection and team-first approach. He was the only Minnesota player to have started all 82 games this past season.

"He brings leadership," Johnson said. "He comes out and plays hard every night."

Ridnour's even temper is a calming influence on teammates, Stiemsma said.

"He is a good guy to have in the locker room."

For Ridnour to be in the league as long as he has is a testament to his work ethic.

"He has the ability to adjust to any situation he has been in," Conley said. "He has been on different teams and has done well everywhere he has gone. He is a true professional."

During his rookie season, Ridnour was baptized at First Love Church, Seattle.

"Actions are the way you've got to represent the Lord," he said. "Christ is everything for me. It's who I am. Christ is how you encounter the love of God. It changes your life forever no matter what situation you are in or what path you might be headed down. Nothing is impossible with God." ❧



Photo courtesy of Fair Trade Services

Although band members have changed, the message remains the same. The new lineup for Audio Adrenaline includes (from left) Jared Byers from Bleach on drums, Dave Ghazarian from Superchick on guitar, former dc Talk member Kevin Max as lead vocalist, original member Will McGinniss on bass and singer/songwriter Jason Walker playing on keys.

Audio Adrenaline inspires listeners to be hands, feet of Christ

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Christian rock band Audio Adrenaline is on a mission: to remind audiences about the importance of being the hands and feet of Christ.

The group also emphasizes that while band members may have changed, their message remains the same.

After being a prominent force in Christian rock music for nearly 20 years, the band stopped touring when founding member and lead singer Mark Stuart began struggling with vocal chord problems.

Following a five-year hiatus, the band has returned for the sole purpose of continuing to share the gospel through songs and to share Christ's love with orphans in Haiti.

Stuart's parents served as missionaries, and the things he witnessed left a lasting impression on his life and inspired him to create the Hands and Feet Project in 2004. The goal of this project is to create a children's village that provides a caring environment for orphaned children, with a home, food, education and the love of a Christian family.

'Rely on God'

"Growing up in Haiti, I saw my parents go through a lot," Stuart said. "They worked hard to make a difference in a Third World country. In the midst of that, my sister was diagnosed with leukemia. There are stories like that from missionaries and God's servants all over the world. But I think God's people are at their strongest when they are broken, because God can use them to do incredible things when they say, 'All I can do is rely on God.'"

Although Stuart has stepped down as lead vocalist, he is still heavily involved with the decision-making and songwriting process.

The new lineup for Audio Adrenaline includes like-minded musicians who have joined the efforts to meet needs in Jesus' name. The band is now comprised of former dc Talk member Kevin Max as lead vocalist, Dave Ghazarian from Superchick on guitar, Jared Byers from Bleach on drums, singer/songwriter Jason Walker playing on keys and original member Will McGinniss on bass.

By using this platform to raise awareness for or-

phans in Haiti and around the world, net proceeds from their "Kings and Queens" album go directly to support the Hands and Feet Project and their efforts to build new orphanages.

The heart behind this project is extremely close to their new lead singer, Kevin Max, who was orphaned as a young child.

"The inspiration from this record comes from the fact that God has called us to serve the least of these," McGinniss said. "God has called us to be His hands and feet, to share the gospel and pull people out of the horrible situations that we see around the world. That's what we witnessed firsthand in Haiti. To be able to use this platform for this specific purpose was the main reason we started touring again and recording songs."

The title track on the album was inspired by 100 children whose lives have been greatly influenced by the Hands and Feet Project.

"Because of organizations like Hands and Feet, these children have been able to reach their God-given design," McGinniss said. "For the children in the orphanages in Haiti, this song is their anthem. It's a song that is so true about God — how He can pull you out of the worst scenario, set your feet on a rock, give you a new perspective, potential and possibilities.

"When these kids were found, they were suffering from malnutrition and many of them not expected to live more than a few days. By receiving proper medical treatments and food, we have seen the incredible transformation. Now these kids have a place to learn about God's love. It's mind-blowing. Each child has their own miracle story."

Through their music and message, Audio Adrenaline hopes to inspire audiences to take action by responding to God's calling on their lives. "We feel like God is doing something way bigger than us," McGinniss said. "He is constantly reminding us how faithful He is. God wants to author these amazing stories with our lives. If we just turn the pen over to Him, He can create incredible chapters in our lives.

"When the band stopped touring, it was a tough time for me. Everything we had been doing for 17 years was pulled out from under us. I was even wondering if those were the best days of my life and what was ahead," he said. "However, God was showing us He still had so much in store. If you will surrender your life and plans over to the Lord, He will show up every time and take you on an incredible journey." ❧

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Exodus International to close after 3 decades

IRVINE, Calif. — Exodus International, the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality, announced it is closing its doors after three-plus decades of ministry.

"We're not negating the ways God used Exodus to positively affect thousands of people, but a new generation of Christians is looking for change — and they want to be heard," said Tony Moore, an Exodus board member. The message came less than a day after Exodus released a statement apologizing to the gay community for years of undue judgment by the organization and the Christian Church as a whole.

"Exodus is an institution in the conservative Christian world, but we've ceased to be a living, breathing organism," said Alan Chambers, president of Exodus. "For quite some time we've been imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical."

Chambers continued, "From a Judeo-Christian perspective, gay, straight or otherwise, we're all prodigal sons and daughters. Exodus International is the prodigal's older brother, trying to impose its will on God's promises and make judgments on who's worthy of His Kingdom. God is calling us to be the Father — to welcome everyone, to love unhindered.

"Our goals are to reduce fear and come alongside churches to become safe, welcoming and mutually transforming communities."

'Surrogacy for hire' bill vetoed in Louisiana

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a Republican, vetoed a bill June 20 after state and national pro-life bioethics organizations expressed grave concerns about the legislation of gestational surrogacy. The measure's contracts could commercialize surrogacy by allowing "reasonable compensation" to women who carry babies to term for a couple or another person, he said.

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell D. Moore commended Jindal for his decision. "Surrogacy for hire is bad for children and bad for women," said Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "The womb is not a commercial commodity to be traded in the marketplace, and children are blessings, not consumer items. Surrogacy bypasses the one-flesh union and exploits women's bodies and children's lives."

Gestational surrogacy — in which an embryo created by in vitro fertilization is implanted in a woman who has no relation to the child but has agreed to endure the pregnancy and give birth — has become increasingly popular. No federal regulation of surrogacy exists in the United States.

Nearly 13-hour filibuster ends Texas pro-life bill

AUSTIN, Texas — A nearly 13-hour filibuster and parliamentary wrangling in the Texas Senate on June 25 and into early June 26 exhausted the final hours of the 83rd Texas Legislature's special-called session and ended efforts to pass pro-life legislation.

The final minutes of the session broke down in a cacophony of noise from protesters and rules questions on the floor, leaving observers wondering if the measure passed by the midnight deadline.

Abortion-rights advocates cheered the ruling. "Thanks to the powerful voices of thousands of Texans, SB 5 is dead," Sen. Wendy Davis, D-Ft. Worth, said.

Davis' filibuster effort seemed to be cut short just after 10 p.m. following her third rules violation called by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst. Parliamentary rules wrangling stalled a vote for almost another two hours.

The bill, stating that the unborn baby can feel pain as early as 20 weeks of gestation, would place restrictions on abortion after 20 weeks. The current state standard is 24 weeks.

House passes nationwide 20-week ban on abortion

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House of Representatives has approved landmark legislation that would prohibit abortions during the last half of pregnancy.

In a roll call June 18, the House voted 228-196 for the Pain-capable Unborn Child Protection Act (H.R. 1797), which would ban abortions nationwide on babies 20 weeks or more after fertilization. The ban is set at the developmental stage based on scientific evidence that a child in the womb experiences pain. The House's support of the bill, however, is unlikely to translate into approval by the Senate or endorsement by President Obama.

The White House has threatened a veto if the bill were to reach Obama's desk. ❧