

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



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‘Winning souls for the Kingdom’

Marshall County churches ‘becoming one’ to change culture of ‘Meth Mountain’

By Carolyn Cunningham
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Fall harvest came early in Marshall County when more than 1,300 made decisions for Christ during the Rick Gage GO TELL Crusade and pre-crusade events in late September. Of the decisions made, more than 700 were for salvation.

Crusade co-chairman Roy Sullivan, of Arab, said the county has a national reputation as being the meth capital because of the amount of meth used by young people, and is even known as “Meth Mountain.”

“We have been praying and planning and putting all of our efforts into making this crusade happen for Christ and for Him alone,” he said. “This is not about us but is truly all about winning souls for the kingdom of God.”

Gage, president of GO TELL Ministries in Atlanta and an international evangelist for 25 years, was joined by guest speakers Jose Alvarez, Tony Nolan and Steve Paysen. Musical

guests were Joy Fowler and Roy Sullivan’s son, Chuck Sullivan, who serves as GO TELL’s music director.

“Marshall County was an area that was ripe for an evangelistic harvest,” Gage said. “The preparation for this outreach was in place for more than a year. To have a successful evangelistic event, preparation and leadership are the two key components.”

Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Baptist Association, was one of the hundreds of volunteers helping with the event. More than 40 churches in the county worked together to pull off the crusade and pre-crusade activities. Nearly 300 volunteers served at the crusade as encouragers.

“As far as I know, we’d never had a county-wide, multid denominational crusade,” Stoner said, noting the success and excitement resulting from the event. “The churches are becoming one like the Book of John talks about” — even deciding to schedule a multid denominational Harvest Festival



GAGE



Photos by Joelle Brooks of Joelle Brooks Photography

Rick Gage’s GO TELL Crusade and pre-crusade events in Marshall County in late September results in more than 1,300 decisions for Christ. Churches of all denominations worked together to organize the event.

tival (Halloween-alternative event) in Arab on Oct. 31.

And Marshall County churches are even talking about a crusade in Albertville in 2015, he added.

Reaching the community

Crusade co-chair Steven Swords, pastor of Victory Baptist Church, Guntersville, said Gage not only spoke at the nightly crusade meetings at the Guntersville High School football stadium from Sept. 22 to 25 but also at several pre-crusade events. The events included county and city jails, all of the schools (more than 7,000 students total), several football practices, a pre-crusade youth rally and a Celebrate Recovery meeting for recovering alcoholics.

About 40 were saved at the jails,

80 at the youth rally and 12 at the Celebrate Recovery meeting, Swords said. “Rick Gage would do whatever he could do to reach the lost, even leading a body builder to Christ while he was working out.”

At the schools, Gage spoke about the dangers of drugs, alcohol abuse and premarital sex while the Outcast BMX Bike Team performed.

“After one of the high school assemblies, a student came up to me with tears in her eyes, very broken,” Gage said. “After hearing her heart and concern, I was able to share the gospel with her. Right there, next to the high school gym, we led her to Christ.”

Swords also led a young man addicted to prescription medication

(See ‘God,’ page 10)

Coming next week...

Facing life’s regrets
and taking a
holistic approach to mental health



COMMENT

The Growing Presence of 'Nominals'

When the Pew Research Center recently released a study concluding that a growing number of American Jews had only a “nominal” commitment to their faith, few were surprised. It has been said before.

The Pew study found that 62 percent of American Jews saw themselves as Jews because of ancestry or culture. Only 15 percent traced their identity through their religious faith. Thirty-four percent of Jewish respondents even said it is permissible to see Jesus as the Messiah and still call oneself a Jew.

Alan Cooperman, deputy director of the Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, said, “They are not saying Judaism can allow belief in Jesus. They are saying if you are born a Jew, reared as Jewish and convert to Christianity, I still consider you a Jew.”

One report described these “nominal” Jews as “rarely at worship services, indifferent to doctrine and surprisingly fuzzy on Jesus.” That description illustrates the definition of “nominal” found in Webster’s Dictionary. There the word means “existing in name or form only; not actual or real; very small in amount.” Each definition seems to fit the latest Pew report.

Trend for Christians too

Unfortunately the definition also matches the trend among Christians in the United States. Among Roman Catholics, for example, only 55 percent of the nearly 78 million members practice their faith, according to a study by Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Sixty-eight percent said they could be “good Catholics” without going to mass and more said it was a moral obligation to help the poor and needy (68 percent) than believed the church sacraments were essential (61 percent).

Protestants fared little better, according to a study by LifeWay Christian Resources. When asked in a survey “if a person is sincerely seeking God, he/she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity,” 26 percent of respondents agreed.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents said God is just a concept, and only half said, “Believing in Jesus Christ is the only way to get to heaven.” With such responses, it should not be surprising that more than two out of three said they rarely pray, attend worship or read the Bible.

Another study by Hout and Fischer titled



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

“America’s Weakening Ties to Organized Religion” found a steady century-long decline in American Christians’ belief in heaven, hell, the Bible and the certainty of God.

Like the Jews, American Catholics and Protestants — including evangelicals — seem to have a growing number of “nominals.”

Some contend the “nominal” phenomenon is not new, that there have always been people who do not personally adhere to the public standards of belief but are afraid to break with them publicly.

It is easier to blend in with the dominant religion than to risk economic, social or political fallout by breaking with the norm, these observers say.

Some point to the parable of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25:8–12 of the virgins who prepared for the wedding feast. Five made personal preparation by bringing oil for their lamps. The other

five simply went along with the crowd. When the bridegroom neared they discovered they were unprepared. These are like “nominals” today, the reasoning goes. They are in the group but not prepared for the celebration.

Some researchers trace the impetus for the growth in “nominals” to a philosophical change beginning late in the Baby Boom generation. Since the late 1950s children have been reared to think for themselves and not simply to follow authority.

As a result, this argument contends, more recent generations have developed values and attitudes that undermine traditional authority. Many in this camp point to the sexual revolution and the drug culture to illustrate a “me first” attitude that resists authority whether it comes from government or the church.

Other Christian observers point out that some “nominals” once had a vibrant faith but dis-

appointment with God or injury in the church caused them to drift away. Lack of social awareness by the church is a stumbling block for many young people today. They find the orthodoxy of their elders lacking the visible obedience to God’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Evangelicals themselves have indicted a common approach to theology that many believe encourages “nominals.” The biblical emphasis that it is “by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8–9) sometimes fails to point out that believers “are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

The gift of grace is always accompanied by the demands of costly discipleship, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization said in “Occasional Paper 23.” One without the other is incomplete.

The Lausanne Committee observed, “In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin veneer of Christianity.” In the United States, for example, about 70 percent claim to be Christian but fewer than half that number say religion is important in their lives.

Statistics are interesting but they cannot show what is in one’s heart. One must always be careful about judg-

ing the faith of another. And it is incumbent on anyone talking about “nominal Christians” to examine one’s own heart first, for it is in the heart that the drift toward being a “nominal” begins.

Personal relationship

At the same time, as evangelicals understand the Bible, a relationship with God is not about identity with a culture, a tribe or an institution — not even a church. It is about a transforming personal relationship through faith in Jesus Christ that is characterized by such qualities as love, joy, peace, fellowship with other believers, a desire to learn of God through Bible study, a concern for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven and a living hope for eternity.

That is the kind of relationship to which God invites all who will believe, and there is nothing “nominal” about that kind of relationship.

“One must always be careful about judging the faith of another. And it is incumbent on anyone talking about ‘nominal Christians’ to examine one’s own heart first, for it is in the heart that the drift toward being a ‘nominal’ begins.”

Follow Bob Terry
Twitter
@drbobterry





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

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Preach the Word

Pastors Conference 2013 to focus on preaching, praise, prayer

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

The 2013 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference will be a time of preaching, praise and prayer, according to conference president Fred Lackey. On Nov. 11, pastors from around the state will gather at Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, to hear from "men who have a track record that verifies ... they preach the Word and they live the Word," Lackey said.

With the theme "Preach the Word," the conference will focus on the importance of preaching Truth.

"With so many things bombarding us from every angle, we just need eternal truth to serve as our guide, our support. And the Word of God is that instrument," said Lackey, who serves as associate pastor of Clements Baptist Church, Athens.

Lackey and the Pastors Conference officers chose as the conference Scripture 2 Timothy 4:2, which says, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction."

Lackey said one of the focal points of the conference is "getting pastors together and fellowshiping in the Word."

Time of fellowship

The Pastors Conference is "one of the few times" pastors see each other, are able to have long conversations together and pray with each other, Lackey explained.

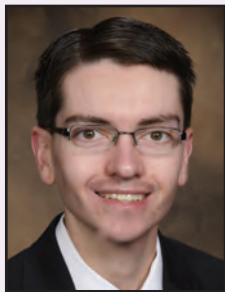
"My hope (for this year's conference) is that our hearts would be stirred by the preaching of God's Word. ... And maybe even have a refocusing on the importance of the Word of God in our personal lives as well as our ministry."

Held in conjunction with the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting, the one-day conference is divided into three sessions, each including preaching, prayer and praise and worship.

Daniel Wilson, pastor of West End Baptist Church, Clanton, will be the first speaker during the morning session. Tim Anderson, pastor of Clements Baptist Church, Athens, and Bob Pitman, an evangelist based in Muscle Shoals, also will speak during the morning session.

After a break for lunch, Mark Foley, president of the University of Mobile, will speak. Dusty McLemore, pastor of Lindsay

WHITESBURG BAPTIST, HUNTSVILLE — NOV. 11

			
WILSON	ANDERSON	PITMAN	FOLEY
			
McLEMORE	PATTERSON	CATT	VINES

PASTORS CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Morning Session 8:30 Pre-session music 9:00 Music led by Rick Stone 9:15 Welcome and prayer 9:20 Praise and worship 9:30 <i>Message: Daniel Wilson</i> 10:10 Praise and worship 10:25 <i>Message: Tim Anderson</i> 11:05 Praise and worship 11:20 <i>Message: Bob Pitman</i> 12:00 Closing prayer	Afternoon Session 1:20 Pre-session music 1:30 Praise and worship 1:40 Welcome/election of officers 1:50 Prayer 1:55 <i>Message: Mark Foley</i> 2:30 Praise and worship 2:45 Prayer 2:50 <i>Message: Dusty McLemore</i> 3:30 Praise and worship 3:45 Prayer 3:50 <i>Message: Paige Patterson</i> 4:30 Prayer	Evening Session 6:20 Pre-session music 6:30 Welcome 6:35 Praise and worship 6:50 Prayer 6:55 Special music 7:00 <i>Message: Michael Catt</i> 7:40 Recognitions 7:45 Praise and worship 8:00 Prayer 8:05 Special music 8:10 <i>Message: Jerry Vines</i> 8:50 Closing prayer
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2013 OFFICERS:
President — Fred Lackey, Athens Vice President — Adam Dooley, Mobile
President-elect — Kevin Blackwell, Hueytown Treasurer — Mark Smith, Birmingham

Lane Baptist Church, Athens, and Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, also will speak during the afternoon session.

Michael Catt, pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga., will speak during the evening session. Jerry Vines, former Southern Baptist Convention president and evangelist based in Woodstock, Ga., will be the final speaker.

Alabama Baptists also will take part in the conference by leading in prayer, including: Lackey; Mitch McCormick, pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, Elkmont; Kevin Blackwell, pastor of Valley

Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown; Robert Smith, director of missions for Muscle Shoals Baptist

Association; Art Burroughs, retired pastor of Fulton Road Baptist Church, Mobile; Mike Holcomb, pastor of Life Church, Oxford; Lucky Teague, director of missions for Walker Baptist Association; Mike Greene, pastor of Round Island Baptist Church, Athens; and Chris Crain, pastor of South Roebuck Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Rick Stone, worship pastor

for Whitesburg Baptist, will lead praise and worship throughout the day.



LACKEY

Lackey, who has not missed many Pastors Conferences in the past 60 years, said he has never left one disappointed.

"I've always been challenged, edified and always look forward to the conference" he said, adding that he hopes that proves to be true for those who attend the 2013 conference.

For more information, call 205-870-4720 ext. 107.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services

Hindus drag woman to temple to 'reconvert' her

NIRAYANPALYA, India — Incidents of violence against Christians in India's Karnataka state have spiked since June, including hospitalization of a school helper in early October after Hindu extremists beat her and marched her through the streets.

Hindu extremists kicked and punched the 50-year-old Christian woman, who goes by the single name of Sannamma, after intercepting her in Chamrajnagar District on Sept. 13. A resident of Kolipalya, Sannamma was in Nirayanpalya village to invite students back to school when a mob of about 40 Hindu nationalists stopped her and demanded she give money for a Hindu festival, a Christian leader said.



MS photo

"Sannamma agreed to give them the money later, as she did not have any money with her at that time," area pastor Vincent Dass said.

Nevertheless the Hindu extremists began beating her, calling her "pagan" and accused her of forceful conversion. As they abused Sannamma with foul language, the mob punched, kicked and shoved her around before dragging her to a Hindu temple. There they tried to forcefully convert her back to Hinduism by pouring water on her as a symbol of religious cleansing from Christianity.

After the six-hour attack, she was rushed to the hospital, where she was treated for internal injuries and multiple contusions. "What I am suffering is nothing compared to what my Lord Jesus has suffered," said Sannamma, who became a Christian eight years ago. "I will love him forever for giving me a new life."

Two Egyptian Christians beaten, killed in Libya

DERNA DISTRICT, Libya — A group of Muslims robbed two Egyptian Christians living in Libya, then tied up and shot them to death after the two Copts refused their demand to convert to Islam.

On a rural road in Derna District in northeastern Libya on Sept. 25, a group of Muslims surrounded Waleed Saad Shaker, 25, and Nash'at Shenouda Ishaq, 27, demanded their belongings and started beating them. The Muslims demanded that Shaker and Ishaq recite the *shahada*, the declaration of conversion to Islam. When the two Orthodox Coptic Christians refused, the group of Muslims tied them up and shot them, relatives said.



SHAKER

Later that day, a shepherd found Shaker and Ishaq in the desert, and they were taken to Derna Hospital. Shaker was dead upon arrival at the hospital. Ishaq initially survived, and before he died he gave details about the assault to a relative.

No one has been arrested in connection with the killings. The attack marks the third time in a two-week period that a Coptic Christian was robbed and killed in Derna District.

Buddhist nationalism fuels attacks in Sri Lanka

MEEGODA, Sri Lanka — Persecution of Christians is rising in Sri Lanka, where at least three attacks took place in September as the government promoted Buddhist nationalism to maintain its hold on power.

A Buddhist monk and his four subordinates led a mob attack on Jeevana Diya Church, beating a pastor until he fell unconscious and destroying church property. Others in the crowd beat the pastor's mother after she pleaded for her son.

In the same district, a group of unidentified people tried to set fire to the house of the pastor of an Assembly of God Church, sources said. The mob threw plastic bags filled with kerosene and gasoline at the pastor's house.

The same week, Praise Prayer Lanka Church had to cancel a worship service due to threat of an attack — possibly a contrived threat. More than two dozen policemen came to the church early in the morning and ordered worshippers to go to their homes.

Successful church planting

Black church plants grow, LifeWay Research shows

When Sammy Campbell thinks about growth within African-American church plants in Alabama today, there are some churches that immediately stand out.

"We have a couple churches who are doing very well in their growth," said Campbell, church planting strategist for Birmingham Baptist Association.

Those churches — True Vine Evangelical Outreach Ministries, Birmingham, led by Ralph Garth and founded in 2004, and Brewster Road Community Church, Birmingham, led by Eddie Gibson and founded in 2012 — are two of the African-American church plants in the state reaching populations of the unsaved and unchurched.

A steady increase in attendance has been the overall trend among African-American churches planted prior to 2012, LifeWay Research learned from "the first research project of its size and scope," as researchers described it, "to measure characteristics distinctive to the African-American context."

The average first-year Sunday attendance of 37 doubled by the fourth year among the 290 African-American church plants in the multid denominational survey aimed at identifying characteristics of healthy new congregations.

Worship attendance, new commitments to Christ, community demographics, church culture, facility usage, promotion and outreach and church sponsorship and funding were studied in the project.

Training and equipping leaders

"This research has described in detail African-American church planting today," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "More importantly, this research has begun productive conversations among church planting leaders across the U.S. about how best to train and equip new African-American church plants."

Stetzer added that large national studies on church planting have been conducted in the past, "but it would be wrong to assume that national factors are the same for every sub-population of church plants."

The survey identified three characteristics that had the most positive impact on worship attendance,

African-American Church Planting Worship Attendance

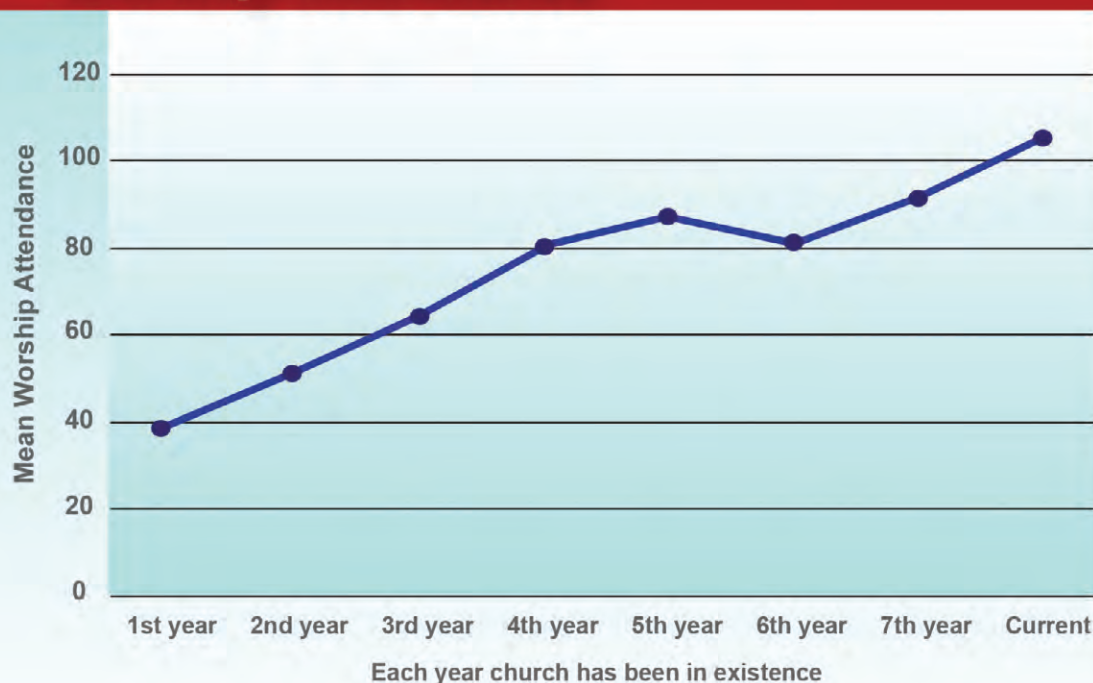




Photo by Nathan Troost



Photo by Toni Wall

Regular attendance at Brewster Road Community Church, Birmingham, is about 54 people who are actively involved in church, including adults and children. Eddie Gibson (above) is pastor.

which were present in more than two-thirds of the churches: delegation of leadership roles to volunteers, leadership training for new church members and a plan of personal spiritual formation for the church planter.

The study found worship style impacts attendance. The most common worship style used by African-American church plants was blended, cited by 45 percent of those surveyed, followed by contemporary gospel, contemporary and urban contemporary, ranging from 12–14 percent. However, church plants with a more distinctive style, urban contemporary for instance, had higher attendance than churches using a blended style.

The average number of new commitments to Christ for the first year of a church plant was 16, LifeWay Research found. The average number of new commitments peaked in year three at 20 and then remained at 12 or higher for the remainder of the years measured.

The study identified two characteristics that stood out as having a positive impact on new commitments to Christ and were present among more than two-thirds of the churches: door-to-door evangelism (75 percent) and the establishment of a new member class (68 percent).

On average, African-American churches were planted in communities that were largely made up of the following ethnic groups: African-American (42 percent), white (35 percent), Hispanic (13 percent), African or Caribbean decent (4 percent), Asian (3 percent) and other (3 percent).

The survey asked church plants to select what ethnicity or race they specifically sought to reach in the community around the church. About two-thirds (68 percent) of churches focused on reaching African-Americans.

More than 80 percent of church planters said they also intentionally sought to reach a cross-cultural or multiethnic audience.

The LifeWay Research study found 48 per-

cent of new churches were sponsored by another church. Among the sponsoring churches, 79 percent provided active prayer support while 53 percent provided mentoring to the church planter or church planting team, researchers noted.

“A sponsoring or mother church is often a crucial aspect of successful church [plants] for obvious reasons,” said Carl Ellis, assistant professor of practical the-

ology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas and a consultant on the research project. “The fewer burdens a church plant has to carry in the initial stages, the greater is the likelihood that the new church will succeed.”

The primary funding sources for African-American church plants were core members (84 percent), affiliated denominations (62 percent), the church planter or church planting team (49 percent) and the personal financial support network of

the church planter (44 percent). The study also found 36 percent of church plants received funding from one or more sponsoring churches.

Receiving funds

The average amount received by church starts from outside sources was \$21,818 in the first year. Average dollars received from members or attendees in the first year was \$33,301. During the first seven years, outside funding declined 44 percent, while dollars from members or attendees grew 211 percent, the research found.

Among the African-American church plants surveyed, 29 percent were self-sufficient by their first year. Half achieved

self-sufficiency by the fourth year and 60 percent by year 10.

Many church planters received support other than financial during their first years. Sixty percent said they received church planter mentoring, coaching or supervision, and training for themselves or their team.

Specific training

The project indicated 55 percent of planters received church planting training prior to starting a church. But only 16 percent received specific training on the dynamics of the African-American context prior to planting. Sixty-nine percent said they would benefit from that type of training today.

Two-thirds (69 percent) were bivocational the first two years of the plant's existence. Despite so many having a second

job, 63 percent of church planters worked 40 hours a week or more at the church plant. Slightly more than half (52 percent) received some financial compensation for their work as a church planter, but only 38 percent of them termed the financial compensation adequate to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families.

The majority of church planters arrived on the field as a single staff member. Only 6 percent of the church plants had a paid, staffed team of more than one person to start the church.

Church planters from more than 20 denominations and several nondenominational churches participated in the study. Almost half (43 percent) were started since 2007. Most of them, 94 percent, still exist. Among the churches that closed, lack of financial support was the most common contributing factor. (BP, TAB)



Photo by Julie Payne

True Vine Evangelical Outreach Ministries, Birmingham, led by Ralph Garth was founded in 2004.

Characteristics impacting worship attendance and new commitments to Jesus Christ

- Church planters compensated for their work (52 percent of the new churches).
- Weeklong boot camp or basic training provided for the church planter (42 percent).
- Church planter worked 60 hours a week or more on the church plant during the first two years of existence (39 percent).
- A sponsor or mother church permitted the plant to meet in the sponsoring church building (32 percent).
- The plants had their own facilities during the first five years (20 percent).
- The church plant incorporated a contemporary worship style (13 percent).

Source: LifeWay Research

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **Maytown Church, Bessemer**, will host The Blackwood Brothers Quartet in concert Nov. 4, 7 p.m. John Killian is pastor. ► **Seventh Street Church, Bessemer**, will celebrate its 91st homecoming Oct. 27, 10:30 a.m. Bill Goodwin, pastor of First Church, Lincoln, will speak. A covered dish lunch will follow. Former members and friends of Seventh Street are welcome. Sam Davidson is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **East Gardendale Church, Gardendale**, will host its annual Trunk or Treat on Oct. 26, 3-5 p.m. with hot dogs, popcorn, games, candy and inflatables for children. For information, call 205-608-0889. Allen Davis is pastor. ► **First Church, Trussville**, will hold "A Weekend with Kay Arthur" on Nov. 15-16 with the topic "Prepare for the days to come." Arthur, co-founder of Precept Ministries International and award-winning author, will address such questions as "Do we understand the times?" and "Do we know what to do?" The Friday session will be at 7 p.m. and the Saturday session will be at 8 a.m. Doors will open one hour prior to each session. For ticket information visit <https://kayarthur2013.eventbrite.com> or email kayconferencenovember_2013@gmail.com. Buddy Champion is pastor.

CHILTON

► **Maplesville Church** will celebrate homecoming Oct. 20, 10:30 a.m. There will be no Sunday School. Pastor Terry Harris will speak and dinner will follow. Everyone is invited.

COVINGTON

► **Mobley Creek Church, Andalusia**, will celebrate homecoming Oct. 20, 10:30 a.m. Dennis Knowles will speak and there will be special music. Dinner will follow. Terry Powell is pastor.

LIMESTONE

► **Mays Memorial Church, Toney**, will hold "Celebration Day" on Oct. 20 in conjunction with the Limestone Association High Attendance Day. Sunday School will be at 9:30 a.m. and worship at 10:30 a.m. with singing by The Servants. A fellowship meal will follow. Anthony Perry is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Shiloh Church, Somerville**, will present an eight-scene walk-through drama, The Judgment Seat, on Oct. 28-31, 6-10 p.m. This event is a joint collaboration between the student ministry and the adults of Shiloh Church. Reservations are not required but recommended for large groups and will be offered for groups of 10 or more. To make reservations, call 256-286-0509. Recommended for

ages 10 and up. Charles Owens is pastor.

TENNESSEE RIVER

► **Mount Carmel Missionary Church, Bridgeport**, will hold its annual fall festival Oct. 26. Festivities will be at 2 p.m. with activities for the children, pumpkin decorating, inflatables, hay rides and a meal will be served at 4 p.m. Wade Spencer will sing at 6 p.m. On Oct. 27 the church will hold old fashioned day. Spencer will sing in the morning service. Everyone is invited to attend. Josh Myers is pastor.

WASHINGTON

► **Pleasant Hill Church, Millry**, will hold revival Oct. 27-29, 6 p.m. each evening. Fred Wolfe, of Mobile, will speak. Everyone is invited to attend. Ron Pierce is pastor. ► **Wagarville Church** will celebrate homecoming Oct. 20, 11 a.m. The traditional homecoming lunch will follow the worship service. Interim pastor Joshua Purvis will speak. All members, inactive members and former members are invited to attend. The church also will host a Community Fall Festival on Oct. 31, 6-8 p.m. The outdoor family event will include a live band and classic car show. Classic car enthusiasts are encouraged to bring their showpiece to the Wagarville Community Ball Field. All cars, trucks, tractors and mud trucks are welcome.



Georgiana's Mount Pleasant marks 125 years

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Georgiana, celebrated its 125th anniversary Aug. 18.

During the 10 a.m. service the Butler Baptist Association church remembered the past during a PowerPoint presentation of its history. Photos of the church from 125 years ago up until today were featured.

People who were connected to the church in the past were invited to speak about their memories, and the worship service followed a special singing.

A representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented Mount Pleasant Baptist with a plaque, and a document from the governor congratulating the church also was presented.

Lunch was served afterward, and about 150 people attended the service, according to Pastor Wayne Davis. He added that people said it was the best homecoming they had ever experienced.

Looking to the future of Mount Pleasant, Davis said, "We just preach the Word and love each other — keep it simple and love the Lord." (Julie Payne)

Cullman's Oak Level celebrates 100th anniversary

Oak Level Baptist Church, Cullman, celebrated its centennial Aug. 18 beginning with a 10:30 a.m. service.

The church choir sang and the son of a church member read a poem he wrote about Oak Level Baptist that was initially read at the church's decoration service in June. "It was really nice," Pastor Etsel Riddle said of the reading.

Nancy Beasley, representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque to the church to commemorate its 100 years, and both East Cullman Baptist Association and the Cullman Historical Society presented plaques as well. There also was a presentation of a certificate from the Alabama House of Representatives.

In addition, people shared remembrances about Oak Level, including Lillian Keese, 91, the oldest member of the church.

A video presentation of photos submitted by the congregation also was featured, titled "The 100th Celebration."

Riddle spoke to the congregation and lunch followed the service. There were 109 people in attendance for the celebration, he noted. (Julie Payne)

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Someone You Should Know

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

JETTIE KIRKPATRICK

Wildwood Baptist Church, Cottondale
Tuscaloosa Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSES: Psalm 19:14 and
John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "Amazing Grace"

HOBBIES: Working in the yard

and music

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 48
years of marriage to Alton
(known to many as Pat)



KIRKPATRICK

Jettie Kirkpatrick, 91, serves as the church clerk, treasurer and Sunday School secretary at Wildwood Baptist Church, Cottondale. She also is a member of the church choir and prepares breakfast each Sunday morning for the children who are picked up and transported to church by Wildwood Baptist's van ministry.

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

A: I had an aunt and uncle (who) raised us (siblings). ...

They had a great influence on all of our lives — we were all ... actively involved in church and became Christians at an early age.

Q: What do you get from this ministry work?

A: It's always a blessing to do things for other people. ... I ask the Lord every day to show me what He wants me to do. ... I try to do what I feel that I'm led to do. It's just a great blessing.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: They absolutely support me 100 percent. My husband always

did, too. We were partners in everything that we did.

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

A: As long as the Lord allows, I'll continue to do what I feel He's leading me to do. ... I just want to be in His will, whatever it is.

Q: What difference has Jesus Christ made in your life?

A: He is the ... total difference in everything I do. ... I can't imagine life without Christ.

The Cooperative Program in action in Alabama



Church planting residencies, training sessions prepare Alabama to be 'a sending state'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Michael Johnson loves Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, and he's loved taking his wife and daughters there with him while he's been stationed at Fort Rucker over the past few years.

But over time, he began to feel like it was time to do something different.

It was time to "start a church from scratch."

Through godly counsel, "a lot of prayer" and spending time in Scripture, Johnson felt drawn to church planting.

"Through various things, God laid on my heart the idea of going out and starting a church," he said. "I've just been waiting for the right time."

The right time became apparent, he said, when Travis Dunham, Hillcrest Baptist's missions pastor, approached him about a pilot project he was starting in the church in conjunction with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) — a church planting residency.

It has been an experience that Johnson calls a confirmation from God that his family is being led to a good thing.

"God's timing is always perfect," said Lamar Duke, SBOM church planting strategist.

God's calling

Johnson, who has been in the church planting residency since August, ends his time in the Army at the end of 2013.

He had been praying for God to make it clear where he wanted the family to go, and gradually they began to feel God wanted them to return to Washington — their home state — and start The River Church.

"God impressed on my heart the city of Yakima. So many of the churches are struggling there, and there are so few of

them," Johnson said. "There's no movement right now to reach that area."

How do you make that move to get something going in an area where there's currently nothing?

Duke said the answer "is to follow the Lord" and pursue available resources.

Hillcrest, he said, has done "an awesome job" at preparing Johnson and another residency participant, Aaron Wine.

"They have reading assignments, weekly training ... and they are learning the nuts and bolts of what it takes to plant a church," Duke said.

Hillcrest also created an additional worship service designed to model for Johnson and Wine what it takes to reach a segment of the population that's not being reached.

"It's been a great pilot project, and we hope to duplicate it across the state," Duke said of the church planting residency. "I'd love to see 20 of them in the next few years intensively preparing people for planting."

He calls the strategy "church planting in Alabama and beyond," something he hopes will foster an Acts 1:8 mentality in churches across the state.

"We want to be a sending state," he said. "We need churches here but beyond as well."

Duke's office at the SBOM helps recruit interns as well as helps churches set up internships or residencies to train them.

"Some churches already have an idea of where they'd like to go with church planting. Some need some guidance along the way. We're here to serve them however they need it," he said.

More than 200 Alabama Baptists have gone through Basic Training Journey in 2013, with more training opportunities still to come in October.

"Basic Training Journey is an intensive three-day training for planters and core group members of new church plants," Duke said, noting that the next basic training is Oct. 17–19 at First Baptist Church,



JOHNSON



Photo courtesy of Lamar Duke

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association, speaks at Basic Training Journey for church planters in Mobile in July.

North Mobile, in Saraland. "God is bringing us some solid planters and amassing some core groups, but we need more sending churches," he said.

Six-step process

Duke hopes to cultivate those sending churches through a new type of training called Churches Planting Churches.

"If your church is considering the possibility of planting a church, this training will provide you with a clear six-step process to follow," he said.

The next Churches Planting Churches

training is set for Oct. 24–26 at First Baptist Church, Foley.

It is provided to churches free of charge, thanks to the Cooperative Program (CP).

"There's no way we can do this without CP funding," Duke said. "It costs a considerable amount to put these trainings on, and we give them away."

The CP also provides salary support and start-up funds for church planters, as well as mobile chapels and other resources.

For more information, contact Duke at lduke@alsbom.org or 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332. ☎

Basic Training Journey for church planters

Oct. 17–19

First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland

Churches Planting Churches training

Oct. 24–26

First Baptist Church, Foley

"There's no way we can do this without CP funding. It costs a considerable amount to put those trainings on, and we give them away."

Lamar Duke
SBOM church planting strategist



IMB photo

John Harper repairs a ripped seam on a dress shirt. He and his two daughters help with many household tasks that his wife, Mary, used to do on her own.



IMB photo

Mary Harper takes advantage of a quiet moment alone. Since the Harpers' story first began to be shared, people have responded, offering to help remodel their home to make it accommodating to Mary. Others have expressed interest in finishing the work they started in Central Asia.

'Mom, I don't want you to die'

Southern Baptist representative shares hope in midst of ALS diagnosis



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A concussion is an injury caused by a blow to the head in which the brain moves rapidly and may collide with the inside of the skull.

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On a bright spring day in rural Missouri, Mary Harper's eyes well with tears as she plucks rocks from the garden of her family's home near Springfield.

The 42-year-old slowly makes her way down a row marked "Spinach," using her left hand to toss dozens of stones into a trailer made from the bed of an old pickup. Her right arm hangs at her side, emaciated, its fingers slightly contorted — the first victim of a disease that will likely take her life.

Three to five years, she said. That's the average doctors give most people with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease.

She fights back tears as she recalls the moment that she and her husband, John, broke the news to their daughters and turned their family's world upside down.

"Mom, I don't want you to die," Mary remembers her older daughter, Lindsey, now 15, crying in her arms. Her younger daughter, Jessica, now 13, also was in tears. John wondered how he'd raise two girls without his best friend.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Less than a year ago, the Harpers were living half-a-world away, sharing Jesus in a spiritually dark corner

of Central Asia. They'd spent the past seven years there serving as Southern Baptist representatives. It was an epic journey the small-town couple never imagined they'd take; especially for John, a self-described "hillbilly" whose happy place is either perched in a deer stand or waist deep in a river holding a fishing rod.

Called to missions at 15, John said he surrendered to just about every missions field on the planet, "bawling his eyes out" whenever a missionary spoke in church. He met Mary after high school and they started dating, until John's calling almost ended their relationship.

Pig-headed ultimatum

"God told me to go, and you can either come with me or not," he remembers telling Mary one night. "And then I turned around to walk away because it didn't seem like she was responding."

Irritated but otherwise unfazed by John's pig-headed ultimatum, Mary grabbed his arm, spun him around and revealed something she'd never told anyone — at 16, God also had spoken to her about missions. Listening to a missionary from China preach in church one Sunday morning, Mary clearly felt the Lord asking if she would be willing to go overseas one day. She was.

"I gave her a little bitty, thin gold ring with a little grain of sand in there for a diamond," John said. "I was poor. I ate all my money." He

proposed at Lambert's restaurant in Sikeston, Mo., home of the famous "threw rolls." (Yes, it's exactly what it sounds like; waiters literally throw hot yeast rolls at customers.) It wasn't the most romantic gesture, but Mary was too down-to-earth to care about such things — she simply wanted to obey God and follow wherever He led her husband-to-be.

John was prepared to go just about anywhere, except to work with Muslims. He'd heard missionaries speaking about Muslim work and could "summarize all of their testimonies like this: We served for 30 years in such-and-such country, we were about to retire, and the day before we got on the plane somebody finally gave their heart to Christ." Incredulous, he added, "Dude, I'm not working 30 years to see one person come to faith."

But the Harpers wouldn't have to. Within a year of arriving in Central Asia they had already seen their first new believer. (John says the irony of God sending him to an entire region of the world that is dominated by Islam isn't lost on him.) Despite God's graciousness in granting that early victory, the darkness among their people group was deeper than they'd imagined.

There are only a handful of known Christians in the city where the Harpers lived, and two of those are men John personally led to Jesus. Signs of lostness are everywhere, from the minarets towering above the

city's skyline to the shiny prayer beads that swing from the hands of nearly every man who walks the streets. But only people who have invested their lives in a place like this, gone deep in language and culture, can catch glimpses of the true darkness that lurks behind closed doors.

Mary said that darkness holds particular sway over the city's women. Trapped in their homes by religious and cultural mores, many are uneducated, isolated and abused, viewed as little more than property. Suicide is a common way out. "The preferred method is to pour kerosene on themselves and then light it with a match," she said. "Many survive for days before they die. I guess they feel they have no other option. They don't have the hope of Christ."

But the Harpers know sharing that hope comes at a price.

Masud was a taxi driver and a fearless evangelist, sharing the gospel openly in the city's market. "Angry crowds would gather around him just like Jesus, but nobody laid a hand on him because it wasn't his time," John said. Until the day a man shouting "*Allahu Akbar!*" (God is greatest) emptied an AK-47 into Masud's body in broad daylight.

"According to the Quran, if a Muslim leaves Islam it's a death sentence, and anybody who kills them is guaranteed heaven," John said. "An Islamist group bought the shooter's family the biggest house in the city and gave them cars, money — he was a hero."

Masud's death left a gaping hole in the city's tiny Christian community. Believers were so afraid to reveal their faith in Christ that many kept it secret, even from their spouse. But there was one believer with the courage to boldly obey the Great Commission — Masud's ministry partner, Ahsan.

Though he was targeted by the same men who murdered Masud, Ahsan wouldn't stop sharing the gospel. He began to pray that God would send him a new partner, someone who could stand with him as Masud had. The answer came the day he met John Harper.

Introduced by a mutual friend, Ahsan's family became fast friends with the Harpers, bonded by their deep love of Jesus and determination to share that love with others. They ate meals together, worshipped together, their children played together — and they shared Christ together. John and Ahsan would often go "circuit riding," hopping from village to village outside the city to visit small pockets of believers, encouraging and discipling them while sharing Truth with anyone who would listen.

"Ahsan has a voice like a bullhorn," John said. He remembers sharing the gospel in a village where a group of more than 25 men had packed into a home, curious to meet the tall American visitor. Ahsan preached. "I felt like Paul and Silas; I was ready to get saved," John said, laughing. "The power of the Holy Spirit was there. We saw two or three people from that village come to faith."

While John and Ahsan shared Christ with the men, Mary and Ahsan's wife, Iman, would share with the women. Late-afternoon visits were common and involved lots of hot tea and deep conversation.

Sometimes their children opened doors to new relationships. One day Jessica came running to the house in tears because a neighborhood boy had thrown a rock at her. She wasn't hurt, but Mary wanted to make sure the boy's mother knew what had happened. They ended up becoming friends.

"We would go to her house quite often, have tea and watch her make bread," Mary said. She used the opportunity to share what the Bible says about Jesus being the "Bread of life." On another occasion, Mary's friend was in intense pain following a hysterectomy and

hadn't slept for two days. Laying her hand gently over the incision on her friend's belly, Mary prayed for healing.

"While I prayed she became very calm, her whole body relaxed and she fell asleep. I slipped my hand from underneath hers and left her to rest," Mary said. When she went the next afternoon to check on her friend, God had worked a small miracle. "She told me, 'I actually slept last night for the first time, and I slept well. I told all my friends it's because you prayed for me,'" Mary recalled. Though her friend hasn't yet accepted Christ, Mary knows the seeds of the gospel have been planted.

But spreading the gospel also meant sacrifice — especially for local believers. About a year after Ahsan and John began sharing Christ together, Ahsan was arrested and thrown in jail. During the week he spent in prison, the Harpers visited Ahsan's family daily, taking them meals, praying with them and offering encouragement. When he was released, police told Ahsan he should return to Islam. Ahsan told them he had lived in darkness long enough. He also told John it wouldn't be his last time behind bars.

In July 2011, Ahsan was arrested again. But this was different. He was tortured, nearly to death. For the first three weeks, no one even knew where Ahsan was being held. John finally tracked him to a large prison in the country's capital.

"I made him a promise that I will stand with him, I will defend him, I will take care of his family while he is in prison," John said. "And I meant it."

But John had no way of knowing he wouldn't be able to keep that promise.

Rapid deterioration

About a year later, while Ahsan was still in prison, Mary began to notice twitching in her right arm and chest. Doctors first thought she might have a vitamin deficiency and ordered supplements. But things continued to get worse. Mary noticed her arm was not only twitching, it was losing muscle. Everyday tasks like lifting a pot from the stove were becoming difficult.

Eventually, she was sent to a neurologist. It was the first time that she and John heard the letters A-L-S. There was still a glimmer of hope, however — the doctor's diagnosis wasn't conclusive. Just in case, he put Mary on a drug that is sometimes used to treat ALS patients. That's when things started to fall apart.

Within a few weeks Mary's condition deteriorated rapidly. "I'd get up and make breakfast, and by 10:30, I was ready to take a nap," Mary said. "I had no energy. My knees felt like Jell-O." By now the twitching had spread to her legs. John was terrified. "The drug was making her worse. I thought she was going to be dead in a month," he said.

Then one afternoon John came home to find Jessica in tears. "Daddy, we're going back to America," she cried. "Mom is on the phone with the doctor." Alarmed by the news of Mary's sudden decline, the International Mission Board's medical department had ordered the Harpers to return to the United States immediately.

John and Mary shared the news with their team that night. Jill Foster, a short-term Christian worker from Oklahoma, was with them. "We spent time worshipping and praying," Jill said. "Eventually John went over into the corner and curled up in a fetal position and start-

ed crying. He's a big man, like 6 foot 3; his nickname in the local language is 'Mountain.' And he was just crying out to the Lord, saying things like 'How am I supposed to raise two girls without their mom?'" A surrogate big sister to the Harpers' girls, Jill held Lindsey and Jessica as they cried.

With their team's help, the Harpers managed to pack up seven years' worth of accumulation in just seven days. They sold what they could and gave away the rest. Jill said nearly half their house went to a refugee camp outside the city.

Throughout the week a constant stream of friends filtered through the Harpers' home, saying goodbye.

"My hope is in Christ. I know whatever the end is, I'll be in heaven."

**Mary Harper
Southern Baptist
representative**

"They were capable of sharing the Good News in the local language better than any other expat in town, and when they left their house half the city knew them by name," Jill said. "It was clear that they'd impacted many, many people. They were always with people. They didn't seek to make some American bubble; they lived like the people — they wore the nationals' clothes, they ate the nationals' food, they lived and slept in the nationals' homes.

"Even at the end I remember John, every time someone came over, he was looking for an opportunity to share Truth just one last time."

On the drive to the airport John wept bitterly, burning through the remaining minutes on his cellphone's SIM card to make final goodbyes to friends that the family simply hadn't had time to see. He thought of Ahsan, still in prison, and of the promise he had made to stand by him and watch over his family. He felt as if he were abandoning his friend.

John and Mary didn't know whether they would ever see their friends — or Central Asia — again. Most of all, they worried about who would take their place. So many had yet to hear the Good News, and with Ahsan in jail and the Harpers gone, their city was losing two of its brightest witnesses. Their hearts broke at the thought that no one was left to carry on their work.

A warm breeze blows across the front porch of the Harpers' century-old farmhouse in the Missouri countryside. John sits quietly, sipping a glass of ice water. He ponders the "Why did this happen?" question he's just been asked.

"It didn't make sense. We were in the beginning of the prime of our ministry," John admits. "We knew the language. We knew the culture. I told Mary it's not supposed to end

this way. ... But I know it's not the end. The Lord has other plans for us.

"He's not sitting up in heaven saying, 'Oh no. I didn't see this coming. What am I going to do now? Where's plan B?' God foreordained Mary's ALS."

John said he's never asked why — and he's never doubted God's love.

"The very first morning I woke up after we knew that Mary had ALS, I was reading Romans 5:8 and it says, 'But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' And God just screamed in my heart, 'Don't you ever doubt My love for you, don't ever doubt My love for you.'

"I've never asked God, 'Why did You do this?' because He is going to give me the same answer that He gave Job. He's going to say, 'Where were you when I created the heavens and the earth?' I don't have an answer for that. So I'm just going to try to live by faith."

'I wish it was me'

"I'm not going to say it's easy. ... I wish it was me instead of her."

Doctors confirmed Mary's ALS diagnosis in January 2013. There is no cure or treatment. Most patients live three to five years, though some have survived for 10 or more.

"Absolutely I pray and ask God to heal her. I need her," John said. "When you've been married for 20 years, you kind of become each other. She's a little bit of me and I'm a little bit of her. I don't just love my wife, I like her, I like doing stuff with her."

But if healing doesn't happen, the Harpers are planning for the future. They've already remodeled their bathroom to make it wheelchair accessible. Mary is teaching Lindsey and Jessica to cook, do laundry and help run the house. Mary can still do most things for herself. The girls do help braid and brush her hair, and John rubs coconut oil into her back and arms. It's part of a supplement regimen called the "Deanna Protocol" that has helped some ALS patients slow the disease's progression.

Mary said there are days when the potential eventualities of ALS hit her hard, like things she might miss doing with her daughters. In those moments, Mary leans on John's faith.

"Faith is one of his giftings," she said. "Whatever it is — financial situations, ministry problems — God is going to see us through. He just knows it, believes it."

"I don't know what the end is going to be," Mary said. "Right now I need to focus on teaching my girls and making the most of the time that I have with them. ... My hope is in Christ. I know whatever the end is, I'll be in heaven."

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



IMB photo

Men walk the market in the Central Asian city where the Harpers served; nearly all of them carry Muslim prayer beads, a physical manifestation of the spiritual darkness in the city.

'Significant **impact**'

Beeson receives Lilly grant to strengthen quality of preaching

Samford University's Beeson Divinity School has been awarded a grant of \$499,983 by the Lilly Endowment Inc., as part of its Pilot Initiative to Strengthen the Quality of Preaching program.

David Hogg, associate dean of academic affairs and associate professor of divinity at Beeson, will direct the five-year program. The project is designed to strengthen preaching through the use of new course offerings, innovative pulpit exchanges and quality peer groups of pastors and current master of divinity students.

In addition, the divinity school will host special conferences for

the members of all peer groups.

The program will be in keeping with divinity school benefactor Ralph W. Beeson's belief that the school should prepare "pastors who can preach."

The grant is designed to continue to improve the quality of preaching through peer groups after the seminary education is ended.

Learning from peers

"Peer groups of pastors and current students will be assembled under the leadership of either a faculty member or trusted pastor/alum currently serving in the ministry," said Hogg, who designed the grant proposal. "These groups will allow local ministers

and divinity students to improve their preaching by learning from each other."

The goal of the program is for the peer groups to become self-perpetuating and continue beyond the life of the grant, Hogg said.

J. Bradley Creed, Samford's provost and executive vice president, said receiving the grant is an example of how schools like Samford "are engaging and building upon their historic missions as faith-based institutions of higher education. Beeson Divinity School plays a central role in this aspect of Samford's institutional identity."

Hogg also noted the new divinity course offerings.

"Although Beeson already integrates the study and practice of preaching in courses dedicated to the discipline, the school will add three new preaching electives," he said.

New courses

The new courses will be preaching during the Civil Rights era, the relationship between preaching and social/political issues and a course that will help students appreciate "the preachability of the entire curriculum," he said.

Other components of the initiative will include visiting professors and increasing Beeson's pool of adjunct professors. (Samford)

'God is still in the saving business'

(continued from page 1)
to Christ. The young man had not planned to attend the event but saw the stadium lights on and — being a former football player — decided to stop in and see what was going on.

Another story that caught Swords' attention was that of a man who encouraged his unsaved sister-in-law to attend the event.

She did not go but agreed to listen over the phone. The man kept a check to make sure she was still listening, but after about 20

minutes she was no longer on the other end of the phone. He looked down and saw his sister-in-law kneeling at the altar ready to be saved — before Gage had even concluded his message.

"There were so many prayers answered of those who had been praying for lost family members and friends who got saved," Gage said. "God is still in the saving business, and He still uses crusade evangelism to reach multitudes for Christ." (Neal Embry contributed)



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PASTOR: North Gardendale Baptist Church, Gardendale, Ala., is seeking a bivocational or full-time pastor. Send resume to: dl1308@bellsouth.net, or P.O. Box 1308, Gardendale, AL 35071, ATTN: Pastor Search.

PASTOR: Axis First Baptist Church is seeking a God-led, spirit-filled individual for the position of pastor. Send resumes to: P.O. Box 98, Axis, AL 36505.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Monroeville, Ala., is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumes to: Pastor Search Committee, 1801 Sawyer Drive, Monroeville AL 36460.

MINISTER OF MUSIC: Parkway Baptist Church in Goodlettsville, Tenn., a suburb of Nashville, is seeking a full-time minister of music. Resumes may be sent to: ken@parkwaybc.net.

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Want to know God?

Pastor Bill Pritchett
Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia

On Aug. 2, 1876, Wild Bill Hickok was shot dead while playing poker in Deadwood, in the Black Hills, Dakota Territory. He was holding a pair of aces and eights, which came to be known as a dead man's hand. Hickok's hand is symbolic of the life that a person lives when they live life separated from God. Paul writes, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

The idea of deadness suggests a person is living apart from the source of life and is helpless to do anything about it within himself. However, the human plight serves only to amplify in magnitude both the power and mercy a person can experience by the grace of God.

God is so rich in mercy that He willingly offers His grace to the sinner. "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift" (Eph. 2:8).

A gift can be a real surprise and such a gift from God can catch a person off guard. Why would God offer you such a gift? Wait. There must be strings attached. No, salvation is rooted in the unwarranted, unconditional love of God. Since a person dead to God can do nothing to help himself, grace is his only hope. Grace enters into your situation of sin and death as a force that will yield a harvest of a new life filled with good works.

While such an amazing gift is offered to you, God's grace is never imposed upon you; rather it must be received by faith.

What is faith, you ask? Faith is trust, an openness of mind, heart and life to God to receive all He has to give and to surrender that which He demands. You can trust God because God approached you first, laying this amazing hand on the table before you; not a dead man's hand, but an offer of eternal life through repentance and faith in His Only Son — Jesus Christ. A gift is not really a gift until it is received, opened and put to use.

Today why not receive God's gift of salvation by turning to God and putting your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ?



'Girls only' time



WMU photo

Carmen Bruce (standing back left), an Acteens leader at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Enterprise, seeks to help girls understand the importance of personal involvement in missions.

GAs, Acteens help teach next generation to be true disciples of Christ

It was as a GA (Girls in Action) at First Baptist Church, New Brockton, that Carmen Bruce remembers "God beginning to speak to my heart and the Holy Spirit began to show need for the Savior."

"If I hadn't been a GA I really don't think that I would have understood the importance of personal involvement in missions," Bruce said.

"I also would not have become aware of the cooperative effort that we as Southern Baptists share in working together to carry out the command of the Great Commission."

To this end, Bruce sees GAs and Acteens as organizations that teach the next generation to be true disciples of Christ.

"I wish children's and youth leaders in all churches, regardless of size, could understand they can have GA and Acteens programs and see the importance of these ministries."

Reflecting God's glory

"The need for a 'girls only' time is also very important," Bruce noted. "This also helps us fulfill the biblical method of teaching found in Titus 2. Acteens can help our young girls learn how to be young women of

grace, virtue and reflect the glory of God."

Her passion from God to minister to girls living near her and far away led Bruce to become an Acteens leader at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Enterprise.

"I enjoy seeing young girls become more active in serving," Bruce noted.

"But most of all, I enjoy working with Acteens because I know that is what God has called me to do."

In Acteens, girls not only learn about ministry opportunities, but they also put their faith into action.

For example, on Oct. 17,

2012, the Mount Pleasant Baptist Acteens group announced to their church body the beginning of a new ministry called Handing Her Hope (HHH) and adopted it as their project for 2012-2013. HHH is a ministry of Mount Pleasant Baptist in conjunction with the church's Moldova missions project, which offers the hope of Jesus Christ in the midst of the darkness of human trafficking.

HHH raises awareness of the reality of human trafficking, encourages prayer for victims along with those vulnerable to trafficking and raises financial support for Christ-centered, anti-

trafficking missions projects in the country of Moldova.

As of June 2013, the financial support raised by the Mount Pleasant Baptist Acteens totaled \$3,669.52.

Making disciples

The Acteens earned the money by making, packaging and marketing a hair tie/bracelet product called Marianna's — named in honor of a young Moldovan girl rescued from human trafficking.

"Our churches need true disciples," Bruce said. "GAs and Acteens are an important part of that discipleship." (WMU)



Photo courtesy of Circlewood Baptist Church

PATTERSON MARKS 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, honors Winton Patterson for 40 years of service as minister of music Sept. 29. A churchwide reception was held in honor of Patterson and his wife, Betty. Herbert Thomas is pastor.

Women recruited to desegregate Carver School of Missions, Social Work in 1950s honored

Baylor University's School of Social Work recently recognized two daughters of the segregated South who served as forerunners for change and equality when they broke the color barrier at the Carver School of Missions and Social Work in Louisville, Ky., in 1955.

Freddie Mae Bason and Verlene Farmer Goatley recalled their story at a Baylor School of Social Work board of advocates meeting and were honored during a worship service that evening.

Guy Bellamy, who directed the department of work for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), recruited the two African-American women to desegregate Carver in 1955.

This came on the heels of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, which declared racial segre-

gation in public schools unconstitutional.

The women, both members of the National Baptist Convention's Women's Auxiliary, were aware of the social ramifications of integrating an all-white private school.

God's provision

Bason took the challenge head-on with little fear.

"I did not feel intimidated. I felt no danger," she said. "For me, God was taking care of me."

Goatley was pleasantly surprised at the warm hospitality shown by fellow classmates and grateful for God's provision throughout her time at the school.

Carver students played a pivotal role in helping Bason and Goatley adjust to the challenges of being the only African-Americans in an otherwise all-white student body.

"They always went out of their way to let us know we were welcome here," Bason said.

For Goatley, the Carver School experience marked the beginning of a life devoted to seeking God continually through prayer.

"God can do anything but fail, and I thank God for the power of prayer," she said.

Upon completion of their studies, Bason and Goatley continued to break down the walls of racial segregation in church leadership. (ABP)



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Fighting against poverty



ABP photo

Colleen Burroughs (right) meets with Malawi President Joyce Banda in Montgomery.

Alabamian surprised by encounter with Malawi leader

Colleen Burroughs went into her unlikely meeting with Joyce Banda in September with a lot of built-in admiration for the headline-generating president of Malawi. But she came away with even more respect and inspiration when the encounter took a spiritual turn.

"I'm still walking around with chill bumps," Burroughs said a few days after her Sept. 20 one-on-one with Banda in Montgomery. "She's a woman of God walking around feeding her children and feeding the children of Malawi."

Burroughs admits Malawi has

a special place in her heart. She grew up a missionary kid there and today is president and founder of

Watering Malawi, which advocates for clean water and other systemic solutions to poverty and hunger in the African nation.

But there's also a lot of admiration and praise for Banda around the globe these days. Earlier in October, she made international headlines by announcing the government sold

its jet, a Dassault Falcon 900EX, for \$15 million to help feed the estimated 1 million suffering from food shortages.

She also cut her own salary by 30 percent and has pledged to sell

35 Mercedes Benz vehicles used by cabinet members, according to news reports.

In March, she was among four Africans praised by President Barack Obama at the White House for meeting extreme political, social and humanitarian challenges head-on — and with some success.

"They exemplify the progress we're seeing in Africa," Obama said. "All of them have had to deal with some extraordinary challenges."

On Sept. 24, she told the United Nations General Assembly that Malawi is on track to achieve four of eight U.N. Millennium Development Goals: developing global partnerships for development, improving environmental sustainability, combating diseases and reducing child mortality rates.

Banda also told the assembly

Malawi is unlikely to meet the goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, universal access to education and ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women.

But the economic growth rate is increasing through "painful but necessary reforms" undertaken by the government, Banda told the assembly.

Watering Malawi

In the United States ahead of her U.N. speech, Banda attended private gatherings. Burroughs said she attended the one in Alabama so she could brief Banda about Watering Malawi's activities.

She also told the president that student participants in Passport Inc., where Burroughs serves as executive vice president, have raised \$800,000 toward clean water projects in Malawi. "And I

wanted her to know there are thousands of students who know about Malawi and are interested in clean water there," she added. "She didn't know anything about it."

But Burroughs was in for her own surprise.

The American had brought with her her mother's Bible to show to Banda, who then promptly took it and began to write something in it. When Burroughs got it back, she was stunned.

It began with a reference to a passage in Exodus in which Aaron and Hur helped Moses raise his staff to remain victorious against the Amalekites. The rest confirmed to Burroughs that Banda truly understood the role Watering Malawi was having in her country.

"Thank you for helping me keep the staff up so that Malawi does not lose the fight against poverty," Banda wrote. (ABP)

"Thank you for helping me keep the staff up so that Malawi does not lose the fight against poverty."

Malawi President
Joyce Banda



Photo courtesy of Judson Baptist Association

JUDSON ASSOCIATION HOLDS BACKYARD BIBLE STUDY

On Sept. 14, Judson Baptist Association had three churches come together for a Backyard Bible Study — Concord Baptist Church, Headland; Haleburg Baptist Church, Columbia; and Sardis Baptist Church, Abbeville. The team of volunteers shared the gospel with about 35 people and served 210 hot dogs. George Thompson is director of missions.

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Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Attendance, diversity increases for Huntsville church

In the two years since Hillsboro Heights Baptist Church, Huntsville, transformed into All Nations Church, worship service attendance has increased 25 percent and people of about a dozen ethnicities attend, said Pastor Larry Inman.

And since becoming a fully functioning multicultural, multiethnic church, other positive changes have happened as well. "Our Awana program has exploded," Inman said, noting between 50 and 60 students now attend.

Before its transformation in 2011, the aging church in a changing community had voted to become intentionally multicultural and multiethnic in an effort to better minister to its community. One of the first orders of business after that decision was made was a name change. The name "All Nations Church" derives itself from Matthew 28, and the church's motto is "Uniting Cultures in Faith."

The Madison Baptist Association church recently conducted four block parties at apartment complexes in the community, as well as a backyard Bible club in summer 2013.

In addition the church has a 30-minute weekly program that airs on a local cable TV station, and the community as a whole is becoming more aware of the church, Inman noted.

During its Awana program, All Nations provides English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for the parents of children who attend Awana. "We're looking for ways to connect to parents on Wednesday night," Inman said.

The church is currently gearing up for its Trunk or Treat event Oct. 31 for the community, where typically 1,000 people pass through.

Inman noted that the church also plans to host a community Thanksgiving meal Nov. 28 in its fellowship hall in partnership with Manna House in Huntsville.

Inman said he is "more than willing" to be a resource for pastors in changing communities whose church may be considering the same direction All Nations has taken. For more information, visit allnationshuntsville.org or call 256-539-3729. (Julie Payne)



Photo courtesy of All Nations Church

'Pilgrimage of promise'

Alabama evangelist starts walk across Texas

Rick Hagans hasn't been the same since a little boy in a garbage dump in Mexico asked him for a pair of shoes.

"We were on the last day of our annual Christmas missions trip when a little fella, no more than 5 or 6 years old came up to me and asked if he could swap the toys we'd given him for a simple pair of shoes," Hagans said. "His own shoes were tattered with his toes sticking out well beyond the soles, and his were among the best in the dump."

Hagans promised the little boy he'd come back with shoes for everyone — and to raise the money, he walked across the state of Alabama the following summer.

That was in 1996. In the years since, Hagans — who founded Harvest Evangelism in Opelika — has walked across more than 34 states, covering more than 8,000 miles and collecting more than 400,000 pairs of shoes. One year he walked the entire Trail of Tears.

He calls these walks a "pilgrimage of promise." And he's at it again. On Oct. 15, he started walking across Texas.

Between now and Thanksgiving, Hagans will make his way along the cattle trail made famous by Larry McMurtry's "Lonesome Dove." He started his route on the Rio Grande and will head north through San Antonio, Austin, Fort Worth and on to

Wichita Falls — a total of about 700 miles.

Hagans said he doesn't rely on a specific route during his walks.

"If the road to my left looks more interesting than the road on my right, I'll probably take it," he said.

He walks 20–25 miles each day and then hitchhikes back to a van he travels in.

"Seeing who will pick me up is part of the adventure," he said. "You can't imagine the tales I have where someone picked me up and were shocked to find I'm a preacher. That's become a big part of my pilgrimage. I pray for divine appointments and God never seems to disappoint."

Hagans said he's prayed with people out on the highways in every state he's crossed.

"Sometimes the road seems more sacred than the sanctuary," he said. "I guess that shouldn't surprise me — Jesus seemed to share the same sentiment."

Hagans said when he was able to find that boy after returning to Mexico and put new shoes on his feet, he felt more like Jesus than he'd ever felt like while preaching a sermon.

"We've taken tractor trailers full of shoes to Mexico and given away tens of thousands here in our own needy neighborhoods," Hagans said.

For more information, visit harvestevangelism.org. (TAB)

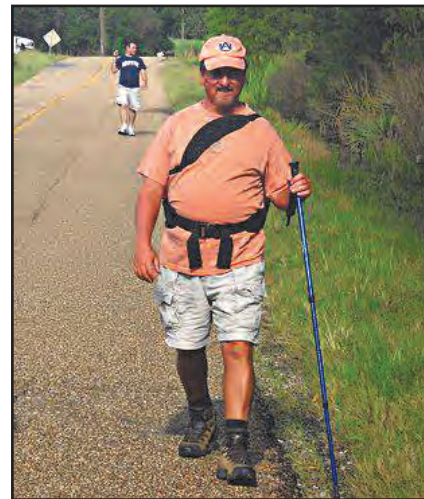


Photo courtesy of Rick Hagans

Since 1996, evangelist Rick Hagans has walked across 34 states to raise money for shoes for the needy.

70% of Alabamians die without a will. YOU don't have to be one of them.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I don't have a will.



I have a will.



I have a will.



I have a will.

We are told that a staggering 7 out of 10 Alabamians do not have a will. The ramifications of this on children, surviving spouses, taxes and fees are immeasurable. We, at The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, want to provide some "layman friendly" estate planning information that can enable you to protect your family and be a wise steward of what He has entrusted to you. Don't be part of the 70%. Take the first step towards completing a Christ-Honoring Estate Plan by completing the information below and mailing this ad to The Baptist Foundation of Alabama.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 20

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson

Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

THE POWER TO MEET NEEDS

John 6:5–11, 26–31, 47–51

Perhaps no other story in the Bible, other than the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, demonstrates the deity of Jesus as clearly as the feeding of the 5,000. Only God could do what occurred on that day in Israel. This story is popular with children and adults and is so important in the life and ministry of Jesus that it is the only miracle, other than the resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels.

See the Need (5–7)

Jesus has taught a large crowd of people for a long time. The hour is late, the people are famished and they need something to eat. Jesus is concerned for the people spiritually as well as physically. He has spent time teaching the people and now He is concerned for their physical need because they're hungry.

Jesus sets out now to teach Philip and His disciples some very important lessons. Jesus asks Philip, "Where can we get enough food to feed this crowd of people?" Philip quickly calculates and responds that 200 denarii (eight months' wages) would not be enough to feed such a great crowd of people. We should have compassion for others like Jesus. Christians need to cultivate an awareness of people and their needs, both spiritual and physical needs. Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to see the need.

Look for Resources (8–11)

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, introduces a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Andrew's point is that the boy's tiny meal is inadequate to feed the 5,000 hungry men. Add women and children, the number may have been 20,000 total hungry people. Despite the size of the crowd, Jesus proceeds in an orderly fashion, seating the people in preparation for the meal.

It is one thing to recognize a legitimate need. It is an altogether different thing to do something about it. We should seek to meet people's needs like Jesus. First do

what only you can do. You do not work where you work or live where you live by accident. Jesus places His disciples strategically so He can work through them to meet people's needs. Second trust Jesus to do what only He can do. Jesus loves to demonstrate His power and sufficiency in our lives. Sometimes He allows problems to invade our lives that are far beyond our abilities or resources to handle. Why? He wants us to look to Him. He wants us to come to the end of us and find Him right there.

Jesus takes a little lunch that could hardly feed a young boy and He feeds a crowd of thousands. Jesus uses what's available and miraculously satisfies the hunger of the entire crowd.

Share the Gospel (26–31)

Jesus says the people are seeking Him for the material benefit that He gave, whereas they should seek Him because they saw miraculous signs that point to His divine nature and identity as Messiah. Jesus capitalizes on this opportunity and teaches them they need to trust Him as Messiah.

After we serve people in Jesus' name, we should seek to share the gospel with them. Every Christian is commanded to share the gospel with non-Christians; therefore, every Christian needs to be equipped to introduce non-Christians to Jesus. Are you prepared to share the gospel?

Follow Through (47–51)

Some of the people are grumbling about Jesus teaching that He came down from heaven. Some of the people still have questions about eternal life and Jesus patiently answers their questions. He teaches them that eternal life comes through faith in Him. He is the true bread of heaven and He will die to secure the redemption of sinners.

After sharing the gospel, it is important to follow up. Teaching is an essential component of evangelism. We need to keep sharing the gospel and answering their questions so they can have an accurate understanding of the gospel.

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange

Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

1 Samuel 24:1–6, 12, 14

Today's passage is an example of a "doublet," a story told twice in a book of the Bible (read 1 Sam. 26).

The author of Samuel, whom some scholars call the "Deuteronomistic Historian" (he is thought to be responsible for putting together Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, not including Ruth), often relied on earlier sources (see for example 1 Kings 11:41), which could explain why he had this story in two different forms. He uses the doublet to emphasize David's justice and mercy toward Saul with disregard for Saul's instability and consuming envy of David.

Saul's repentance at the end of both incidents might be genuine, but it is also fleeting.

Verses 1–2

En-gedi means "spring of the kid." One can visit it today: the waters of the spring that flow east into the Dead Sea form a lovely oasis known for its rare and isolated ecosystem, including species of freshwater crabs.

The location of "the Rocks of the Wild Goats" is unknown. Wild ibexes still live in the area, as they did centuries ago.

Verse 3

"To cover his feet" probably means "to relieve himself." Feet are sometimes a euphemism for genitals in the Old Testament. For some possible examples, see Exodus 4:25; Ruth 3:4, 7; Isaiah 6:2; Ezekiel 16:25.

Verses 4–6

The quote that David's men attribute to the LORD is unfamiliar to us, but it is clear that they understand it to be divine providence that Saul has come into the very cave where they are hiding. Surely God is giving Saul to David as a gift, and if David won't take advantage of it, they are prepared to do so (see v. 7). David might agree that it is the LORD's doing (as does Saul himself: 24:18) but for a different purpose.

The narrator suggests that David is so stealthy that he can cut Saul's cloak while it is still attached to Saul. Afterward David regrets the deed, as if he has harmed Saul himself. "The LORD's anointed" is literally "the LORD's messiah." This will become a standard way to refer to the kings of Judah and to others who have not been anointed literally but whom God has appointed to a special task (see Isa. 45:1). Some translations write "LORD" in small capitals, as I have done, to indicate that the Hebrew say "Yahweh" with an instruction to substitute "Adonai" ("Lord").

Verse 12

David says that God is the one who takes revenge (see Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; also Matt. 5:38–40, 43–48; Luke 6:29–30); it is not David's (or anyone else's) prerogative. The words turn out to be prophetic. This encounter and its doublet in chapter 26 contain the last meetings between David and Saul before the Philistines kill Saul's sons on Mount Gilboa and Saul falls on his own sword there (chapter 31).

Verse 14

David's self-abasement might conceal a jab at Saul: does Saul really think he needs to pursue a dead dog, or a flea, with an entire army?

The lesson we can take from this story is striking, even if we already know it. (Isn't that the way God so often works?) David has no assurance that his actions will change Saul's mind about him, and in fact they do not.

Nevertheless David acts mercifully toward an enemy. He does not use an opportunity to harm his enemy, no matter how tempting it might be, and even regrets cutting his cloak.

What an important lesson to take, not only in a time of fractious political battles and worries about terrorism, but also in a time, like all times, in which temptations to answer wrong with wrong come at us where we live, work and — dare we say it? — worship.

Christian Crossword

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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		47					48	
49				50		51		

Across

1. To crush.
4. The Spirit _____ truth.
(1 John 5:6)
6. What all homes in the South have.
8. Wind direction
10. _____ did that which was right. (1 Kings 15:11)
11. If I be _____, then my strength will go.
(Judg. 16:17)
13. A Protestant denomination.
15. Land from which the Lord brought Abram. (Gen. 15:7)
16. Verse or rhyme.
18. A mental disorder.
20. Behold the _____ of God. (John 1:29)
21. _____ Moses lifted up the serpent. (John 3:14)
22. The days that Adam lived were _____ hundred and thirty years. (Gen. 5:5)
23. _____ else!
24. The mother of all living. (Gen. 3:20)
27. Fragrant shrub.
30. Location.
32. Seaman apprentice. (abbr.)

Down

34. Thou shalt make _____ covenant with them. (Ex. 23:32)
35. When the Lord smelled the pleasing _____. (Gen. 8:21)
36. Male cat.
37. Judah is a _____'s whelp. (Gen. 49:9)
39. Curve.
40. And when he had spit _____ his eyes. (Mark 8:23)
41. He _____ meet them. (2 Sam. 10:5)
43. A particular thing. (legal term)
44. King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
45. Seth lived _____ hundred and five years. (Gen. 5:6)
46. Drone.
47. Thou shalt have good _____. (Josh. 1:8)
48. Consumed.
49. So Absalom _____ the hearts of the men of Israel. (2 Sam. 15:6)
50. With regard to.
51. Golf peg.

30. To weep with convulsive heaving.
31. An elementary child's flute.
32. This _____ unto the Lord. (Ex. 15:1)
33. Morning time.
36. Handyman's necessity.
38. And _____ the vine were three branches. (Gen. 40:10)
41. First king of Israelite nation. (1 Sam. 9:17)
42. Mantras.
47. _____ Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old. (Gen. 50:26)
48. One. (Scottish)

T	E	E	R	E	S	T	O	I	E
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MUSIC

Media reviews



Devin McGlamery

Love Is a Verb
Stowtown Records

If you know Devin McGlamery, then you'd expect nothing but a high-energy recording. From the age of just 17 he's been burning up the main stage with The Dixie Melody Boys, Karen Peck & New River and, lately, with Ernie Haase & Signature Sound. Now his "Love Is a Verb" shows an equally intense yet sometimes surprisingly mellow side of McGlamery.

Produced and arranged by Wayne Haun, this album offers some great vocal collaborations as well. The group Beyond The Ashes joins in on the title song. Super-hot bluegrass duo Dailey & Vincent appears on "From My Rags to His Riches." It's a reunion of Karen Peck & New River for "While I Still Can." Russ Taff is spotlighted on the Statesmen classic "Up Above My Head." Then there's

Signature Sound to round out the recording with "That's Why."

These 12 songs are a good blend of both classics and fresh material. The word "bluesy" kept coming to mind as I listened through the recording several times — but no, it's not a blues CD. Instead it's just McGlamery's way of feeling the messages and then translating them with his own personal style. By the time you hear Ronny Hinson and Mike Payne's "When He Was on the Cross (I Was on His Mind)" or Phil Cross' "In the Depths of the Sea" or the very touching Cindi Ballard/Wayne Haun song "Waiting at Home," you'll understand the passion with which he has portrayed each selection. All in all this is a good, eclectic combination with depth of messages for us all song after song. (Rick Sharp, TAB)

Matt Papa

Look & Live
2 Cities Music

Matt Papa released his first project on his independent record label 2 Cities Music on Sept. 17. Papa will launch a fall tour to support the new record, the Look & Live Tour 2013.

This is not your run-of-the-mill four-chord "God is good/magnificent/full of grace" praise and worship record we've come to expect from much of the Christian music industry. This is deep stuff — theatrical in its presentation, lyrically convicting, rich and varied musically. That said, the album opener "For Your Glory" is a four-chord wonder, although even here, varied textures and rhythms lift the song head and shoulders above the norm.

Co-produced with Delirious guitarist Stu G — who almost certainly adds much to the creative beauty of the record, not to mention the occasional searing guitar riff — the record manages to present powerfully the gospel message of hope and redemption while touching on real-world



issues like addiction, depression and the tension between worship and idolatry.

If you're looking just to tap your foot and nod your head to rock rhythms, keep looking. But if you'd like more — insightful lyrics, sweeping melodies and intricate rhythms — this may be just what you're looking for. Highly recommended. (Rick Sharp, TAB)

Canton Junction

Show Me Your Way
Difference Records

If you were to handpick a male quartet to take into the recording studio these days, you couldn't do much better than Canton Junction has done with Aaron Crabb, Tim Duncan, Matthew Hagee and Michael Sykes (although Shane McConnell has now replaced Sykes). Collectively these men have garnered more than a dozen GMA Dove Awards, several Grammy nominations and numerous other personal awards and honors.

Among the 14 songs on "Show Me Your Way" are five live performance tracks including "Hold On," the successful radio chart song from the group's first CD. Much of this sophomore release was co-produced by Sykes and Crabb. If that's not enough magic for you, throw in the piano/key-board duties of both Gary Prim and Gordon Mote.

And there are also the always-sweet arrangements of Nashville's Steve Mauldin.

The recording is full of classics such as "I Wouldn't Take Nothin' for My Journey Now," "Dig a Little Deeper in God's Love" and a superb job by bass crooner Tim Duncan on "The Son Shines Down on Me." And make sure you enjoy the wonderful harmonies on "Softly and Tenderly."

When the CD slips away from traditional southern gospel, the message remains strong in "Show Me Your Way," "The Inviting Christ" or "Glorify." (Bob Crawford, *Singing News*)



Featured review

Casting Crowns

The Acoustic Sessions (Vol. 1)
Provident Label Group LLC

Fans of Casting Crowns will welcome their new project, an acoustic remake of some of their favorite songs, along with a couple of new songs, "Delivered" and "Only You Can Satisfy," done in the same acoustic-only format. Inspiration for the new CD came from the well-received acoustic medley portion of their "Come To The Well" tour.

While string arrangements might seem a little foreign as the musical vehicle for some of the old Casting Crowns favorites, I have to say the format works well. If there is a downside, it's that lead singer/songwriter Mark Hall's sometime awkward lyrics are a little more out front, although two decades of hits, including three Grammy Awards, 14 Dove Awards and two American Music Awards have answered any questions about Hall's songwriting skills.

Their "Acoustic Sessions" tour includes Alabama. It already found its way to Tuscaloosa and will reach Huntsville on Oct. 25. That's quite an honor, considering there are only 18 stops on the tour. If at all possible, get out and see this powerhouse Christian band live. (Rick Sharp, TAB)



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BOOK REVIEW

Lost America: What Caring Americans Need to Know

Robert G. Wilkerson. Pinson: Christian Way Press, 2012. 132 pp. (Paperback).

The back of this book declares, "America is on the road to disaster. Unfortunately, many Americans do not see what has been lost or have the vaguest idea of how to fix it." This book, proclaims the author, will point the way. "It is a must read for all caring Americans."

Wilkerson writes well, and this self-published book is well edited for grammar and mechanics. He makes some good points concerning the state of our nation and the actions needed to turn America around.

My problem with the book is that,

although there are 78 footnotes, much of the book is poorly documented, and some information is simply overstated. For example, the author asserts on page 6 that 1 percent of Americans hold 99 percent of this country's wealth — the popular rallying cry of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

After carefully searching through a number of trustworthy sources, the most I could find was 35–42 percent of the wealth in the hands of the wealthiest — certainly indicative of income disparity, but far from the 99 percent cited in the book.

Some serious fact-checking and additional documentation of assertions would have been a very good thing, and might have elevated this book to the position of influence the author obviously hoped it would have. (Martine Bates Sharp, TAB)



If you have a book you would like reviewed, mail a copy to:
P.O. Box 1504, Hartselle, AL 35640.

Beating hunger



BP photo

Pastor Sontash Roraon hurries to feed his pigs, hungry for their morning meal.

Pig farming in India helps pastors support their families, build their communities

Paulus Maharaj had a dream. It was a dream that brought him up close and personal to one of the dirtiest, smelliest jobs in the world — raising pigs.

The smells would turn even the strongest of stomachs, but for Maharaj and a handful of rural Indian pastors, they are the smells of progress, odors that mean their families and communities can better support themselves. That's what Maharaj's dream was all about, and Southern Baptists' gifts through Global Hunger Relief (previously known as the World Hunger Fund) made that dream a reality.

It all began when Maharaj took time away from the overcrowded streets of his hometown to visit the wide-open spaces of village life. A pastor and teacher, Maharaj wanted to encourage other pastors. What he saw in their homes left a lasting impression.

"The pastors, their children eat only rice. They can't afford even milk or vegetables and fruit," Maharaj said. "Many pastors are not able to send their children to school."

People in this area of India typically need no less than 5,000 rupees per month (a little more than \$80) to feed and support their families. The pastors Maharaj saw were making less than 2,000 rupees a month (\$30), if that much.

Most of the pastors relied on their already poor congregations — other villagers like themselves. Depending mostly on crops that struggled to grow in the hard, dusty soil or on livestock prone to sickness and malnourishment, these church members simply could not afford to give much to their pastors.

Maharaj knew the pastors' ministries and families would continue to suffer unless they had help.

"I said to myself, how can I help these people?" Maharaj recalled. "I was thinking, what is the best way to keep their ministries going, to help them maintain financial stability without depending on outside income?"

Maharaj's dream took an interesting turn as he searched at the local vet school for a Thanksgiving turkey for a visiting American friend. There Maharaj heard the deep grunts of a much less attractive animal.

As it happened, the vet school specialized in pig husbandry. The school had scores of stalls packed with the biggest, fattest mama pigs he'd seen in some time, many with squealing babies following closely — a stark comparison to the sickly pigs he'd seen in most villages. He saw so many breeds — black ones, spotted ones, some with large snouts, some with sleek bodies, some with wrinkled.

An idea flickered.

"Someone had told me about raising pigs before, but I didn't think it would work," Maharaj said.

But he said he realized at the school that pig farming "could be the easiest and best way to support the pastors and their families and help them be self-supported."

His dream began to take wings — or rather hooves.

Maharaj and International Mission Board representative Clifton Melek developed a plan to provide pig husbandry training to rural pastors. One thing was lacking — seed money to get the project off and running.

Baptist Global Response, through Global Hunger Relief, was able to answer their call for help.

At first, many pastors hesitated. Did they really want to wake up at dawn every day and collect rancid leftovers to feed their pigs? Was it worth wafting smells and endless squealing and grunting just steps from their houses? What would their neighbors think?

After an awareness day that included a tour of the vet school, 20 pastors decided to participate. For 15 days at the vet school, they learned the basics of raising pigs — feeding, providing shelter, giving immunizations and performing basic medical care.

The pastors received this training plus two starter pigs through Global Hunger Relief. They went back to their villages ready to succeed.

But for most pastors, things got off to a rocky start. Surprisingly a lot of opposition came from church members' interpretation

of a familiar Bible story — the prodigal son. They associated caring for pigs with backsliding.

No one wanted their pastors trudging through pig waste in their most tattered clothing. No one wanted their pastors cleaning stalls covered in mud and swarming with flies. To think of the prodigal son wanting to eat the rancid, discarded food that pigs slop up in seconds was repulsive. How could pastors have time for this and for ministry?

'Have you lost your mind?'

"People mocked me at first," said Kanai Hembrom, a pastor who received training. "They laughed at me and said to me, 'What happened to you? Have you lost your mind?'"

Pastor Sontash Roraon also faced opposition from church members. "They started commenting that this pastor who used to be taking care of the church members is now taking care of pigs," he said.

During monthly meetings with the pastors, Maharaj heard about the opposition and began to wonder if the program would succeed. "I was discouraged, and I asked God, 'God, [if] it is You who gave me this thought and vision, why is this happening?'"

"It was God's direction leading me to be connected with these pastors."

**Paulus Maharaj
pastor and teacher**

Over a year has gone by, and church members and neighbors have changed their tune.

Within months, many of the pigs had five to six babies, increasing the pastors' wealth to at least 25,000 rupees (\$400) — more than 10 times what they need to care for their families for one month.

By the time the pigs were ready to sell in the market (a matter of months), each pig could earn the pastors up to 10,000 rupees (about \$160).

New ways to serve

Rather than hindering ministry, pig farming has opened up new ways for pastors to serve their church members.

"One church member came to me because he owed 40,000 rupees in 15 days and could not pay it," Roraon said. "I went and sold two pigs and was able to give him 20,000 that day."

Doors once tightly shut have opened.

Neighbors noticed how pastors' lives were improving because of the pigs, which grew faster than any they had seen before.

They were healthy, robust and quickly sold.

"The people who are very poor are looking at me and saying, 'If this man can get this kind of income, why can't we?'" Roraon said. "A few of [my neighbors] have already requested for me to provide baby pigs for them to begin raising."

Several pastors have been able to share their expertise and build relationships to share the gospel with people who have not heard it before.

Hembrom has done so well with his pigs that he is known by many as the "pig doctor." He is now called upon to administer vaccines and help other farmers whose animals become sick.

He said happily, "I feel like this is the grace of God that I can go to the communities and do these treatments. ... As my pigs increase, so do my churches."

The impact of Global Hunger Relief goes beyond the 20 pastors initially trained.

After their farms begin to flourish, each is expected to train and provide two pigs to a "Timothy," who will then start his own pig farm. Many pastors have already begun to invest in other farmers and break the hunger cycle in their areas.

Maharaj is grateful to God for His provision.

"It was God's direction leading me to be connected with these pastors. It was God who put this desire in my heart," he reflects. "All glory goes to God."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons. For more information, visit www.globalhungerrelief.com. (BP)