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HYMNS of Thanksgiving



A look at popular Thanksgiving songs rooted in Scripture

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Thanksgiving hymns are a special part of our worship during the holiday season. However, it might surprise those who treasure these songs to find that many of them were inspired not by good times but instead by extremely difficult circumstances.

Timothy George, dean and professor of divinity history and doctrine at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, said the hymns of Thanksgiving remind him that gratitude often comes out of great struggle.

"A lot of our thanksgiving comes out of these periods of wrenching experiences: pain, suffering, sorrow, war and violence," he said. "In the midst of all that's swirling around us, there's an opportunity to lift our hearts in thanksgiving to God."

Suffering and thanksgiving

Paul Richardson, professor of hymnology at Samford, said this connection between suffering and thanksgiving is rooted in Scripture.

George and Richardson discussed the "Hymns of Thanksgiving" in the

Nov. 18, 2011, Beeson Podcast.

"From biblical times to our own, persons have often gained a clearer understanding of the presence of God when they have faced difficulties," Richardson said. "That is reflected in song from the Psalms to those by today's writers."

Though the Psalter has more psalms of lament than of other types, Richardson said we should not assume that rejoicing is the only proper response to suffering or that we can only know God through suffering.

On the contrary, he said, such songs acknowledge that "even complaint rests on trust, and it is often followed in the song of the faithful by thanksgiving."

"The 'righteous,' as the term is

often used in the Psalms, doesn't refer to those whose behavior is morally upright but to those who know they are dependent on God," Richardson said.

The tradition of giving thanks despite troubling situations carries on in many of the hymns that often find their way into Thanksgiving services.

"Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices, Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices."

For example, "Now Thank We All Our God," by Martin Rinkart, was written during Germany's Thirty Years War (1618–1648). Rinkart was a Lutheran minister

in his native city of Eilenburg, a walled city that became a haven for refugees from the surrounding country. As the war progressed, the besieged city suffered from famine and then the plague, which claimed

8,000 lives in 1637, including Rinkart's wife and other clergymen. Historians estimate that Rinkart conducted services for as many as 50 people a day until the number of daily deaths required mass burials.

In the face of these hardships, Rinkart wrote the familiar words of thanks, based on the apocryphal text Ecclesiasticus 50:22–24:

Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices, Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;

Though written originally as a table grace, today the hymn remains popular for worship, especially at Thanksgiving.

"It has always been remarkable to me that given the situation he was in, Rinkart's chosen expression was thanks," Richardson said. "He brings together the theological, the doxological and the very personal elements of Christian faith all in one tremendous hymn."

Another familiar hymn, "We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's" (See 'Hymns,' page 8)

Baptists bring relief to typhoon-devastated Philippines

In the wake of Typhoon Haiyan — which left the Philippines battered and without easy access to relief supplies Nov. 8 — Southern Baptists have been at the leading edge to meet the needs of the hurting.

A specialized disaster relief team assisted people with immediate survival needs, said Pat Melancon, managing director of disaster re-

sponse and management for Baptist Global Response (BGR). The group that followed was to make detailed assessments and formulate a longer-term strategy for helping survivors rebuild their lives.

BGR has released an initial \$15,000 in relief funds to humanitarian partners who are focusing their efforts on three areas: Tacloban, which is the hardest-hit area,

and northern Cebu and Panay provinces, said Jeff Palmer, BGR's executive director. Baptist churches in the Philippines and Filipino teams trained in disaster relief will be working alongside Southern Baptist workers in efforts focusing on immediate needs such as water, food and shelter.

"For Christians, every disaster is (See 'A call,' page 9)

COMMENT

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Thanksgiving Day most Alabama families will gather around a table boasting a special dish or two for their annual Thanksgiving meal. Before the turkey is cut or the cranberry sauce dipped, heads will bow and hands will be held as families offer thanks to God for His blessings and presence during the past year.

Deuteronomy 8:20 commends this practice when the writer urges Israel to “remember all the ways which the Lord thy God led thee.” Hopefully Christians acknowledge God’s blessings every day but once a year it is as if the nation pauses to remember and give thanks.

In various ways practically every family will echo the words Jesus taught His disciples to pray when He instructed them to ask God to “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). It does not matter if the table is overflowing with bounty reflecting a prosperous year or the meal has been provided, in part, with food stamps, the plea to God for daily bread is common to all.

Recognizing that physical life requires the shared necessity of food has a way of softening differences between rich and poor, of lessening the prejudices between races and cultures. All humanity must have daily bread. Without it one dies.

Acknowledging the Lord’s role

Giving thanks to God for that daily bread acknowledges the Lord’s role in our personal history. While some may point to their own efforts in earning their bread, it is God who empowered and equipped them to do the various tasks that resulted in bread.

Others may point to the laws of nature that produces the miracle of food growing from seeds but no one should ever lose site of the God who is nature’s lawmaker (Ps. 65:9–13).

Jesus was concerned about the physical needs of people including their need for food. Matthew 14:13–21 tells the story of the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus saw the multitudes that followed Him to the remote side of the Sea of Galilee, He had “compassion” on them. One of the things He did was order the disciples to feed them. The meagerness of two fish and five pieces of bread, with the blessing of the Lord, was more than enough to feed them all.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

We know when we ask God to “give us this day our daily bread,” we are praying for something that God desires.

Each word of the Model Prayer has special meaning.

“Give” illustrates dependence on God. One does not ask God to lend us bread or to sell it for humanity cannot bargain with God. The word is an imperative as if one is begging God to please give us bread.

“Us” is plural, not singular. One prays for bread for all, not just for me. The word “us” reminds of God’s command to live with charity and compassion toward the poor and needy. In Alabama almost one in five live in poverty (19 percent) and almost that number live with hunger (18.2 percent), according to the most recent statistics.

For the last year of record an average 920,365 Alabamians received SNAP benefits each month (formerly called food stamps). When the word “us” is prayed, one prays for their daily bread as well as one’s own.

“This day” emphasizes dependence on God. Scholars have argued for hundreds of years over the correct translation of the Greek word *epiousion* because it is used only here. Some say it is bread for today. Others believe it is bread for tomorrow. All agree that Jesus and the disciples lived in a hand-to-mouth culture and the direction of the word is for one to depend

on God like the Israelites in the wilderness did. This does not rule out storing up bread for the future but one’s trust is always in the God who provides and not in one’s self.

Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1–4) differs from Matthew’s at this point. Luke’s version reads “each day.” Luke’s prayer is for today’s bread today and tomorrow’s bread tomorrow. Still, like Matthew, the primary teaching is continual dependence of God.

“Our” points to honesty and industry by the recipient. One’s bread is to be honestly obtained. It is not bread gained by deceit. Proverbs 20:17 warns that “food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel.”

That verse applies to those who take too much as well as those who do too little. Likewise bread is not to be gained by idleness.

“Bread” recognizes necessities. The prayer is not for cake as tasty as that may be. The prayer is for God to care for the necessities of life — in this case food. Desires and dreams may abound and one may pray for them as well, but the Model Prayer begins at a more basic level. It begins with a prayerful plea for the necessities — for bread.

As prayer for our daily bread is offered around the Thanksgiving table, God is worshipped. His faithfulness represented by the bread spread on the table reminds us of God’s faithfulness. But what about our faithfulness?

Is thankfulness for daily bread expressed only at Thanksgiving or other special days or is it a daily experience? Is our labor honest and industrious so the bread we eat is ours? It is as sinful to take someone else’s bread by some business scheme as it is for someone to abuse community concern.

Shaping society

Is the prayer for “our” daily bread supported by concern for the hungry in the community? Providing bread in the form of Thanksgiving meals is good. Helping shape a society where everyone has opportunity to earn their own Thanksgiving bread is better.

As we ask God to “give us this day our daily bread” this Thanksgiving, may we understand that even our prayer calls us beyond ourselves and to a life that demonstrates God’s concern for the wellbeing of all His created children.

Add the blessings of the Lord and it is no telling what miracle the world might see.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

IMPRESSIVE ARTICLE

The article titled “‘Mom, I don’t want you to die’” in the Oct. 17 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* was very impressive.

John and Mary Harper are un-

known to me, but I surely sympathize with them and their children.

Grace Wright
Montgomery, Ala. 📧

Email Letters to the Editor to news@thealabamabaptist.org.





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

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'Seize the opportunity'

Alabama pastor shares firsthand account of working with IMB

By **Richard L. Richie**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Since June 2010, I have had the privilege of serving our Lord, Southern Baptists and Alabama Baptists as a trustee of the International Mission Board (IMB). I am one of 84 trustees on the board and one of five trustees representing Alabama.

The past four years have afforded me a firsthand opportunity to observe and work with the IMB. As a pastor, I led my churches to become involved in international missions, adopt international missionaries and support the IMB through financial giving. However, I was not completely aware of the true magnitude of the work and difference that the IMB is making in the world. Since becoming a trustee, my eyes have been opened. I have found that the IMB is an excellent, if not the best, missions organization in the world. The IMB and its missionaries are highly respected, revered and admired throughout the world. No other missions organization trains, sends and financially supports its missionaries like the IMB. The executive and support staff members are highly professional and extremely committed to their call and vision of reaching the lost world for Jesus Christ. The field missionaries are highly trained, very talented and extremely innovative in their approaches to reach people for Christ. Finally, IMB logistics professionals ensure that all of the missionaries are well equipped and provided for, helping to meet most if not all of their basic needs. We truly have an impressive missionary corps.

Though we have the most well-equipped and capable missionary force in the world, our mis-

sionaries simply cannot complete their work alone. The missionaries need willing helpers to work side-by-side with them on the missions field. Our missionaries need churches and individuals that are willing to adopt them, partner with them, pray for them and assist them in the conduct of their work via short-term missions trips and projects.



RICHIE

For example, several missionaries in the Czech Republic are presently seeking church teams that would be willing to go to Prague next year to conduct sports camps, Vacation Bible Schools, backyard Bible clubs and block parties. In London, our missionaries have established a thorough adoption process and a website (www.AdoptLondon.com) where churches can choose one of London's 33 boroughs to pray for, research, visit and work with field personnel to eventually plant a church there.

Because London is such a diverse, international community with 190 nations and 300 distinct language groups, our missionaries believe that "if one can reach London, one can reach the world."

Specialized resources

Some missions locations don't require short-term missions teams but require specialized resources for their unique missions platforms. For example, a group of church planters that I met this summer in Portugal are reaching Portuguese men and their families through the game of American football. The missionaries have set up leagues, teams and games as a means of drawing people to Jesus Christ. The thing most needed is ample amounts of new or used football equipment.

God continues to call gifted and talented

men and women from a myriad of locations throughout the world to serve as international missionaries. The current pipeline of potential Southern Baptist missionaries is plentiful. However, the dollars to support those missionaries is diminishing and, in some cases, not currently available.

The Cooperative Program (CP) and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) are the two well-known flagships of our convention's missionary efforts, yet we have member churches who are not even "participating" in our convention by financially giving through these important instruments. How can these churches say that they are fully cooperating churches of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) yet give nothing toward the causes of the SBC? This giving pattern has negatively impacted the capacity of our board to call, train, send, equip and support our missionary corps. Because of these reduced amounts of giving, we are now having to consider possibly reducing the number of missionaries that we are sending overseas. At one point, we celebrated a missionary force of more than 5,600 missionaries. However, we now have less than 4,800 missionaries (and that number is dwindling) because of decreased giving.

I call upon all Southern Baptist churches to rise up and seize the opportunity that we now have before us. We must do whatever we can to increase our financial giving through the CP and LMCO in order to meet the missionary needs and lostness around the world. We must also accept the Acts 1:8 missions call, becoming actively involved in missions both here and abroad.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Richard L. Richie is pastor of Flint Baptist Church, Decatur, and a trustee of the International Mission Board.

Response of Ugandan Missionary Vincent Victours Katongle

EDITOR'S NOTE — In response to an Aug. 1 article titled "Warning other churches" printed in *The Alabama Baptist*, the following information was recently received by the paper from an attorney for Vincent Victours Katongle, a principal in the story. *The Alabama Baptist* has received two other contacts with questions about the article — one phone call and one email. The Aug. 1 article in *The Alabama Baptist* was intended to give readers the tools to evaluate requests for assistance from abroad. *The Alabama Baptist* did not intend to state or suggest that it had determined whether or not Rev. Katongle's activities involved any kind of improper activity. Anyone who read the article in

its entirety would understand that. Nevertheless, in order to clear the air, we are printing the statement from Rev. Katongle. The opinions expressed in the statement are those of its author.

"Following the publication of [The Alabama Baptist] article on Rev. Vincent Victours Katongle, the Missionary to Uganda, [The Alabama Baptist] received several emails and letters on the matter. [The Alabama Baptist] sources were incorrect in their assessment of Rev. Katongle. One of the sources has since retracted her statements and asked forgiveness from Rev. Katongle.

"Rev. Katongle and his ministry Partners, including Union Grove Baptist Church in Opelika, Alabama have over the years minis-

tered to the people of Uganda in several ways. Three Churches, one Grade School, one High School, two Orphanages for children of HIV/AIDS parents have been built. Several thousand people have been won to Christ by visiting missionaries, during a nine day crusade, a team from Union Grove Baptist Church, saw about 1,000 profess faith in Christ.

"Rev. Katongle oversees over 45 Churches all over Uganda. A former muslim, Rev. Katongle professed faith in Christ, while at a muslim theological school, at a young age and was disowned by his family. He was adopted by Caucasian missionary, Helen Smith, from England who sent him to Grade School and Bible College, paving the way for his ministry today.

"Rev. Katongle being a former

muslim has a unique ministry to our muslim brothers in Uganda. Over 80% of converts in his Church are former muslims. This has led to continuing attacks in the country and the media in Uganda. He has survived several attacks on his life but continues to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and provide succor to orphans, widows and other people of need.

"Several Baptist Pastors who would not want to be named have confirmed the work that Rev. Katongle is doing in Uganda. They have visited various churches and orphanages in Uganda and attest to the truth of what the Lord is doing through Rev. Katongle."

— Statement submitted by
Vincent Victours Katongle



Photo courtesy of Mount Gilead Baptist Church

People mingle in the streets of 'Bethlehem' during last year's Walk Thru Bethlehem at Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan. The event allows visitors to experience Jesus' hometown on the night of His birth.

Walk Thru Bethlehem

Mount Gilead to present interactive Christmas experience

By Maggie Walsh
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Mia Jones said she wants her two sons growing up knowing what Christmas is all about. Even though they're young, she wants them to know it's "more than just Santa and presents," she said.

That's why she took them in 2012 to Walk Thru Bethlehem at Mount Gilead Baptist Church, Dothan — along with more than 4,800 other people.

The major theatrical production offers adults and kids alike the opportunity to take steps into the past and walk through Jesus' hometown on the night of His birth.

Walk Thru Bethlehem, set for Dec. 11–15, begins when a robed woman leads a group to the first setting — a small, dimly lit room with greenery and simple wooden benches — where they are greeted with "shalom" by other women in robes and head coverings.

Here each group meets its guide, who sets the stage for the night, explaining life in Bethlehem during the time of Jesus' birth.

Then each group boards a hay-laden trailer that transports them across a large parking lot to the expansive outer walls of Bethlehem. After an altercation with Roman centurions outside the city walls, the group is admitted into the city.

With every step taken, visitors delve deeper into the night when Jesus was born.

Rows of booths with enthusiastic merchants and artisans snake throughout the city. Each booth contains a different good or service, from hand-woven baskets to pottery to a carpenter building crosses.

The guide takes her group from booth to booth, looking for a place for the group members to stay for the night while speaking with various city-dwellers.

With every exchange, group members are told the Christmas story through short accounts intermixed

with bartering and testimonies about life in everyday Bethlehem.

After witnessing a miraculous event, the group is taken to the outer wall of the city where "Samuel" offers shelter as he shares how Jesus "bore God's wrath" for us.

"The manger leads us to the cross, and we pray that the cross leads you to eternal life," he tells the group.

By the time visitors reach the outer gate of Bethlehem, they have experienced the birth of Jesus Christ firsthand, as well as learning about Jesus' crucifixion, before concluding their evening in the Family Life Center with refreshments.

Danny Williams, Mount Gilead Baptist worship pastor and director of Walk Thru Bethlehem, got the idea for the event from Shirley Hills Baptist Church, Warner Robbins, Ga.

He crossed paths with someone from Shirley Hills Baptist at a Life-Way Choir Conference in Marlboro, Mass., and the seed was planted in Williams' mind. When he got home, he approached Mount Gilead's committees and key leaders about the plausibility of such an event.

Four years of serious prayer and preparation later, the first Walk Thru Bethlehem was held.

"Taking on a huge project like this is all about finding right leaders," Williams said.

Twelve committee chairmen coordinate and direct about 300 people within the church to make this event a reality.

Williams said he sees it as a powerful tool for evangelism.

"Lost people aren't coming to our churches anymore, so we've got to find a way to get the gospel to them," Williams said.

Mount Gilead has committed to holding the event for 10 consecutive years. December 2013 will be its fourth event.

For more information or to preregister, visit <http://mgbcdothan.com/ministries/walk-thru-bethlehem>.



Photo courtesy of Mount Gilead Baptist

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Around 8,000 Christians driven from Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria — Islamic extremist Boko Haram insurgents have driven thousands of Christians from areas of Borno state in Nigeria, church leaders said.

Boko Haram attacks that killed at least 150 members of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN) in the past 10 months have caused 8,000 Christians to flee, EYN leaders said.

"Most of our church members affected by these attacks have fled to other communities, and they are in desperate need for help," said Daniel Yumuna, Jos district secretary for EYN.

Militants from the extremist group destroyed 15 places of worship belonging to EYN, the dominant denomination in several states in northeastern Nigeria with 180,000 members.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

Christian leader in Nepal brutally killed by Hindu man

NEPAL — In a remote corner of Nepal, a church elder was summoned three times after midnight to pray for the head of a devout Hindu family. Each time, the wife and mother of Kumar Sardar summoned church elder Debalal Sardar (no relation) to their village home in southeastern Nepal on Oct. 20.

The elder for the Gospel for Asia-supported Believers Church in Balarda village, Saptari District, went to Kumar Sardar's home to pray over the pain he said he was suffering at 1 a.m., 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. After the third time the 36-year-old church elder went to pray for Kumar Sardar, he never returned home.

As Debalal Sardar was praying for the Hindu, Kumar Sardar struck the Christian leader from behind with an iron rod. After beating him with the rod, he used a long, inwardly curved knife to cut his throat, ears, face, chest, arms, legs and back, church leaders said.

They found the Christian's body at Kumar Sardar's home at about 5 a.m., said Krishna Shrestha, the pastor of the victim's church. Police have arrested Kumar Sardar, and the investigation is expected to conclude in November.

Christian shot, killed in Somalia by suspected rebels

MOGADISHU, Somalia — Gunmen shot and killed a Christian in Mogadishu, Somalia, for spreading his faith, the victim's neighbor said.

Two men armed with pistols shot Abdikhani Hassan seven times as he approached his home after closing his pharmacy in Kharkinley District on Oct. 20, his Muslim neighbor told a Morning Star News source. Hassan is survived by his wife, who is pregnant, and five children ages 3 to 12.

Before killing Hassan, one of the assailants told the neighbor, "We have information that Hassan is spreading wrong religion to our people, and we are looking for him," the neighbor recalled.

The men who murdered Hassan are suspected to be Al Shabaab militia. Although Islamic extremists from the rebel group no longer control Mogadishu, a few rebels hiding their militant identity remain in the capital, according to one source.

Leader in Mexico orders mob to attack Christians

OAXACA, Mexico — Traditionalist Catholics abducted, jailed and beat a group of evangelical Christians in Oaxaca, Mexico, in early November on orders from the head of a municipality, according to human rights officials.

A mob sent by San Juan Ozolotepec President Pedro Cruz Gonzalez on Nov. 4, attacked the Christian's unfinished church structure with sledgehammers and pick-axes, and four of the Christians were jailed from Nov. 5 to Nov. 8.

Conflict between the "uses and customs" law — designed to protect the rights of indigenous communities to practice native rites — according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, "has allowed local authorities to violate the rights of members of the local communities. ... In addition, the Mexican government's aversion to involving itself in religious issues has allowed such situations to escalate."

'We're just the hands & feet'

Hueytown church gives Thanksgiving surprise to neighborhood in need, sees walls fall

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Judy McGhee said she's got a lot to be thankful for this year, after Jesus and a new friend pursued her family by way of a big red truck.

McGhee, who lives in an area of Hueytown riddled with drugs, gangs and prostitution, said it was her daughter who first spotted the big red truck driving through their neighborhood.

It belonged to Mike Gordon, minister of outreach and evangelism for Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown. Gordon had been driving through the neighborhood for more than a year, praying over each house.

Slowly he and other church members began to engage the people who lived there — many of whom wondered why he drove through there so much.

Friendships started. Gordon began

picking people up for church on Sundays in his big red truck. And Valley Creek Baptist families began going over every third Saturday to have a cookout for the neighborhood, talk to residents and play with the kids.

"We just wanted to tell them that someone cares about them, that someone loves them," Gordon said.

That sentiment made a connection with McGhee's granddaughter, who struggled with a drug addiction.

"He met her first," McGhee said. "He started coming to the house and checking on her, and we became good friends."

'Y'all will love this church'

And, she said, he always invited them to church.

Finally one day, she went, along with her 9-year-old grandson.

"I loved it so much, that's all I talked about," McGhee said. "I kept telling my



Photo courtesy of Valley Creek Baptist Church

Members of Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown, pack bags of Thanksgiving food for families in a local neighborhood they've become heavily invested in.

family, 'Y'all will love this church, you've just got to go.'"

Her oldest daughter finally gave in, and after she went, she joined the church.

And on Feb. 17, five members of the family were baptized.

"We love it. We love the church, and Bro. Mike has been really special to us. It's been a godsend," McGhee said.

She's not the only one in her neighborhood who feels that way.

This year for the second time, Valley Creek Baptist members packed a bag with a Thanksgiving meal for every family in the neighborhood — 121 bags in total, Gordon said.

Church families adopt a family, then go buy all the items on the list for their bag.

"They have things in them like potatoes, stuffing, macaroni and cheese, dry milk, pumpkin pie and muffin mix," Gordon said.

On Nov. 20, Valley Creek members of all ages packed the bags in assembly-line fashion,

then the church members who donated each bag signed the bag and prayed for the family who would receive it.

Last year, when the families opened the door and saw what was being done for them, several of them burst into tears, Gordon said.

"God could take care of those people without our help, but He chose to use us to go — we're just the hands and feet," he said. "The whole thing is about servanthood. Jesus just asked us to trust Him, and He said, 'If you lift Me up I will draw them unto Myself.'"

Gordon has seen it happen. Two young men who immediately come to mind are Jeremy and Tim, who "got radically saved," he said.

"It's incredible," Gordon said, noting that one day both of the men came to church and began confessing their sins as

people at Valley Creek prayed over them.

"When it was over, Jeremy said, 'I feel so much lighter,'" he said. "Only God can do that."

Gordon challenges his church members to connect on a personal level with members of the community when they go to distribute the bags of food, or when they go for a third Saturday cookout.

It's a challenge they've accepted wholeheartedly.

"God has been opening our eyes to the people of that community," Gordon said.

All kinds of stereotypes can hinder relationships in areas like the one they invest in, but "we're seeing past that," he said. "We're not afraid of the element that's there — we see the people who are there."

Since they've been praying over the community, the drug dealers have gotten to know "Bro. Mike" by name, and one drug house has already been shut down, he said.

"There are prayers being answered ... but Satan rears his head there, too. It's a constant fight in there," Gordon said.

He's burdened for the people there, he said. "They're my sheep."

It's personal for him and for the rest of Valley Creek.

'It's not about the issues'

Church members "are completely encouraged when they see these families come in and they get saved and join our church," Gordon said.

God has opened their hearts to love unconditionally, no matter what people wear or need when they come through the doors of the church, he said.

"It's not about the addiction issues, the ripped jeans, the worn shoes," Gordon said. "It's about showing the love of Christ and His peace, joy and hope." ❏



Photo courtesy of Clayton Scott

RANDOLPH ASSOCIATION HONORS RAMP BUILDING MINISTRY

Ramp Builders Extraordinaire, a ministry supported by Randolph Baptist Association, built 28 ramps for people in Randolph and Clay counties this year. The association provides the materials, and volunteers offer their time and energy to build the ramps. Randolph Association Director of Missions Clayton Scott (far right) honored volunteers (l to r): Jack Gross, Hulond Humphries, Tommy Bishop and James Kendrick at the association's annual meeting Oct. 19.



Photo courtesy of VCBC

Sam Patrick (right) and Meagan Brasher pass bags along the Thanksgiving bag assembly line Nov. 20 at Valley Creek Baptist.

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.

BIRMINGHAM

► The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) of **First Church, Birmingham**, will host a special December program with Rosalie Hunt, former president of Alabama WMU and current board member of *The Alabama Baptist*, on Dec. 3, 10:30 a.m. in the fellowship hall. Hunt will share highlights from her new book, "We've A Story to Tell: 125 Years of WMU." Charles T. Carter is interim pastor. ► **Vestavia Hills Church** will hold "In a Manger Lowly: A Christmas Open House" Dec. 6-7, 10 a.m.-noon. Through an inspiring exhibit of nativity displays from around the world, visitors will be reminded of the miracle of the first Christmas. There also will be live music and refreshments. For information call 205-979-5920 or visit www.vhbc.com. Gary Furr is pastor.

DEKALB

► **New Harmony Church, Albertville**, held "The Last Chance" Judgement House, written by church member Kelly Armstrong, for six nights in October and No-

vember. As a result of the event 35 people were saved and there were 41 rededications. A total of 1,120 people attended. Lynn Darnell is pastor.

MADISON

► **Mable Hill Church, Ardmore**, will hold "Bethlehem Walk 2013" Nov. 29-30, Dec. 1 and Dec. 6-8, 6:30-9 p.m. Experience the sights, sounds and smells of ancient Bethlehem during this guided, outdoor drama. Be a part of the activity of the very first Christmas. No reservation is required but advance notifications of large groups are requested. For information call 256-420-8172 or email mhbc@ardmore.net. Mike Clark is pastor.

MOBILE

► **First Church, Citronelle**, along with choir members from Citronelle United Methodist Church, Memorial Church and Living Word Church will present the drama "A Fairy Tale Christmas" set to the music of Travis Cottrell's "Joy of Every Longing Heart" Dec. 6-7, 7 p.m. The "fairy tale" depicts the story of God creating a world of

Pinocchio and how He intervened to make them real. For information call the church office at 251-866-5793. Elbert Charpie is pastor.

SHELBY

► The 19th annual Meadow Brook Run 5K and fun run will be Dec. 14. **Meadow Brook Church, Birmingham**, will provide volunteers to staff a water stop along the race course. The 5K will be at 9 a.m. and the fun run will be at 10 a.m. For information visit www.meadowbrookruns.org. Chris Jones is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Josh Howell** is the new pastor of **Hopewell Church, Tuscaloosa**. He previously served Vine Run Church, Dry Ridge, Ky. He was licensed by Skyland Boulevard Church, Tuscaloosa, and ordained by Northridge Church, Northport. He holds a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Alabama and a master of divinity from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and his wife, Melissa, have three children.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Windermere sues Missouri Baptist Convention

ROACH, Mo. — After defending itself against litigation for a dozen years, Windermere Baptist Conference Center in Missouri filed a lawsuit Oct. 25 accusing the state convention's lawyer and newspaper of interfering in its business affairs.

Windermere claims in a new lawsuit in Cole County Circuit Court that impediments to updating sewer and water guidelines to meet EPA standards and avoid contaminants being dumped into the Lake of the Ozarks are the latest example of interference by convention leaders. The lawsuit says the impediments have cost the camp more than \$5 million in lost business. They are seeking \$10 million in damages.

For 12 years Missouri Baptist officials pursued litigation against the conference center, costing Windermere \$1.5 million. The convention wanted the ability to elect Windermere trustees or to recover the property directly. The Missouri Supreme Court upheld a ruling in Windermere's favor in 2009.

"We have sought numerous times to resolve this matter outside the courtroom," camp trustees said in a statement. "Unfortunately, recent developments involving water quality at the Lake of the Ozarks have made it impossible for Windermere to continue this approach."

The new lawsuit claims legal tactics by Missouri Baptists prevent Windermere from transferring land containing the current sewer system a nonprofit entity formed to create a public sewer and water system to serve both Windermere and about 200 other users at the Lake of the Ozarks. The lawsuit also charges convention officials with making false statements designed to discourage anyone seeking to help Windermere.

Ky. Baptists vote no-confidence in leader

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The Kentucky Baptist Convention (KBC) passed a symbolic vote of no-confidence in an agency head who recently asked his board to consider dropping a policy against hiring gays. Messengers at the 2013 KBC annual meeting Nov. 12 in Paducah also elected a new slate of 11 directors for Sunrise Children's Services to replace board members who decided against the policy change proposed by President Bill Smithwick on Nov. 8. The new board members include Paul Chitwood, the KBC executive director and outspoken critic of Smithwick's proposal.

For 13 years the agency formerly known as Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children has fought a legal battle over the use of taxpayer funds by ministries that proselytize that began with the firing of a lesbian employee in 1998.

Smithwick told convention messengers that his views on homosexuality have not changed. Convention messengers, however, appeared more concerned that the agency was straying from its Baptist identity.

The no-confidence vote is nonbinding, because only the Sunrise board of directors has the authority to hire or fire. The 11 new board members replace six Sunrise directors who were scheduled to rotate off the board and five others who resigned. Thirteen current members of Sunrise's board remain.

Scottish Baptist to lead relocated seminary

AMSTERDAM — A Scottish Baptist educator and former pastor has been named rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in Amsterdam, a school owned by the European Baptist Federation in the process of relocating from the Czech Republic.

The International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) board of trustees voted unanimously to hire Stuart Blythe, currently interim principal of the Scottish Baptist College. Blythe, a 1989 graduate of the seminary then located in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, will be the first IBTS alum to lead the school established in 1949 to rebuild and unify European Baptists following World War II.

In 2012, trustees responded to declining revenues and costs associated with maintaining an aging campus by voting to establish a Baptist house, embedded in VU University of Amsterdam, to concentrate on doctor of philosophy study in Baptist/Anabaptist studies and mission and practical theology.

The shift also recognizes that local seminaries have sprung up to offer undergraduate and master's degrees, but there is a continuing need for doctoral studies.



Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, TAB

GEORGIA PRIDEMORE

Goodsprings Missionary Baptist Church, Cordova
Walker Baptist Association



PRIDEMORE

FAVORITE VERSES: John 3:16;
Matthew 28:19-20

FAVORITE HYMN: "I'll Tell the World
That I'm a Christian"

HOBBIES: Reading, oil painting,

social networking, cooking

FAMILY STATUS: Married for 58 years
to Robert; children: Jamie, Sherrie
and David; six grandchildren;
two great-grandchildren

If asked what her ministry work is, Georgia Pridemore does not have to think twice. She swiftly responds, "Missions. I've always had a heart for missions." While a young mother of three, she felt called into missions and came to realize that the missions field is in "your own backyard." Through the years, she has taught Sunday School, led Acteens and been active in community service and missions endeavors of the churches she has attended. Now 74, she is currently Woman's Missionary Union director at Goodsprings Missionary Baptist Church, Cordova. She also produces her church's bulletins, organizes fellowship activities and provides publicity for church events.

Q: What influences in your life pointed you to Christ at the

beginning of your faith journey?

A: My mother and second after my mother would be Bible school.

Q: When and how were you led into your ministry work?

A: I don't remember being led as such. I just kind of jumped in. A dear friend in Illinois was in WMU. She had ... a passion for missions.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: Probably more energy than I have. But I mostly do my best. I love it, so it is not a hardship.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: It's hard to tell whether I get it from my ministry work or from Jesus. I have so much joy in my heart, it just bubbles out.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My husband just thinks it's wonderful. He supports everything I do. The grandkids are very supportive also.

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

A: I intend to do it as long as God keeps me on this earth and I'm able to.

Q: What difference will this ministry work make for you in the future?

A: I can't imagine life without it. I've never had a more supportive pastor.

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

A: The joy I spoke of, if it wasn't for Him, I firmly believe I would not have that joy. I can't imagine where you would have a source of joy without Him.



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Colvin

Cynthia Colvin uses the character CeCe the Clown to minister to children. She joined Heaven Bound Clowns, a Pickens County-based clowning ministry, about 10 years ago.



Photo courtesy of Cynthia Colvin

For more than 15 years, the 2013 Missions Volunteer of the Year Cynthia Colvin has taught a Bible study at the Pickens County Jail in Carrollton.

'For God's glory'

FBC Aliceville member Cynthia Colvin named Missions Volunteer of the Year

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Cynthia Colvin was shocked when she found out she had been chosen as 2013 Missions Volunteer of the Year, but no one who knows Colvin was surprised by the news.

"She is the true definition of a missions volunteer. She takes the Great Commission very seriously and truly

does go and teach all nations, baptizing and making disciples for the Lord," said Janie Colvin, Cynthia's youngest daughter and the one who nominated her for the annual award given by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Colvin, a lifelong member of First Baptist Church, Aliceville, in Pickens Baptist Association, committed her life to Christ at a young age and experienced His peace in extraordinary circumstances. At the age of 12, she was diagnosed with a heart problem and underwent open heart surgery at the age of 15. During the entire ordeal, she felt God's comforting hand.

"I never worried about dying then, but as I got older, I realized how wonderful God had been to me. I said then that I would serve Him for the rest of my life," Colvin said.

That is just what she has done, throughout her community, the state, the nation and the world.

"Cynthia has a heart for missions straight out of Acts 1:8," said Charlie Wilson, pastor of First, Aliceville. "She has a passion for people and wants them to know the Lord like she does."

One example of Colvin's involvement in local missions

is her work with women in prison. Colvin has taught Bible study on Wednesday afternoons at Pickens County Jail in Carrollton for more than 15 years. This year, the opportunity to reach imprisoned women for Christ has expanded in Pickens County with the opening of a federal corrections facility for women in Aliceville. By the end of this year, the prison will house more than 1,700 inmates, and Pickens Association volunteers are already ministering to the women who have arrived.

"The jail ministry is my first really big passion," Colvin said. "These are women who are suffering the consequences of bad decisions, but I tell them they weren't arrested, they were rescued. We encourage them to use their time in prison to draw nearer to God."

About 10 years ago, Colvin heard about Heaven Bound Clowns, a Pickens County-based clowning ministry. She was intrigued, but she did not think she could fit another activity into her schedule. Her husband convinced her otherwise, and CeCe the Clown, named after Colvin's grandmother, joined the troupe.

Colvin will quickly say that clowning is not an easy ministry.

"It takes hours of planning and practice, preparing a theme and illusions to go with it," Colvin said. "But it's so wonderful to make people laugh and let them see that Christians have fun."

The clowns also use balloons, temporary tattoos and stickers to share

a simple message: "Smile, God Loves You." More than anything, Colvin said clowning opens doors to witnessing opportunities that might not be available to other missionaries.

Last summer during a missions trip to Brazil, Colvin ex-

perienced this firsthand. In character as CeCe, Colvin was walking down the street with other missions volunteers after a school visit when a man stepped out of a hospital. He introduced himself as a hospital administrator and asked the translator if the clown would come in and see the patients. Colvin asked the others to pray for her, then went inside and visited with patients, doctors and nurses in the hospital wards.

"It was such a joy to be able to talk to the patients, which wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been a clown," Colvin said. "It's rewarding yet emotional. Clowns are not supposed to cry, but sometimes you can't help it."

Colvin's husband, Johnny, and her three daughters have been her biggest encouragers. Colvin said she is grateful for her husband's support of her missions work and for the fact that they grew up together in a missions-minded church. She also credits Pickens Association and Director of Missions Gary Farley for continuing to provide a variety of missions opportunities locally, nationally and globally.

Daily opportunities

Though she enjoys sharing the gospel on trips and in small groups like the Soul Sisters Bible study fellowship, Colvin has daily opportunities to share Jesus in her job as an elementary school teacher at Pickens Academy in Carrollton. Recently Colvin was honored at the school, and a former student who spoke at the ceremony said that being in Colvin's class was like going to Sunday School every day.

Wilson said that comment describes the loving attitude Colvin takes everywhere she goes. "Whether it's leading prayer or teaching a Sunday School lesson or simply walking up to somebody, Cynthia always has the right thing to say," he said. "She is so genuine and loving. I wish every pastor could have a church member like Cynthia."

For Colvin, missions is simply a way of life that allows her to share her love of Jesus with others.

"All I do is for God's glory. I'm so grateful He has allowed me to be available for Him." ❧



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Reggie Quimby, director of the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, recognizes Cynthia Colvin as the 2013 Missions Volunteer of the Year at the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 13.

Hymns provide poetic skills, insight to contemporary issues

(continued from page 1)
Blessings” is one Richardson calls the “quintessential” Thanksgiving hymn.

“It’s the one I think of when everyone comes home for Thanksgiving and we go to the community service,” he said, adding that the words to this familiar hymn also were written during a time of war.

During the 1500s, Dutch Protestants were forbidden by the Spanish rulers of Holland to gather for worship. The Dutch fought for independence from Spain, defeating the Spanish at the Battle of Turnhout in 1597. Though the Dutch did not gain independence until 1648, they saw the victory at Turnhout as the hand of God at work:

*We gather together
to ask the Lord’s blessing;
He chastens and hastens
His will to make known.
The wicked oppressing
now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to His name,
He forgets not His own.*

The hymn’s second stanza includes military undertones as well, Richardson said, as the writer recognizes God’s presence during the battle:

*Beside us to guide us,
our God with us joining,
ordaining, maintaining
His kingdom divine;
so from the beginning
the fight we were winning;
thou, Lord, wast at our side,
all glory be Thine!*

Finally the third stanza praises God for His leadership and defense of the Dutch people, even as the writer continues to pray for God’s help in the fight for independence:

*We all do extol Thee,
Thou leader triumphant,
and pray that Thou still
our defender wilt be.
Let Thy congregation
escape tribulation;
Thy name be ever praised!
O Lord, make us free!*

Richardson also noted that around the turn of the 20th century, many Christian worshippers felt the military imagery of Theodore Baker’s translation of the original tune was too strong. For example,

Baker translated the third line of the third stanza as “Thou leader in battle.” Most hymnal editors, including those of the Baptist Hymnal (2008), have chosen the less militant “triumphant” instead.

However, in response to concerns, Julia Cady Cory used the melody of “We Gather Together” and wrote new words to the tune in 1902. The alternate version, “We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer,” emphasizes “grateful devotion,” “praise” and adoration over the stronger message of freedom in the original.

As both versions are included in the Baptist Hymnal, “our hymnal provides a choice,” Richardson said.

Another popular Thanksgiving hymn, “Come Ye Thankful People, Come,” by Henry Alford, celebrates God’s provision of the agricultural harvest, called Harvest Festival or Harvest Home in Britain. While the hymn expresses thanks for the harvest that is “safely gathered in / Ere the winter storms begin,” Richardson noted that in the third stanza, Alford starts preaching on two of Jesus’ parables, first the tares and wheat being sown together and then the angels harvesting the tares and throwing them into the furnace.

Today’s circumstances

“So here we are gathered together in a warm church with warm feelings for the people around us, singing about casting the sinners into the fire for eternal punishment,” Richardson said. “But Alford is preaching, ‘here are today’s circumstances, and here’s how Jesus used examples from the harvest.’”

Richardson called “For the Fruit of All Creation” one of his favorite of recent hymns. The lyrics, written by Methodist minister Fred Pratt Green, are often set to the tune of the Welsh folk song “Ar Hyd y Nos” (“All Through the Night”), though they were written specifically for another tune, according to Richardson. He said the hymn brings both poetic skills and pastoral insight to contempo-

rary issues. The first stanza talks about the agricultural harvest and the last stanza about the harvest of the spirit, but the second speaks to how God’s will is done when we live our thanks, Richardson said.

*In the just reward of labor,
God’s will is done.
In the help we give our neighbor,
God’s will is done.
In our worldwide task of caring*

*for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God’s will is done.*

He added that the hymn ends with an expression of thanks that is both profound and poetic:

*For the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all that love has found us,*

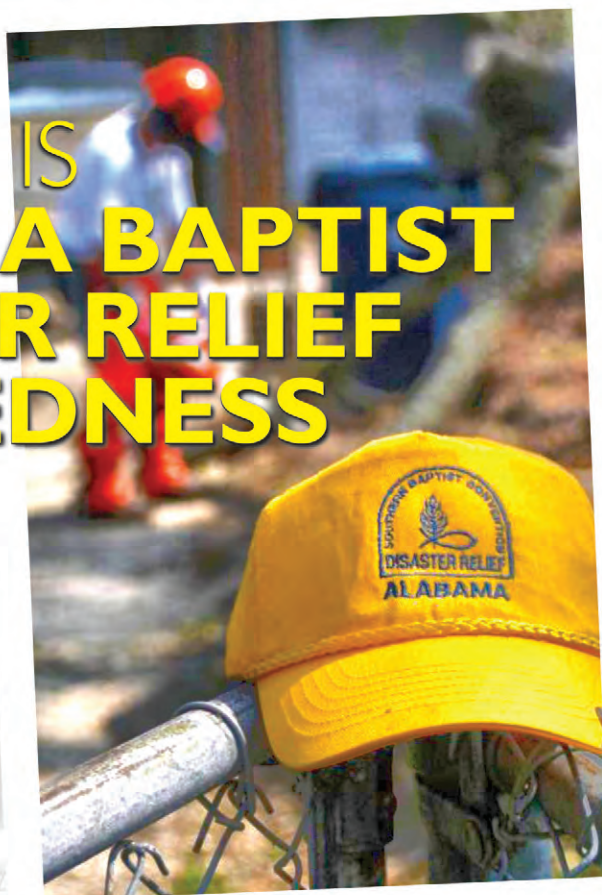
thanks be to God.

Richardson said these lines state three theological truths: the omnipotence of God, which might be evident in God’s being or God’s action; the omniscience of God, that God is greater than we can comprehend; and finally, that these are surpassed by God’s love.

“For all of these we give thanks,” Richardson said. ☞

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2013 National Test Results Show Little Change in State's Rankings

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

This month, the National Center for Education Statistics issued the 2013 edition of The Nation's Report Card, which compares test results in reading and math among students across the country.

While holding on to gains made in recent years in reading, Alabama students continued to lag behind the rest of the nation in math.

The test results come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP tests are given every other year to a sample of students from each state, providing the only current measure of how states compare on school performance. Results are not reported for individual schools. Unfortunately that takes away the incentive to improve for low-performing schools and denies recognition to those that are high-performing. Regardless, it's clear we need to do better as a state.

Fourth-grade reading

Alabama's best performance in recent years has been in fourth-grade reading, where our students made substantial gains starting in 2007 and caught the national average in 2011. The 2013 results for students from both poverty and nonpoverty backgrounds maintained parity with the national averages for those groups. The Alabama Reading Initiative, which places reading coaches in elementary schools, is widely credited with rais-

ing performance at this level.

However, in eighth-grade reading Alabama's poverty-level students were tied with Mississippi for the lowest results in 2013. Among students from nonpoverty backgrounds, only Louisiana, Mississippi and four other states had lower results.

On the math tests, Alabama's poverty-level students ranked 50th among both fourth- and eighth graders. The ranking for students from nonpoverty backgrounds was only slightly better, at 49th.

Changes are afoot to improve these results. Alabama has introduced more rigorous College and Career Ready Standards, and teachers will have better ways to benchmark student progress from year to year. Test results will be comparable across state lines because of the voluntary agreement of most states on common standards.

When these new capabilities are fully in place, Alabama students should be better prepared and we'll be able to compare test results from our school systems with their peers in other states. This will provide better incentives for those who need to improve as well as recognition for those who rise above the average.

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

'A call to action'

Baptist hunger funds provide food for storm victims

(continued from page 1)

a call to action; we are called to help those who are suffering when they need it," said Gerlie Baltero of the Luzon Convention of Southern Baptist Churches. "This is one ministry we cannot turn our backs on."

The typhoon's sustained winds, peaking at nearly 200 mph, drove waves 20 feet tall into the coastal city of Tacloban.

At press time, the death toll of Haiyan — one of the most powerful storms in recorded history — had passed 5,000.

University students in the Philippines and church members of the International Southern Baptist Church of Cebu assembled relief kits for the inhabitants of Gibitngil Island on Nov. 18.

Global Hunger Relief — formerly World Hunger Funds — distributed by BGR were used to purchase rice, canned meat, sugar, powdered milk, ramen noodles and Nescafé for the kits. These supplies are enough food for a household for one week.

Susan Stokeld, a BGR project director, said the kits "will help those who have nothing."

Dwain Carter, disaster relief strategist for the Missouri Baptist



BP photo

Student volunteers from a Cebu university work alongside BGR project director Susan Stokeld and members of International Southern Baptist Church of Cebu to assemble family food packages for urgent shipment to needy families in northern Cebu.

Convention, traveled with BGR partner Adore Sabido to Gibitngil Nov. 16-17 to assess needs.

Carter said there are 449 families on the island in need of water and food. Right now, the island's only water source is rainwater.

After building rapport with the village leader, plans were put in place for the relief kits and for volunteer teams to help the community rebuild.

Carter said all of the roofs on village homes, except for the roof on the village leader's house, were gone. The school on the island also was damaged.

Carter said the village leader initially seemed skeptical of the team.

"What if we bring enough food for one meal for everyone on the island?" Carter asked him.

Carter said the leader's eyes widened and his heart softened. (BP)

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Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago November 1963

141st Annual Session: The annual session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention meeting in Birmingham on Nov. 12–14 was one of the best. Harmony and unity undergirded it and the attendance for every session was most gratifying. The day sessions met at First Baptist Church, Birmingham, where Earl Stallings is pastor, and the evening sessions were held at Central Park Baptist Church, where John Bob Riddle is pastor. George E. Bagley, newly elected executive secretary-treasurer of the convention, was presented on Tuesday afternoon and brought the main address on Wednesday evening.

40 Years Ago November 1973

Sesquicentennial Session: One of the highlights of the Alabama Baptist State Convention sesquicentennial celebration was the pageant “The Vision Glorious,” held at the University of Alabama Memorial Coliseum in Tuscaloosa. A look at the history of Alabama

Baptists in 35 separate scenes and accompanied by speech and choirs, the pageant with more than 40 speaking parts in the 100-member cast was written by Catherine Allen, public relations director of Woman’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. Assisting in the direction of the pageant were Harold Hunt, director and chairman of the Samford University speech department, and Claude Rhea, dean of Samford’s school of music.

30 Years Ago November 1983

Highlight of the 161st State Convention: Darold H. Morgan of Dallas, Texas, president of the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, highlighted the Alabama Baptist State Convention’s theme of “Discipleship — Developing Bold Believers,” as he led the worship period for each session of the convention meeting at the civic center in Montgomery. At the outset, Morgan expressed gratitude for the ministries of retiring executive secretary-treasurer George Bagley and encouragement

of his former pastorate, Hunter Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, where he served 1962–1966.

20 Years Ago November 1993

State Convention: The Alabama Baptist State Convention met Nov. 16–17 in Huntsville at Whitesburg Baptist Church with the theme, “Serve in Christ’s Spirit.” One of the main items of business was the presentation of a revision of the bylaws of the convention by a bylaws review committee chaired by Earl Potts, a former executive secretary-treasurer of the convention. After lengthy discussion, messengers approved a first reading of the new bylaws with the exception of two controversial paragraphs relating to election of entity trustees. A study committee to report on the trustee issue at the 1994 meeting

of the convention will be appointed by the newly reelected convention president, Dewey Corder, pastor of First Baptist Church, Trussville.

10 Years Ago November 2003

Lance Strives for Super Clarity: “High Definition Cooperative Program” or HDCP is what Rick Lance, executive director for the Alabama State Board of Missions, hopes to accomplish. “I want us to have a High Definition Cooperative Program with super clarity in missions,” Lance said during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 18. In Lance’s mind this means focusing on the people rather than the projects. By keeping this focus Alabama Baptists will be able to “remain at the front of support of missions here and around the world.”

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Church with great potential in the I-75 corridor between Chattanooga and Atlanta is seeking a pastor who loves people and wants to reach a community. The church is missions-minded, debt-free and desires growth through quality discipleship ministries. Please send resumé or inquiries to: Adairsville Baptist Church, P.O. Box 301, Adairsville, GA 30103.

PASTOR: Harmony Grove Baptist Church in Winfield, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: Harmony Grove Pastor Search, P.O. Box 1432, Winfield, AL 35594, or harmonygrovebaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Prayerfully seeking a Southern Baptist pastor who preaches the uncompromised Word of God. If led by the Spirit to respond, send resumé to: River Road Baptist Church, 3352 Warrior River Road, Hueytown, AL 35023, or notiHim@bellsouth.net.

WORSHIP MINISTER: Wilmer Baptist Church is searching for an experienced, spirit-filled individual to join us full-time as our worship minister. This individual will be responsible to lead contemporary worship service, choir and work with instrumentalists. For more details, visit www.wilmerchurch.com.

FULL-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: 5–10 years experience including: all age level choirs, instrumental, blended worship and a vision for future growth. Resumés to: West End Baptist Church, 2005 2nd Ave. N, Clanton, AL 35045.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Liberty Baptist Church, Deatsville (near Prattville, Ala.), is seeking a part-time music minister. If you are interested or

would like more information, please contact Bro. Joey Bentley, 334-312-4476.

MUSIC LEADER: First Baptist Church, Foley, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister of music and senior adults. Worship style is blended. We are looking for a leader who is gifted in music and building a dynamic worship ministry. Minister will also oversee our senior adult ministries. Email resumé to: scollins@fbcfoley.com. Please include a video of you leading worship. Resumés will be accepted until Jan. 15.

MINISTER OF MUSIC/YOUTH: We are currently searching for full-time minister of music/youth for our church. Please send resumé to: ATTN: Carol Mooney, Westside Baptist Church, 1026 Caroline Street, Elba, AL 36323.

TWO POSITIONS AVAILABLE: Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister of music and a full-time children’s minister. Seminary degree preferred. Please email resumé to: bhewis@yahoo.com.

TWO POSITIONS AVAILABLE: Hillabee Baptist Church in Alexander City is seeking a bivocational youth minister and a bivocational music minister. Please submit resumé to: hillabeebc@yahoo.com.

STUDENT & FAMILY MINISTRIES: First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive is now accepting resumé for a full-time associate pastor of students and family ministries. Please submit resumé or questions by email to: sheila@fbcmo.org.

MINISTER OF YOUTH: Forest Avenue Baptist Church in Jackson, Ala., is seeking a part-time minister of youth for grades 7–12. Send resumé to: P.O.

Box 611, Jackson, AL 36545, or fabcpastor@gmail.com.

MINISTER TO CHILDREN: First Baptist Church in Huntsville is seeking a full-time minister to children. More information is available at fbchsv.org/search. Resumés and inquiries may be sent to: search@fbchsv.org.

CHILDREN’S MINISTER: FBC Leeds is seeking a part-time children’s minister. 20 hours a week. Contact Danny Mitchell at the church office at 205-699-6141. Email: kmyers@fbcleeds.org.

CHILDREN’S MINISTER: Good Hope Baptist Church in Eclectic, Ala., is seeking a bivocational or part-time children’s minister. It is desired that applicants have an academic degree of childhood development nature or experience with children’s ministry. Please submit resumé to: kmcghee32@gmail.com or call Libbye McGhee at 334-312-0610 for more information.

OTHER POSITIONS

FINANCIAL SECRETARY: FBC Leeds is seeking a part-time financial secretary. Financial experience is necessary and knowledge of ACS software is preferred. Contact Danny Mitchell at the church office at 205-699-6141. Email: kmyers@fbcleeds.org.

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Want to know God?

Pastor Charles L. Owens
Shiloh Baptist Church, Somerville

There is no lack of God calling people to His gracious salvation in Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired Moses in Deuteronomy 4, “If you search for the Lord with all your heart, you will find Him.”

In Proverbs 8: “Those who seek Me diligently will find Me.”

From Isaiah 55: “Incline your ear, and come to Me.”

Jesus said in Matthew 11, “Come to Me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

In John 6 Jesus declared, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.”

James writes in chapter four, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

Our God is a calling, inviting, saving God.

Christ declares in Revelation 22:13–16, “I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are they that do wash their robes, that their right will be to the tree of life and by the gates they should go in to the city. But outside the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices a lie. I, Jesus, sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I AM the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

Christ is all-powerful and declares that there will be a great divide based on whose robes have been washed. Then this last invitation is given, and the methodology by which it is extended is revealed.

The final and great invitation is found in Revelation 22:17: “And he who thirsts let him come; he that wills, let him take water of life without cost.”

People respond — being thirsty and willing — and come, finding the free and boundless Fountain from which abundantly flows the water of life. The way to the water is only found in Christ.

“But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life” (John 4:14). ☞



Vatican to display bones believed to be of St. Peter

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican planned to display for the first time bones believed to be the mortal remains of St. Peter, the leader of Jesus' 12 apostles, to mark the end of the Year of Faith on Nov. 24.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, wrote in a recent edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, that the Catholic faithful making a pilgrimage to St. Peter's tomb to mark the end of the Year of Faith will enjoy "the exposition ... of the relics traditionally recognized as those of the apostle who gave his life for the Lord on this spot."

Fisichella was referring to the long-held belief that Peter was crucified upside down and died in either A.D. 64 or 67 on the spot now marked by the Clementine Chapel inside the basilica that bears his name.

The church never officially declared the bones — which were discovered in the 1940s — authentic. But a series of exhaustive tests conducted on the bones between their discovery and 1968 convinced Pope Paul VI they had been "identified in a way we can hold to be convincing." Previously only the box containing the bones was on display.

Pope Benedict XVI declared the Year of Faith would begin Oct. 11, 2012, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict said at the time that the Year of Faith was a "summons to an authentic and renewed conversation to the Lord."

Women bishops may be allowed in Church of England

CANTERBURY, England — The Church of England's governing body has approved new proposals that would allow women bishops to be ordained by fall 2013.

Meeting in London on Nov. 20, the church's General Synod passed a motion by 378-8, with 25 abstentions, that paves the way for the endorsement of women bishops. Bishops also approved a declaration that sets out guidance for parishes that reject female consecrations.

The package would end nearly two decades of bitter and damaging conflict, and the vote is a victory of sorts for the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who was appointed in 2012 just as the General Synod came within six votes of allowing women bishops.

Welby called the 2012 defeat "a very grim day for women and their supporters" and vowed to find a way to allow women bishops without creating a schism within the church.

The Nov. 20 vote also creates an ombudsman position to rule on disputes involving traditionalist clergy who oppose women bishops.

Now that the proposal has been approved by the General Synod, a draft declaration is expected to be endorsed at another meeting in February 2014 and final approval is expected by November 2014.

Church of England runs risk of 'extinction'

CANTERBURY, England — A former archbishop of Canterbury has warned that the Church of England faces extinction in less than 25 years unless it can attract more young people now.

Talking to 300 churchgoers in Shropshire, West England, on Nov. 18, on the eve of a church agreement to start a campaign to evangelize England, Lord George Carey said: "We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. We are one generation away from extinction and if we do not invest in young people there is going to be no one in the future."

Carey was Archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the world's estimated 85 million Anglicans from 1991 until 2002 when he joined the House of Lords (Britain's Upper Chamber of Parliament).

He said that every one of the church's 43 dioceses (territorial units governed by bishops) could disappear within 25 years if an urgent campaign to attract the young was delayed.

There are 25 million baptized Anglicans in England and Wales but fewer than 1 million of them attend services on Sundays, church statistics show.

'Not about politics'

Immigration reform garners pastor support

Nearly six in 10 senior pastors of Protestant churches support immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship, according to a new survey from LifeWay Research.

Many of the pastors hope reform will help them minister to more Hispanic Americans. But few say the current immigration system hurts current members of their churches.

The poll of 1,007 senior pastors of Protestant churches, conducted Sept. 4-19, comes as immigration reform has stalled on Capitol Hill. The Senate passed a bill this past summer that includes a path to citizenship, but a House version of the bill seems dead, with House representative John Boehner telling reporters Nov. 13, "We have no intention of ever going to conference on the Senate bill."

According to the survey, 58 percent of Protestant pastors agree with the statement: "I am in favor of immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for those who are currently in the country illegally."

Just more than half (51 percent) agree that "Immigration reform will help our church, denomination or movement reach Hispanic Americans." Among pastors in favor of immigration reform with a path to citizenship, 67 percent say it will help their church, denomination or movement reach Hispanic Americans.

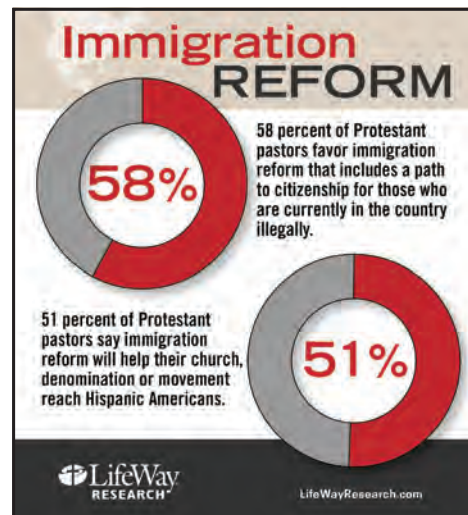
A number of denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), have passed resolutions in favor of immigration reform in recent years. A 2011 SBC resolution on immigration can be accessed at www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=12123.

Several national faith leaders — including Russell Moore, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals and others — met with President Obama on Nov. 13 to discuss immigration reform.

"The president and the leaders discussed their shared commitment to raise the moral imperative for immigration reform and said they will continue keeping the pressure on Congress so they can swiftly pass common-sense reform," according to a White House release.

Alejandro Mandes, national director of Immigrant Hope, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit that trains churches on how to assist immigrants, has worked on immigration reform for a decade. Protestant pastors and groups like the National Association of Evangelicals once were reluctant to get involved in immigration issues. That's changed, he said, as American culture and congregations have become more diverse.

"A lot of congregations have realized that they are now on a missions field," Mandes said. "For me, it is not about politics. It is about the Great Commission and the Great Commandment." (BP, ABP)



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Polar Express

Bellview Baptist reaches community with special Christmas event

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Bellview Baptist Church, McCalla, began a new tradition in 2012, and it was such a community-wide success that they're preparing for the 2013 event to be even bigger.

The church hosts a Polar Express experience, based on the beloved Christmas book-turned-movie of the same name. They set up stations for families to visit that are themed according to the movie, and even have a train car to transport them to a few stations. At one point during the event, participants are led into a room where Santa tells them about the true meaning of Christmas being about Jesus rather than Santa Claus.

The church has their pastor, Tim Hassler, to thank for the idea. It's something he came up with after living in Gadsden and participating in some local events involving trains around Christmastime.



Photo courtesy of Bellview Baptist

The Polar Express event at Bellview Baptist is based on the Christmas book-turned-movie of the same name.

"The Lord brought me to Bellview, and we have a really big gym here," Hassler said. "It's not particularly pretty, but it's an empty space, and the Lord impressed upon my heart that we could do the Polar Express here. It was perfect for what I had in mind."

Hassler shared his idea with church member Sheila Blevins, who helped bring it to life. Blevins helped orchestrate the transformation of the church gym into a winter wonderland, complete with a dining car, a

space for Santa and more. "We say it was Tim's vision and Sheila's visual," said church secretary Debi Gaston,

who helped with the 2012 event and is participating again.

The 2012 two-night event attracted around 700 people, and the church anticipates about 1,000 at this event. To accommodate the larger crowd, they've added a third night to the line-up. The 2013 Polar Express will be held Dec. 6-8 at Bellview Baptist.

"We see this as an opportunity to minister right here in our community," Blevins said. "Our community is growing, and we really want to get to know the people right here and minister to them."

Hassler adds that the event is a way to visually represent the power God has to change people.

'God can transform lives'

"What we want to do more than anything is show how much we believe that God can transform lives," he said. "That old dingy gym that's somewhat of an eyesore? It's transformed into a beautiful place for several nights. We want people to know that's what God does to our lives, too. He transforms them."



Photo courtesy of Bellview Baptist Church

Bellview Baptist Church transforms the church gym into a winter wonderland for the Polar Express event in 2012.

And the community isn't the only thing benefiting from this event. Blevins said she and fellow church members also gained an increased sense of teamwork after working on the 2012 event and seeing what a success it was.

"We are, I would say, a small to medium-sized church, but this is what's amazing about how God has blessed us," she said. "We have amazingly talented people. And this is something that we can do because of the different talents people have. We can fulfill a need to minister to people and to show the love of Jesus by coming together to put on this event." ❧









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Tradition continues

Samford celebrates homecoming, overtime football thriller

Samford University in Birmingham welcomed alumni from many states, including Alaska, for 2013 homecoming weekend Nov. 15–16. The agenda included time for fellowship, worship and celebration of achievements by individuals and the university.

On homecoming Saturday, the campus quadrangle was a sea of tailgate tents and tables for 55 organizations, classes and affinity groups. While graduates reminisced, their children and grandchildren enjoyed an array of amusements.

‘We always come back’

“We always come back for homecoming. It’s fun,” said graduate Andrew Murphy who met his wife, Lindsey, when both were in the Samford band. They brought their three children — Isaiah, 4; Evie, 2; and Lucy, 6 months — to enjoy the parade and other activities.

A gameday crowd of 8,415 in Seibert Stadium watched as the Samford Bulldogs defeated University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

in a 17–14 overtime thriller.

Alumni of the Year were honored at the traditional alumni banquet on Friday. They are: 1983 graduate Mark Cottingham, worship and arts pastor at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga.; 1962 graduate Mickey Newsome, executive chairman of Hibbett Sporting Goods, Inc.; and 1983 graduate Sylvia Snider Young, president of Hospital Corporation of America’s Continental Division in Denver, Colo. Jeff Stephens, a 2004 graduate and general manager of Birmingham-based 365 Incorporated, was named Outstanding Young Alumnus, an honor given to a distinguished graduate of the last 10 years.

Alumni Association president

Keith Herron, class of 1986, noted that Samford’s 45,000-plus alumni live, work and serve in a variety of ways throughout the world, and that the 2013 honorees are exemplary of the “thousands of Samford alumni who are making a difference every day.”



Photo courtesy of Samford University
Rachel Gregory and Jacob Hamilton are named homecoming queen and king at Samford University.

The program included introduction of new Alumni Association officers: Birmingham attorney Gil Simmons, class of 1983, president; and Birmingham teacher Lori

Littlejohn Sullivan, class of 1979, vice president for activities. Birmingham realtor David Spurling, class of 1998, will continue to serve as vice president for annual giving.

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland noted the frequent

stories he hears of people who arrived at the university much like the proverbial stranger.

“Samford invited them in and helped them become the men and women they are today. We are all better for the experience we have shared at Samford,” he said.

Prior to the banquet, many alumni and students gathered for choral vespers in Reid Chapel. Worship leaders included alumni Bob Hatfield, who holds bachelor’s and doctor of ministry degrees; and Rosemary Mims Fisk, a 1977 graduate. The program of song, Scripture and worship concluded with alumni members of the A Cappella Choir joining the current choir to sing “Beautiful Savior.”

Throughout the weekend, seniors Rachel Gregory, an elementary education major from Brentwood, Tenn., and Jacob Hamilton, an English major from Dallas, Texas, reigned as homecoming queen and king. Chosen by vote of the student body, they were announced at an elegant on-campus ball Nov. 14.

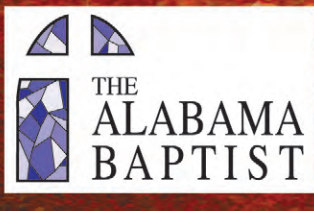
Special homecoming reunion events included programs for the 50-year class of 1963 and Chi Omega sorority alumnae who were celebrating the 50th anniversary of their Zeta Zeta chapter. (Samford)

susan ashton **billy dean** **lenny leblanc** **richie mcdonald**



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But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. I call out to the Lord, and He answers me from His holy mountain.
Psalm 3:3–4

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 1

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

LIVE SELFLESSLY John 12:24-33, 35-36, 44-48

Many Bible students conclude that selfishness is the essence of sin. All adults, even believers, are at heart self-centered as a result of the fall. Many believers understand this truth and include the struggle against selfishness as part of their daily Christian walk with the Holy Spirit. Others deal intermittently with the issue. Still others are so captured by the "me first" mentality of society that they do not recognize how much of their worldview is at odds with a life of Christian discipleship. Jesus taught the way of discipleship is costly in that He demands His followers die to self and focus their lives and service on what God wants.

Accept the Principle (24-26)

During Passover week, the last week of the Lord's earthly life, Jesus was teaching and preparing His disciples to carry on His ministry after He was gone. He emphasized the need to live a God-focused life, not a self-focused one. He did this by using an ordinary agricultural illustration. A seed never produces grain until first it falls into the ground and (to all appearances) dies. Just as a grain of wheat dies in order to produce an abundant harvest, so the death of the Son of God will result in the salvation of many.

This splendid picture of dying to self instructs those of us who are believers to follow Jesus and accept the principle He lived by: dying to self and living for God.

Many people live for themselves, focusing their attention on money, possessions, pleasure or the approval of others. They fail to realize that the soul is more important than the body. By neglecting their spiritual welfare, they lose their lives.

On the other hand, there are those who are God-focused who, by trusting Jesus, receive eternal life. To follow Christ means, by the Holy Spirit's power, to obey Jesus and to grow morally in our resemblance of Him.

Consider the Cost (27-33)

Jesus knew that, for Himself, the principle of dying to self would require His sacrificial death on the cross. Although He was troubled about His approaching death, Jesus knew He had come into time/space history for that very purpose: to die as the payment for human sin.

Christians also, in following Jesus, live with the possibility of martyrdom and many believers in various places around the world have recently laid down their lives for Christ's sake.

If we live by the principle Jesus lived by, we need to consider seriously that we may be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice in advancing God's kingdom. Living a God-focused life, not a self-focused one, does involve a cost.

Realize the Urgency (35-36)

Jesus explained to His men the urgency of trusting Him and following Him while He was still with them.

No less today we need to be motivated by a sense of urgency concerning the call to trust Jesus and to follow Him in selfless discipleship as we share the Good News of the gospel.

Decide to Follow (44-48)

These verses are a summary of Jesus' overall message along with His final appeal before His death. He declared that His mission to the world was to provide the way of salvation.

Thus following Him means trusting Him in a God-focused life.

Bible Studies for Life By Thomas L. Fuller, Ph.D. Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

A PROBLEM YOU CAN'T SOLVE Romans 1:16-17; 2:5-11; 3:9-12

The first step toward new life in Christ — as well as living daily under His lordship — is recognizing one's need. In the early chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul sets forth the truth of God's righteousness.

Only in the light of that truth does it become clear that all of us have a problem we cannot solve on our own. But there is good news.

(1:16-17)

Broadcasting this good news — the gospel — is Paul's passion and purpose in life. When he declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul is saying that it is a great honor and privilege to serve as a messenger of the truth: that Jesus died to save us from our sin and He rose from the dead to give us victory over sin and death. The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is for all people — Jews and Gentiles — and it is appropriated by faith, not by works or following God's commands (the Law).

Central to Paul's message is the righteousness of God. Righteousness is a legal term, meaning "in the right" or "having right standing" before a judge. Here it refers both to God's own righteousness and to the right standing God gives (imputes) to guilty sinners. That guilt — and the condemnation and wrath that follow from it — is determined by God alone (the Righteous Judge). God Himself is the standard, not the Law or how we rate compared to others. Our only hope for meeting this standard is to receive God's gift of Jesus' righteousness.

(2:5-11)

In 1:18, Paul declares that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against

all ungodliness and unrighteousness."

He then proceeds to make the case for the guilt of all humanity (1:18-3:20). Paul's specific purpose in 2:5-11 is to show that God is impartial in meting out justice. It does not matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile; God's righteousness is the standard for everyone.

He will "render (judgment) to each person according to his deeds." God does not grade on the curve, so to speak. Neither does He play favorites or give breaks based on any earthly qualifications. Fairly and consistently employing the standard of God's own righteousness, all are found to be failing.

Some may read these verses as support for salvation by works, but that is a misinterpretation of Paul's meaning. The impartiality of God's judgment is the point Paul is making here. F.F. Bruce summarizes it quite well: "While, for Paul, forgiveness and eternal life are utterly of God's grace, divine judgment is always passed in accordance with what men and women have done."

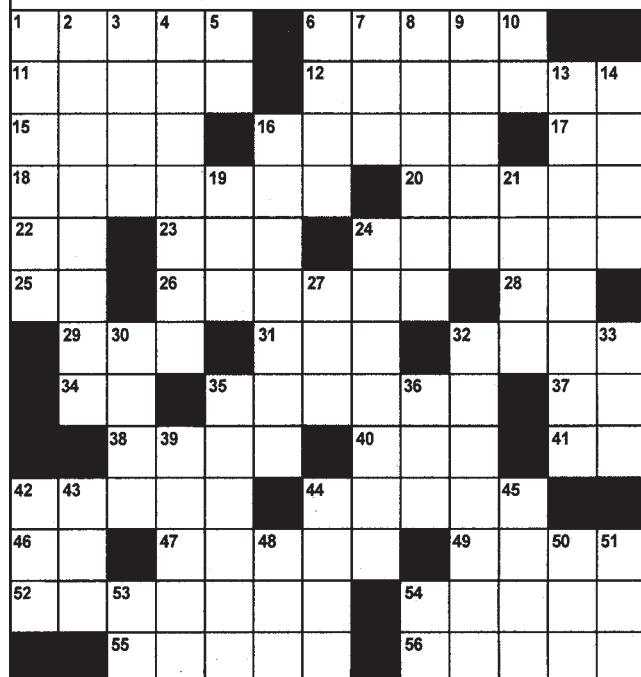
(3:9-12)

Paul brings to a close his argument for the sinfulness and guilt of all humanity, giving specific attention to those who might claim special status and exemption from God's judgment. Are there any exceptions? "Not at all," Paul declares. "Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Paul has been building this argument for some time already.

He finishes the project by bringing forth evidence from the Old Testament Scriptures (Ps. 14:1c, 2b-3; 53:1c, 2b-3). The same sacred text to which one might point as validation of special status carries within it the words of indictment and judgment: "There is none who does good, not even one."

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Now the Lord said unto _____. (Gen. 12:1)
- Are not _____ and Pharpar rivers of Damascus? (2 Kings 5:12)
- Abraham ... _____ the wood. (Gen. 22:3)
- Athenian woman who believed. (Acts 17:34)
- In charge of King Ahasuerus' women. (Esther 2:3)
- The Lord sent him to meet Moses in the wilderness. (Ex. 4:27)
- Infant's first word for Daddy.
- Joseph's wife. (Gen. 41:45)
- The works that are done _____ the sun. (Eccles. 1:4)
- I am, you are, he _____.
- Dialect for get.
- Eli heard the noise of the _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
- Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
- Descendants of Eri. (Num. 26:16)
- Sarah shall bear unto thee _____ this set time. (Gen. 17:21)
- Not bow down thyself to them _____ serve them. (Ex. 20:5)
- I _____ the marathon.

- Place of 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
 - _____ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
 - The sons of Aaron, took either of them his _____. (Lev. 10:1)
 - They went forth _____ go. (Gen. 12:5)
 - King of Greek gods.
 - Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
 - God said, _____ shall not eat of every tree. (Gen. 3:1)
 - Bright _____.
 - Strong people set in battle _____. (Joel 2:5)
 - And, _____, the angel of the Lord came. (Luke 2:9)
 - Melts.
 - Upon the great _____ of their right feet. (Lev. 8:24)
 - Eli for it is the _____ of _____ flesh. (Lev. 17:14)
 - Ahian, and Schechem, and _____. (1 Chron. 7:19)
 - Led him away to _____ first. (John 18:13)
 - An _____ the hole.
- #### Down
- Gallio was the deputy of _____. (Acts 18:12)
 - Thou shalt be a _____. (Gen. 12:2)

- Why do the heathen _____? (Ps. 2:1)
- The Lord is the _____ of all such. (1 Thess. 4:6)
- _____, myself and I.
- And _____ bare Jabal. (Gen. 4:20)
- Candy or ice cream _____. (Deut. 2:18)
- Loves.
- Mary Poppins was one.
- Pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
- Joseph's brothers didn't know his _____. (Gen. 1:26)
- The sun _____ of Ahaz. (Isa. 38:8)
- And the _____ of pure gold. (1 Kings 7:50)
- You get this at a beach.
- Leak out slowly.
- Flighty, capricious.
- _____, Larry and Curly.
- The tents of _____ in affliction. (Hab. 3:7)
- Give _____ to his commandments. (Ex. 15:26)
- Hast thou _____ of the tree? (Gen. 3:11)
- So that it went _____ with Moses. (Ps. 106:32)

- The noise of them that sing _____ hear. (Ex. 32:18)
- Pointed tools for piercing holes.
- Broken the bands of your _____. (Lev. 26:13)
- Order _____ carte.
- Benjamin's son.
- Cleanseth us from all _____. (1 John 1:7)
- Do, Re, Mi, _____.
- Syllable to sing when you don't know the words.





Media reviews



MUSIC REVIEWS

North Point Christmas

Let There Be Light
North Point Music

For those (few) who read my music reviews, it's no secret that I'm a big fan of North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Ga., and their music arm, North Point Music. "Let There Be Light" is their second Christmas album, and it's a good one. With a few more classic Christmas songs than their last, this record may be a little more accessible to many than their last Christmas release. Still the original music here is, like all of North Point's music, top notch.

Two-time Grammy Award winner Nathan Nockels produced "Let There Be Light," with vocals handled by North Point's stellar artists, including Dove Award winner Seth Condrey, Todd Fields, Eddie Kirkland, Casey Darnell and others. Original songs include "Hallelujah," "Dawn Is Breaking" and "Unto Us." Traditional favorites such as "O Holy Night," "What Child Is This," "Silent Night" and "I'll Be Home for Christmas" round out this excellent Christmas project.

It seems everyone is releasing a Christmas album in 2013. Figuring out which ones deserve a place in our homes this season can be a daunting task. "Let There Be Light" from North Point Music is one that you can choose without worry. Recommended.

Various Artists

Christmas: Joy To the World
Centricity Music

Centricity Music released "Christmas: Joy To the World" on Oct. 22, showcasing their artists, as well as

featuring new music by two of their newest artists, Lauren Daigle and Jonny Diaz. Other artists contributing to the record are Andrew Peterson, Carrollton, Downhere, Jason Gray and Unspoken. Daigle adds two songs to the record, the original "Light of the World" and the traditional "The First Noel." Diaz's contribution is the new song "Asleep in the Hay." Both artists have upcoming albums that will be released by Centricity in early 2014.



Other new music on the record includes Peterson's "Long, Long Ago" and Downhere's "How Many Kings." The remaining songs are excellent interpretations of traditional Christmas music.

While Christmas releases can often seem a little tired, Centricity Music and their fine artists have produced one of the freshest Christmas records I've heard this season. This one deserves a spot in your Christmas music rotation.

Brandon Heath

Christmas Is Here
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Brandon Heath's 2013 Christmas release "Christmas Is Here" might be overlooked based on the strength of its interpretations of traditional Christmas songs. While certainly acceptable, these sometimes string-heavy arrangements are not the kinds of tunes that we all love and expect from Heath, although even here gems can be found,

Meet the reviewers

Rick and Martine Sharp are writers and musicians who are members of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, where Rick plays guitar in the praise band.



such as the bluegrass-flavored "In the Bleak Midwinter."

It's the original tunes, "Just a Girl," "The Day After Thanksgiving" and "Momma Wouldn't Lie To Me" that make this record a candidate for your Christmas music rotation. These are classic Heath — witty, touching, well performed and just fun to listen to. "Just a Girl" may be the best of these, chronicling the very human events surrounding the birth of God incarnate, our Savior Jesus.

While it may not be Heath's best work, in this crowded field of Christmas music it certainly deserves a listen. 🎵



BOOK REVIEWS

The Bethlehem Midwife

Mark Randall. Bloomington, Ind.: Crossbooks, 2013. 72 pp. (Paperback).

I have often wondered what kind of help Mary may have had as she gave birth to Jesus. It's hard to imagine that the young Joseph would have been much help, and there is no evidence that any family members traveled with the young couple. Could there have been a midwife nearby who assisted in the birth?

Author Mark Randall wondered the same thing. After some research, he felt that a birth at that time and place would likely have been attended by a midwife. As a physician, Randall drew on his observation of midwives in Zimbabwe and Thailand to write this short, engaging story of how it might have been in the stable in Bethlehem that night. Well written and true to the biblical accounts, "The Bethlehem Midwife" would make a good addition to your Christmas library.

Randall grew up in Zimbabwe, attended school in Alabama at Samford University in Birmingham and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, then returned to serving the Lord overseas in medical capacities.

The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the Full Love Story of Christmas

Ann Voskamp. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013. 262 pp. (Hardback).

Most of us had advent calendars for our children when they were small. Little ones just can't understand the passage of time, especially at Christmas. "When is it going to be Christmas?" they ask with impatience and rising excitement.

"The Greatest Gift" is a devotional book but also is

a sort of advent calendar for adults, a countdown to Christmas that invites us to savor the season as we wait.

What's new about the admonition to slow down? Nothing, I suppose, but in this book of devotions, Voskamp reminds us that advent "is made of the moments. ... The slow unfurling of grace." Voskamp has been gifted with an ability to invite others to worship with her, issuing the invitation in words that turn prose into poetry and tug at the heart, causing the reader to feel a deep need for more of God. What a beautiful way to prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Merry Humbug Christmas

Sandra D. Bricker. Nashville: B&H Books, 2013. 297 pp. (Hardback).

It just wouldn't be Christmas without those sappy, romantic, barely believable TV movies. Well, how about a sappy, romantic, barely believable book? "Merry Humbug Christmas" is the story — or stories — of two friends who spent the last several Christmases attempting to avoid the festivities.

This year, things are different. The pair of books in one volume tell the stories of Joss and Reese as they go their separate ways to celebrate Christmas for the first time in several years, one willingly, the other against her plans. The stories are funny, lighthearted and almost believable. Believable enough for me to enjoy them, anyway — but then, I'm a sucker for anything Christmasy.



MOVIE REVIEW

Silver Bells

Pure Flix Entertainment

Haven't had your fill of made-for-TV Christmas movies? Me neither. Want a movie that you can let your small children or grandchildren watch — that you will actually want them to watch? You might want to try "Silver Bells," a new movie out on DVD.

"Silver Bells" is the story of a sportscaster whose competitiveness gets the better of him and causes his life to cascade in a downward spiral. The movie is predictable from beginning to end and has a few scenes that play awkwardly because of less than stellar acting; but veteran actor Bruce

Boxleitner carries the movie and helps overcome some of the less-polished acting.

The true story of Christmas shines through in the movie, not just politically correct warm fuzzies about good will and peace, but a clear, if a bit soft-pedaled, message of the transforming power of Christ. 🎄



The Virtual Bible Project offers 3-D rendering of key places and events in the biblical text, such as Herod's Temple shown here.

'Window into the context of the



Herod's Temple

BP photo

biblical world'

Professor's Virtual Bible Project to make Holy Land accessible to everyone

Long before smartphones, before technology had literally reshaped modern society, Dan Warner had an idea for teaching the history and geography of biblical lands — a virtual tour of the Holy Land. The idea was innovative and years ahead of its time.

Warner teaches biblical backgrounds on a daily basis in his positions as associate professor of Old Testament and archaeology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's (NOBTS) Orlando Hub and an adjunct faculty member at the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville and Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Warner wants to help people see how geography influenced the biblical text, using interactive visuals rather than textbooks.

The Miami native and member of First Baptist Church, Orlando, birthed the idea for a virtual Bible tour more than a decade ago during one of his frequent trips to Israel. He knew from his own experience that seeing the land leads to richer understanding of the Bible. But it is unrealistic, Warner believes, for most church members and lay ministers to visit the Holy Land, given the travel costs and time. Instead his virtual tour project known as The Virtual Bible Project allows an affordable view of the land.

Warner launched The Virtual Bible Project in 1999 with James Strange, longtime professor of archaeology at the University of South Florida and excavator of ancient Sepphoris in Galilee. Warner and Strange presented their idea to a major Christian publisher shortly after they

created the company. While the meeting went well, the publisher failed to see the potential and passed on the opportunity.

In spite of the setback, Warner refused to give up. He found a group of private investors and began working on the virtual reconstructions. To date, Warner and Strange have not taken a salary from their company. Instead all of the profits have been invested in its development.



BP photo

Dan Warner records pottery findings during the 2013 Gezer Water System excavation in Israel.

Warner and his team have completed four virtual reconstruction projects, including a detailed reconstruction of the events surrounding the Passion Week. A virtual tour of Bronze Age Megiddo was completed first, a natural choice because of the years Warner spent excavating the site. Next came reconstructions of Capernaum and Herod's Jerusalem. A preview of Warner's work is available on YouTube.

Each virtual reconstruction takes months to complete, but finances remain the biggest barrier to success for The Virtual Bible Project. Development is expensive, advertising is beyond the company's small budget and getting the finished product in front of potential consumers is a real challenge, Warner said. However, a distribution agreement with the publisher of Logos Bible Software will enable Warner to focus on additional reconstructions.

"Our goal is to create the whole ancient world," Warner said. "We've just barely scratched the surface."

Warner is well-suited for a project of this magnitude. As the son of a Baptist pastor, he was exposed to the Bible at an early age and developed a love for biblical geography and archaeology during his studies at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Ind.

Warner credits a seminary professor for introducing him to the biblical lands. In 1979, Warner took a month-long trip with stops in Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Greece, Turkey and Rome with a group from his seminary. He was hooked. Warner saved all of his electives for his final year of seminary and moved to Israel to study. There he interacted with noted archaeologists and focused on the subject.

Warner enrolled at Florida State University in Tallahassee to pursue a doctor of philosophy degree in anthropology. There he joined Harvard University in an excavation at the biblical city of Ashkelon and studied in Harvard's summer academic program in biblical archaeology. Eventually Warner transferred to the University of Bristol in England to complete his doctorate in biblical archaeology.

Warner has participated in excavations at Gerar, Tell el-Far'ah South (possibly biblical Sharuhin), Kabri, Megiddo and Gezer. He is co-director of the NOBTS/Israel Nature and Parks Authority excavation of the ancient water system at Gezer.

Illustrations of cultural situations

"Biblical archaeology gives us a window into the context of the biblical world," Warner said. "It helps us realize (that the people of the Bible) were real people, in a real time and in a real place. They lived in houses, they had families, they had jobs."

"It helps us understand the biblical text through material remains and gives us illustrations of cultural situations that people participated in," he said. "It clarifies and provides information that is not mentioned in the biblical text."

The Virtual Bible Project is the application of all that Warner has learned in his biblical study, his travels to Israel and in his archaeological excavations.

Warner dreams of a day when his biblical backgrounds classes can meet in a room with a 180-degree screen, allowing students to virtually step into a biblical world and witness recreations of biblical events. He believes the technology is available and that in time, someone will figure out how to make it work. (BP)