

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Dec. 19, 2013
Vol. 178, No. 50

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Merry Christmas

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*From Editor Bob Terry
and the staff of
The Alabama Baptist newspaper*

— 2013 —

Tell your story

Alabama WMU celebrates 125 years, looks for stories to fill memory book

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As a young girl, Sammie Barstow explored the world through the Wednesday night missions lessons of her Girls in Action (GA) group. Her teacher, a woman the girls called “Jonesy,” made all the difference in the young girls’ lives.

“Jonesy made us feel like we knew the missionaries. When we brought our offerings, we felt like we were absolutely part of spreading the gospel all over the world. That was just precious to me at the time,” Barstow said.

Her memory of Jonesy is one of the stories that will be included in a book of memories set to be published in 2014 in celebration of 125 years of Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU). If Alabama WMU made a difference in your life, Barstow is hoping you will share your story too.

The memory book will contain 125 stories organized much like a devotional book. Each memory page will include a Scripture verse, title and narrative story about your

experience with WMU. Your name, home church, city and association also will be included on the page. Additional stories will be published online at alawoman.org, the website of Alabama WMU.

Getting the word out

As editor of the project, Barstow is collecting the stories, and she wants to get the word out across the state, and even across the nation and world, to women who have been influenced by Alabama WMU.

“I want to encourage every woman to tell her story and participate,” Barstow said. “We can help with editing if that’s needed, but the important part is the story.”

Barstow said that while some memories are certain to be from

years past, women who have participated in the last few years are encouraged to send their stories as well. The best stories will be focused, concentrating on a single topic, event, activity or person, Barstow said. With only 300 words to tell the story, the point of each narrative will be to highlight how participation in GAs, Royal Ambassadors (RAS), Acteens or Women on Mission changed your life.

“The history and influence of Alabama WMU stretches over these 125 years,” Barstow said. “Alabama WMU has been a wonderful constant in the lives of women, some of whom began as children and are now in Acteens or Women on Mission groups.”

(See ‘Anniversary,’ page 3)

COMMENT

Immanuel — God with Us

Ever since that eventful night when the angel appeared to Joseph and announced the birth of Jesus, people have struggled to understand how the heralded Child could be “Immanuel — which means ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23).

Greek mythology was filled with stories of gods taking on human form. In most of the stories, the gods only appeared to be human. They really tricked humankind into thinking something that was not true. Following this line of reasoning, a group of early believers known as Gnostics concluded that Jesus only appeared to be human — but He was really God all the time.

In those Greek stories where gods actually became human, the result was something less than a god but more than a man. This line of thinking caused some to conclude that Jesus was some kind of intermediate being, neither God nor man in the full sense of the terms. He was a mediator between God and man but not fully either. This was one of the beliefs of Arianism.

Fully God and fully man

Orthodox Christianity from earliest days labeled all such teachings heresy. The church has always insisted that “only one who is God can bring God to man and only one who is man can bring man to God.” In the Child born to the Virgin Mary, that which seems impossible to humanity was accomplished by God. Jesus was fully God and He was fully man.

The opening verses of John’s Gospel make this clear. There the apostle declares, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The first readers of John’s Gospel understood the importance of the term “Word.” It was by the power of His Word that God spoke all things into being. Scholars like to say the “Word was the agent of creation.”

The Word was from the beginning. The Word was not only with God; the Word was God.

In verse two, the author moves away from describing the Word in substance and character to describing it in personality. Word becomes He and “He was with God in the beginning,” writes John. All things were made by Him and in Him was life and light.

Verse 14 affirms the message of “God with us” as foretold in Matthew’s Gospel. The writer declares, “The Word became flesh and made



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

His dwelling among us.” References to the Old Testament abound here. The word translated “dwelling” can also be translated “tabernacled” or “tented” and recalls God’s presence with His people during the years of wandering and beyond. And just as the “Shekinah” glory of God was witnessed around the tabernacle, in Jesus, John and others saw “the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father.” Again the word “glory” refers to the manifestation of God’s presence and power — this time in the life of Jesus.

The apostle Paul makes this same point in the clearest of terms in his letter to the Colossians. There he declares, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). For Paul, Jesus is Immanuel — God with us.

Even the verbs in John’s first chapter are important. John begins using “was” in verse 1. In verse 14 the writer changes to “became.” Here the eternal Word became what He had never been before. He became flesh. He became the Child born to Mary. Flesh did not become deity, but deity did become flesh. With one strong stroke the apostle John dismisses the heresies of both the Gnostics and the Arians. Jesus is fully God and Jesus is fully flesh.

There is no other like Him, the writer continues. He is the “One and Only who came from the Father.” Of John the Baptist, the writer also

uses the phrase “was sent from God.” But there is no comparison between John and Jesus. The phrase “sent from God” refers to John’s mission to be a forerunner of Christ. When referring to Jesus, the phrase references the Word becoming flesh, One who was with God and was God taking on humanity. Jesus is unique in all of history. Even today believers become “children of God” through faith in Jesus, but Jesus remains the One and Only Son of God.

The apostle Paul uses what many scholars call an ancient teaching hymn of the church to emphasize that Jesus is Immanuel — God with us.

Philippians 2:5–11 can be divided into three stanzas. The first stanza (vv. 6–7a) describes the heavenly pre-existence of Jesus. Although being the very nature of God, He willingly took

on the form of a servant. Stanza two (vv. 7b–8) is about his earthly humiliation. Christ Jesus took on flesh and humbled Himself in obedience, even to the point of death on the cross. Stanza three proclaims His heavenly exaltation. God exalted Him to the point that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus’ own words also emphasize that He is Immanuel. To unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem who demanded to know if He were the Christ, Jesus said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

To confused disciples saddened by the news that He was going away, Jesus said,

“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

In His High Priestly prayer the night of His arrest Jesus prayed, “And now Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began” (John 17:5).

Conclusion affirmed

In His own words Jesus announced that He was “Immanuel — God with us.” He was the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, a conclusion affirmed by the apostles and taught by the church.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

“And all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son and they will call Him Immanuel — which means ‘God with us.’”

That message never changes.

The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue Dec. 26.
The next issue will be Jan. 2.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)

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

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

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

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Birmingham, AL 35209

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U.S. Army photo by Darrell Hudson
Chaplain (LTC) Claude Wayne Brittan introduces Voices of Mobile at the Pentagon Christmas Concert.



U.S. Army photo by Darrell Hudson
The University of Mobile vocal ensemble Voices of Mobile performs during the Pentagon Christmas Concert in Washington on Dec. 12 during its Christmas tour.

'An amazing experience'

Voices of Mobile sings at Pentagon, IMB during Christmas tour

University of Mobile (UMobile) vocal ensemble Voices of Mobile performed a Christmas concert at the International Mission Board (IMB) on Dec. 11 and a day later made its second appearance in 2013 at the Pentagon, the U.S. Department of Defense headquarters.

The ensemble, one of 24 at the school, sang before an audience of about 250 in the Pentagon auditorium. The group first performed at the Pentagon chapel during its summer 2013 tour. The group was invited back to perform at the larger venue during its Christmas tour.

"It was such an honor to sing for missionaries at the IMB, and singing at the Pentagon

was an amazing experience," said Roger Breland, producer for the college student ensemble and executive director of the university's Center for Performing Arts. Breland also serves as vice president for special projects at UMobile and producer for the school's 11th annual Christmas Spectacular. More than 9,000 people attended a total of four productions of Christmas Spectacular in November, which showcases the talents of more than 300 student vocalists, instrumentalists, technical directors and more.

Voices of Mobile has just released a CD on the university's new record label, 8Eighty Records. The CD, titled "Take Me to the King," is available for download at www.eightyrecords.com. (UMobile)



U.S. Army photo by Darrell Hudson
Roger Breland is producer for the college student ensemble and executive director of the university's Center for Performing Arts.

Anniversary celebration 'to propel us into the future,' McIntosh says

(continued from page 1)

The memory book will celebrate that generational influence of Alabama WMU on ministry and missions.

"Our goal next year is to honor God and celebrate what He has allowed Alabama WMU to accomplish in her 125 years of existence," said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU.

The anniversary celebration will look forward as well, McIntosh said.

"We want this celebration to propel us into the future as we encourage the next generation of missions leaders and challenge the church to live out the Great Commission," she said.

The deadline for submissions to the memory book is Feb. 1, 2014. Be sure to review the writer's guidelines before submitting your stories. The guidelines and an example are available at www.alawoman.org/MemoryBook. Those interested in the project also can contact Barstow at AlabamaWMU125@yahoo.com or at 205-758-3570.

125th anniversary

Want to write a memory for the book?

1. **CONCENTRATE** on one topic, event or person.
2. **TELL** how the person or activity influenced you to love God and missions.
3. **START** with a Scripture verse.
4. **USE** 300 words or less.
5. **INCLUDE** your name, your church and your association.

Send your submission by email to AlabamaWMU125@yahoo.com or by mail to Sammie Barstow, 10137 Chandlers Crossing, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

For other directions, guidelines and an example, visit alawoman.org/MemoryBook



Photo by Jene Loyless

The My Hope America with Billy Graham video, 'Defining Moments,' plays at one of the Feeding the Multitudes sites Nov. 23.

Feeding the Multitudes

Pinckard Baptist, other churches feed some 18,000 people

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

With 3,600 bags of food each feeding a family of five, some 18,000 people were provided a free meal on Nov. 23.

And it was all thanks to the participation of several Alabama churches, including Pinckard Baptist Church in Dale Baptist Association.

The food distribution was part of a four-county event called Feeding the Multitudes, in which Pinckard Baptist and other churches partnered together to provide a pre-Thanksgiving meal to communities as well as the opportunity for them to hear the gospel message.

As people arrived at one of five sites to pick up their reserved bag of food, which included a ham, green beans, rice and a bag of sweet potatoes, there was a gospel presentation — and in some cases even a worship service — they could attend.

And along with the free food, included in their bag were a Bible and gospel tract.

In conjunction with 'My Hope'

Roger Stone, pastor of Pinckard Baptist, said their food distribution site was held at a middle school's gymnasium in Pinckard and was put on with the help of members from about 10 churches. Their event combined the Feeding the Multitudes food giveaway with a showing of "Defining Moments," one of the My Hope America with Billy Graham videos.

At this site alone, between 1,200 and 1,300 people came through and saw the video, Stone said.

Other churches that participated in Feeding the Multitudes included Grace Point Baptist Church, Dothan; The Harbor Church, Dothan; Heritage United Methodist Church, Enterprise; and Shady Grove Assembly of God in Geneva County.

Through the Feeding the Multitudes effort, "we had about 33 professions of faith (and) hundreds and hundreds of people came for prayer," said Jeff Peacock, pastor of Grace Point Baptist. "We shared the gospel with probably more than 6,000 people."

The event began in 2012 as "Feeding the 5,000" with a couple of participating churches. Peacock said the response from the 2012 event was so overwhelming that they began soliciting other churches to get involved for 2013.

Feeding the Multitudes "crosses all denominational lines," he said, adding the event "really engages and challenges church members."

Pinckard Baptist held a celebration service the Sunday following the event, and the testimonies from people who were involved "just kept going on and on" about how lives were touched, Stone said, noting that several people who came to pick up food attended the celebration service.

Churches in Selma, Covington County and other locations have already expressed a desire to be a part of Feeding the Multitudes in 2014. Pinckard Baptist plans to participate again as well, and Stone said church members are excited and already talking about preparing for the 2014 event.

"We really want to invite as many (churches) to get involved as possible" for 2014, Peacock noted.

For more information about Feeding the Multitudes, email Peacock at jeff@godobe.org or visit www.enough4today.com. ☞



Camp Hill's Sandy Creek marks 175 years

More than 100 people gathered at Sandy Creek Baptist Church, Camp Hill, on Oct. 6 to celebrate the church's 175th anniversary.

Former pastor Mark Brantley shared the morning message and Scott Fowler led the congregation in worship and provided special music. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the Tallapoosa Baptist Association church with a "beautiful certificate," according to church clerk Odean Keel.

The Sunday School room was filled with antiques and items from the church's history and attendees were given a commemorative fan with a picture of the church building on one side and the church's history on the other, Keel explained.

"I'm just thankful I could be a part of it," she said.

A fellowship lunch followed on the grounds.

Pastor Rick Hall noted that visitors and former members came from Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee and across Alabama.

Looking forward, Hall hopes the small congregation can "make a difference in the community." He also noted that although all the members are over the age of 50 and cannot travel as easily as a young person, each member sacrificially gives to missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Sandy Creek Baptist gave the most money to missions in Tallapoosa Association per capita in 2012, Hall said.

(Neisha Fuson)

Oak Mountain celebrates 50th anniversary

Oak Mountain Baptist Church, Pelham, recently celebrated its 50-year anniversary. Church historian Scott Martin said 85 people attended the celebration and former pastors and members shared stories about the past during the morning service.

Martin compiled a church history and copies were distributed to visitors during the Shelby Baptist Association church's celebration.

Hugh Richardson, director of missions for Shelby Association, presented the church with a commemorative plaque and Austin and Ron Foster led the congregation in worship and provided special music. A luncheon followed in the fellowship hall.

Ken Phillips, who has served as Oak Mountain Baptist's pastor for a little more than one year, said members are "excited about what the Lord is doing" through the church.

"We stand on God's Word of Psalm 127:1 and we are building God's house one person at a time," Phillips said, noting that the church has gained more than 20 members in recent months and had several baptisms.

(Neisha Fuson)

Hayden's Corinth Baptist celebrates centennial

Corinth Baptist Church, Hayden, celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 20.

Charles Newsome, a deacon at the Blount Baptist Association church, said there were about 100 people who attended the morning service. Several former pastors attended and shared memories and words of encouragement with the congregation. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque, and local singing group Three by Grace provided special music. A luncheon followed in the fellowship hall.

"It was an enjoyable day," Newsome said.

Pastor John Fallin, who has served there for more than four years, said it was a "great day to be in the Lord's house" and would like to see the church "continue to be a Spirit-filled church in the community ... where people can come and worship the Lord for another 100 years or longer."

(Neisha Fuson)

Clinton Baptist Church celebrates 175-year history

Jan Bullock, a member of Clinton Baptist Church, said it was nice to celebrate her church's 175th anniversary so close to Thanksgiving — they have a lot to be thankful for.

During a service Nov. 3, Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a certificate, and Bullock's husband Charles — the church's pastor — delivered a message encouraging the Bigbee Baptist Association church in its long legacy of following Christ in Greene County.

(Grace Thornton)

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IMB photo
Lisa Bell, of FBC Centerton, Ark., looks over homework with some children in India.

The Spirit broke through

Arkansas church celebrates first Bedia baptized believer after 5 years of praying

By Pastor Stuart Bell
FBC Centerton, Ark.

He was so small, so quiet and so humble. He didn't even come up to my shoulder. Yet to me, Sahaji was larger than life. "Here he is," International Mission Board (IMB) representative Clifton Melek exclaimed, patting Sahaji on the back. "Here is the first baptized believer since you began praying for the Bedia five years ago."

Tears flowed down the faces of our missions team from First Baptist Church, Centerton, Ark. This young 20-something Indian man from an unengaged, unreached people group (UUPG) represented so much to us — the Spirit broke through the Bedia's resistance to the gospel in South Asia.

When our church adopted the Bedia in 2007, there were no known believers. Now I stand watching eight being baptized.

The road to get here has been long, but when Avery Willis, an Arkansas native who had served as a missionary in Southeast Asia and a senior vice president with IMB, told our church in 2006 that 639 people groups with a population of at least 100,000 are considered "unreached" (less than 2 percent Christian) and "unengaged" (no ongoing evangelical effort underway to reach them with the gospel) — I knew where we were heading. I had no idea what adopting or embracing UUPGs entailed, but I knew our church would never be the same.

Picking an area of the world to engage was easy for us. A family from our congregation served in South Asia. Selecting a people group though was much harder. How do you choose when so many need to hear?

Willis recommended the Bedia, so I immediately began researching this people group numbering more than 100,000. I

learned that the Bedia people kept small farms. I knew our Arkansas church would relate to this, but from there, the similarities ended. The Bedia practice a form of religion that mixes Hindu practices with ancestor and demon worship.

We prayed as a church for the Bedia. I felt God at work. He knit our hearts to these people before we ever met them.

In 2007, I went to India on a vision trip. I met with an Indian pastor who also wanted to reach the Bedia. I discovered that he met his first Bedia within weeks of when our church started praying for them.

The Indian pastor mapped out 70 Bedia villages in the surrounding jungles. We went to meet some of his coworkers living among this people. The travel was grueling — bumpy roads and hiking jungle paths.

It was on one of these paths that I met my first Bedia. I was so excited that I took his picture (and he became the "face" of the Bedia for our church).

Warned with a snake

I'll never forget that first night sharing the gospel there. The entire village of 80 came to hear. It was overwhelming to stand there and know that they were hearing the name of Jesus for the very first time.

We left that village and hiked back out to our car. And there stretched out across the road was a large black snake. Our driver was terrified. The dead snake was a warn-

ing. Some did not appreciate our presence.

It was a real reminder that the Bedia are among the last people groups on earth to hear the gospel for a reason.

When I returned to our church, I recounted the joy of sharing Christ and explained that we were up against demonic oppression and persecution. On March 4, 2007, 250

people committed to pray daily for the Bedia until the first baptism and first church was planted.

We had no idea how long it would take, 20 or 25 years. All we knew was that no other group in the world was focusing on the Bedia of South Asia. It was our responsibility to do whatever it takes.

Correspondence with our ministry partner, the Indian pastor, proved to be frustrating at times.

There were long periods of no communication. There was little word on the advancement of the gospel there, yet our church continued to pray.

One time, we learned of two Bedia families contemplating baptism. We prayed but it never happened. The village elders exerted pressure, saying if these couples converted, they would not be allowed to marry off their children or benefit from the community rice fields. One couple completely backed out. The husband of the second insisted that he would follow Christ in baptism until his wife scooped up their children and threatened to jump into the community well.

It was a discouraging time. We prayed but

did not really know what was happening.

I consulted with an IMB administrator from South Asia about our stalemate. He said a new missionary family had begun serving in the same geographic area. What a blessing and an answer to our prayers. We could partner with some of our own missionaries supported by our Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

There was very little Bedia news from January 2010 until September 2011. Then God moved in mighty ways — or at least, that's when our church saw God moving.

'We were stunned'

When I connected with Melek, we heard a side of this story we didn't know. The IMB representative told his discipleship training students about our church praying for the Bedia for five years. Immediately, everyone pointed to other students and said, "He's Bedia! He's Bedia! He's Bedia!"

We found out that not only were there five baptized Bedia believers in Melek's class, they were training to become pastors and missionaries. We were stunned. God had been at work the whole time. We prayed the gospel would reach them and it did.

Our journey continues. Will your church join us by embracing a UUPG? There are more than 3,000 people groups still waiting to hear His name. Through IMB's Embrace initiative, you and your church can take the gospel to one of these groups. To learn more, go to call2embrace.org.

Melek is serving in South Asia through gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Cooperative Program, which fund the work of nearly 5,000 Southern Baptist workers internationally. For more information, visit imb.org/offering.

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

Alabama is in the top 10 for sending missionaries to Asia.

Other top 10 sending states are Texas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, California, Tennessee, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia.

(Source: IMB)

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

► **Richard L. Shahan** recently resigned from his position as children and families pastor for **First Church, Birmingham**. Shahan will serve in Frankfurt, Germany, with Bible Mission International (BMI) beginning in January 2014. He will develop teaching materials and discipleship resources for children to be distributed throughout former Soviet countries. He also will help with Hope Center, a BMI orphanage and summer camps. Shahan was on administrative leave from First, Birmingham, since August after his wife, Karen, was murdered July 23. Before serving at First, Birmingham, Shahan served as associate pastor for childhood education and family growth at Shades Mountain Church, Vestavia Hills, and churches in North Carolina and Texas. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla., and Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.



SHAHAN

MADISON

► **First Church, Huntsville**, will hold The 2013 Living Christmas Tree Dec. 19–22 with special guest Committed. Times will be Dec. 19, 7:30 p.m.; Dec. 20, 7:30 p.m.; Dec. 21, 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Dec. 22, 5:30 p.m. There also will be an abbreviated

presentation especially for young children and their families Dec. 22, 3 p.m. The Dec. 22 presentations will feature interpretation into American Sign Language for the deaf and hard of hearing. Tickets are available online at www.fbchsv.org/lct or by visiting the Living Christmas Tree ticket office Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. until Dec. 20. You also can call the LCT Phone Line at 256-428-9422 for tickets. David Hull is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold a Watch Night service New Year's Eve beginning at 8 p.m. Straitway from Dodge City will provide music, and there will be a break for refreshments around 10 p.m. For information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

MOBILE

► The Resort Ministry of **Dauphin Island Church** is seeking volunteers to help with Vacation Bible School, backyard Bible clubs, repairs for area churches, outreach and assistance for the elderly including building ramps and doing yard work. For information, visit namb.net/volunteer opportunities and find Resort Ministry under the Alabama listings. Chris Schansberg is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Central Church Gardendale, Mount Olive**, has launched a major missions effort to assist a family in their church. The family has a boy who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy when he was about 5 years old and is

now confined to a wheelchair or a hospital bed. In phase one of the missions project, the church built an extensive ramp for the family's home. The next phase is to put in a driveway adjacent to the ramp. The church is welcome to assistance from individuals, churches and other groups. For more information, contact Bonnie Bradford at the church office at 205-631-4231. Brian Burdette is pastor. ► **Jimmy Moore** is the new pastor of **North Gardendale Church, Gardendale**. He previously served as pastor of Community Outreach Church, Houston, Texas. In Alabama he also previously served at Glenn's Chapel Church, Gardendale, and as the associate pastor of Westwood Church, Warrior. He and his wife, Michal, have four children.

PLEASANT GROVE

► **Old Blue Creek Church, Bessemer**, will host a New Year's Eve Service from 8:30 p.m.–midnight. There will be food, singing by New Life Praise, a message, a fireworks show and lighting of the kerosene lanterns. Tommy Dennis is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold "The Star of Bethlehem" live nativity Dec. 20–21, 6–9 p.m. Curtis Kelley is pastor.

WINSTON

► The children's choir of **Old Union Church, Nauvoo**, under the direction of Betty Rice, will perform "The Great Christmas Giveaway" on Dec. 22, 5 p.m. Everyone is invited. Shawn Morgan is pastor.

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Robinson retires from Cottage Hill after 31 years

After serving 31 years at Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, Jim Robinson retired Nov. 3 from his role as associate pastor in children's ministry.

A native of West Virginia, Robinson graduated from Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., with a degree in music education. It wasn't until he was asked to serve as summer youth director at First Baptist Church, South Charleston, W.Va., that he recognized his love for children and felt called into children's ministry.



ROBINSON

He earned a degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and then served in the preschool and day care ministry at two churches in Texas.

In 1982, Robinson joined the staff at Cottage Hill Baptist and has served in different roles in the children's ministries department since then.

Robinson also uses a unique skill in aluminum wire sculpting as a form of ministry. Robinson's father, James, was trained in WWII to work with wiring in electrical work. After the war, James Robinson began to "play" with aluminum wire and made a "Merry Christmas" tabletop display. He began to perfect his alphabet and would bend wire into names and began to make angels as well.

While on vacation with his family, Jim Robinson asked his father if he would teach him how to make an angel.

"The first few angels I made were a wreck," Jim Robinson said. "Now I've been doing it about 15 years and whenever I make a hospital visit I make an angel or the words 'God loves you.'"

Cottage Hill held a celebration Nov. 3 for Jim Robinson. He said several friends and people who had been in the hospital in the past attended the celebration and told him they still had their angels.

"God uses a little skill I have to bless others," Jim Robinson said of the wire creations.

Robinson and his wife, Cindy, have three children and six grandchildren. They will retire to West Virginia. (Neisha Fuson)

Fields retires after 56 years at Mobile's Riverside

O'Leta Fields, who has served faithfully as the secretary of Riverside Baptist Church, Mobile, for 56 years, will retire from the role Dec. 29.

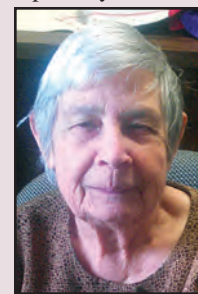
Fields joined Riverside Baptist in 1947 and began serving as the church's third secretary Sept. 1, 1957, just a couple of years after she graduated from high school.

Fields noted that church members who "had a concern for witnessing to people" led her to the Lord.

She said that "being with the people and getting to know them and trying to help them" in any way she can have been the most fulfilling parts of her role at the Mobile Baptist Association church.

Pastor Randall Ingram said Fields is a beloved fixture at Riverside. "She is an encyclopedia of knowledge about the membership and activities of the church," he noted. "She is a godly lady and wonderful servant of Christ and His church. We will miss her presence and knowledge but know she deserves the best retirement life can afford."

Riverside will honor Fields for her years of service Dec. 29. Fields noted that in her retirement, she plans to do some traveling. (Julie Payne)



FIELDS



Photo courtesy of Grace Baptist Church

SNEAD'S GRACE BAPTIST COMPLETES MULTIPURPOSE FAMILY LIFE CENTER

Grace Baptist Church, Snead, in Marshall Baptist Association celebrates the completion of its multipurpose Family Life Center on Nov. 10. The church, which had its first Sunday meeting in early 2010, uses the Family Life Center as its sanctuary, among other things. Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Association, attended the dedication service and noted the church's rapid growth to its current 240-member congregation. Curtis Hawkins is pastor.

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.



Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Bob Covington



COVINGTON

*First Baptist Church, Cedar Bluff
Cherokee Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: Galatians 2:20

FAVORITE HYMN: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

HOBBIES: Reading and listening to music

FAMILY STATUS: Wife of seven years, Ann; wife of 53 years

until her death, Gerry Smith Covington; children: Timothy Poe, Jenni Jones, Daniel Covington and John Covington; four grandchildren

Bob Covington served in the Navy and received his education from the University of Alabama and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Afterward he served more than 33 years with the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board). He served in Malaysia, western Australia and Singapore. In retirement, he instructed Samford University extension classes in Tuscaloosa and has provided pulpit support, taught Sunday School and worked with the homebound ministry of his church in Cherokee County. For 18 months, Covington, now 85, was pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Centre, in Cherokee Association.

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

A: A very loving, warm-hearted pastor's wife. We had lost everything in the Great Depression. We moved into a new community. I would walk down to this white-frame church on Sundays. The Sunday School class was sort of like an oasis of love. I was 12 years old when I accepted Christ as my Savior.

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

A: I was led into the ministry by going on something of an expedition while at the university. I had come out of the Navy. I hadn't been in church in a while. Through activities

and classes, it kept coming back that Christianity was the only thing that makes sense.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: Love the Lord first and love people. You love them and you ask the Lord to help you love them.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: I get a meaning and a purpose in life. I get the joy of serving other people.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: They support me by telephone calls and by their prayers.

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

A: I plan to continue teaching Sunday School. I will continue to preach. I will continue to do my daily Bible study.

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

A: It will give me an ongoing purpose. When I'm preparing to teach or preach, it gives me "fire power." When I hear a moving song or something, I want to get up and preach or teach.

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

A: He has made all the difference because He has given me life and life eternal. He has given me fullness of life. ☪

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or news@thealabamabaptist.org.

'Superb choice'

BHS board names Parrott new president, CEO

The Baptist Health System (BHS) board of directors announced Dec. 10 that Keith Parrott was elected the new president and chief executive officer.

Parrott most recently served as executive vice president and chief operating officer for BHS, with oversight of the four BHS hospitals, as well as patient experience, marketing, strategic planning and business development. Parrott joined BHS in February 2008 as president of Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham.

Prior to that, he spent 17 years with Memorial Hermann Healthcare System in Houston, Texas, holding several management positions, including assistant vice president for operations at the Memorial Hermann Memorial City Hospital in Houston and Southwest Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, and chief executive officer of the Northwest Hospital in San Antonio.

"Keith is a superb choice to lead BHS through what continues to be a challenging environment for health care," said John Holcomb, chairman of the BHS board of trustees.

"Keith's leadership is proven and he is joined by an excellent management team that is ready to move forward in serving our patients."



PARROTT

Parrott said, "I am honored by the opportunity to build upon such a legacy of excellence and compassion and look forward to helping shape the innovative, patient-first ways in which we will serve our communities to better health."

Parrott graduated from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, with a bachelor's degree and received his master's degree in health care administration from the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) in Houston, Texas. He is board certified in health care management and is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives. Parrott was an American Hospital Association/Health Forum "Creating

Healthier Communities" Fellow in 2002 and has served as adjunct faculty for the Healthcare Administration Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

He was honored in 2003 as the Outstanding Alumnus of the UHCL Health Care Administration Program and was recognized in 2007 as a Distinguished Alumnus of UHCL.

Community involvement

Parrott's community activities include membership in the 2010 class of Leadership Birmingham; Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama Hospital Advisory Committee; Alabama Hospital Association (AlaHA) State Regulatory Committee member; secretary, Birmingham Regional Council of AlaHA; Kiwanis of Birmingham; and Advisory Council member for the Junior League of Birmingham (2008-2010).

Parrott is a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, and serves as a deacon there.

Parrott and his wife, Kristy, have three children. (BHS)

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*“Today in the town of David a Savior
has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”
Luke 2:11 (NIV)*

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We are excited about the prospects for Kingdom growth in 2014 and beyond as Alabama Baptists seize the opportunity to become faithful stewards of ALL that God has showered upon us. Contact us today to learn more about this stewardship revolution!



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Front Row: Sarah Snell, Jennifer Ogburn, Robbie Willis, Paula Smith, Stephanie Coston, Donna England, Connie Westover and Nathan McCarthy.
Second Row: George King, Tom Randall, Rodney Bledsoe, Joey Hocutt, Barry Bledsoe, Bill McCrary and Marie Norrell

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Ten Commandments could sit beside pentagram

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — Controversy over a Ten Commandments monument on grounds of the Oklahoma State Capitol took a surprising twist when Satanists sought to place a statue of their own alongside it.

Then a few days later, a Hindu organization said it would apply for permission to erect a statue of Hanuman.

The two groups suggested that Oklahoma legislators opened the door to such displays when they pushed through a bill in 2009 giving permission for a Ten Commandments monument to be placed on the Capitol grounds. The monument, paid for with private funds, was placed there in 2012.

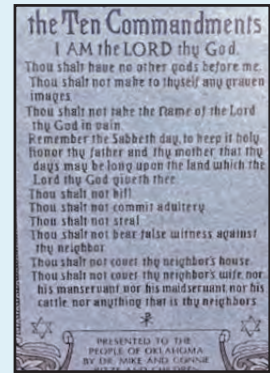


Photo courtesy of ABP

According to media reports, the New York-based Satanic Temple has notified the state's Capitol Preservation Commission that it wants to donate a monument on the Capitol grounds "as an homage to the historic/literary Satan." Possible designs include a pentagram — a satanic symbol — and an interactive display for children.

Rajan Zed, a board member for the Universal Society of Hinduism, announced Dec. 10 the group's intention to seek permission to erect a statue. He said the design would follow.

Hanuman, the monkey king, is an important deity in Hinduism, the world's third largest faith. He is most popular among devotees of the avatar Lord Ram and others following a devotional path. There are more temples and roadside shrines to Hanuman than to any other deity in all of North India.

For Hindus, Hanuman is one of the finest exemplars of a life of love and service of God.

Trait Thompson, chairman of the Oklahoma Capitol Preservation Commission, which approves all monuments, declined to comment, saying only that a good-faith application would be voted on by the commission.

Not 'if' but 'where'

Bryant pastor says church will 'die' without missions

When Todd Smith decided to go on his first missions trip in 2004, he went all in.

He flew, took a bus, rode in a truck and drove a boat hours into the jungle to take the gospel to an unreachable village in Peru.

And after that, he was never the same.

Now Smith, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Bryant, can't stop going.

"Ebenezer does many missions trips each year, and they also have gone on all the associational missions trips I have led," said David Patty, director of missions for Sand Mountain Baptist Association. "They've been with us to Albania, Mexico, Guatemala, Alaska, some of these multiple times."

God shows up in the places they go, Smith said, and it's making an impact on the church, too.

"Now it's not 'if' we're going but 'where' we're going," he said. "Everybody wants to go. We've got little kids who are saying they are feeling called to do missions."

The church has a particular affection for Peru, the place where Smith experienced missions for the first time. One project they're helping to support is a camp for pastors in the jungle to come and



123rf.com

After going deep into the jungles of Peru in 2004, Pastor Todd Smith was hooked on missions. He says it's changed him and his church.

be disciplined and trained by a missionary there.

Smith has already seen God do amazing things in Peru, and he said he knows God can do even more.

On one trip, his team went into the jungle and stayed three weeks, preaching the gospel to whoever would listen.

"We said we were leaving the 99 to go find the one," Smith said.

But at the end of their trip, 99 had come to faith in Jesus Christ.

"The Lord has been shining," he said.

On one trip, they built houses for people living in the dump in Guatemala. On another, they helped build a church in Nicaragua. On yet another, they took food bags to the needy of Honduras.

And in Romania, they saw God send an ambulance to a remote village as they prayed over a dying child.

Seeing God work is keeping Ebenezer ablaze, Smith said. "The church, if we aren't doing missions, we're going to die."

(Grace Thornton)



February 21-22, 2014

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Bartlett, Tennessee

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Southern Baptist
Convention



Phil Hoskins, Pastor
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Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago December 1963

Deacon Goes to Mission Hospital: On Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 28, Dr. Byrn Williamson of the Simon Williamson Clinic and a deacon of First Baptist Church in Birmingham, left for Eku, Nigeria, where he will remain for three weeks performing surgery for the Southern Baptist hospital. Dr. Williamson responded to an emergency call of the Foreign Mission Board to replace the missionary doctor who had to return to the United States on emergency leave.

40 Years Ago December 1973

Campus Ministries Names New

Associate Director: Oxford A. Smith, associate Baptist campus minister at Auburn University for the past five years, has been elected associate director in the campus ministries department of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, effective Jan. 1, 1974. Prior to becoming Baptist campus minister at Auburn, Smith was associate campus minister for the Mobile area and director of the Citronelle Baptist Assembly 1965-1968.

30 Years Ago December 1983

New Editor Elected: Jack E. Brymer Sr., managing editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, has been elected editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*, state paper of the Florida Baptist Convention, effective March 1, 1984. Brymer joined *The Alabama Baptist* staff in 1967, the year after Hudson Baggett became editor. Edgar R. Cooper, who will retire Dec. 31, will continue to serve as editor of *The Witness* through February.

20 Years Ago December 1993

Convention Followup: In an organizational meeting following the meeting of the state convention in November, the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) elected Leon Ballard, pastor of York Baptist Church, as its chairman. Edwin Jenkins, pastor of Hilldale Baptist Church

in Birmingham, was elected vice chair, and Phoebe Harris, a member of Parker Memorial Baptist Church in Anniston, was re-elected secretary. The SBOM also recognized the first black member of the board, Robert Mays, pastor of the Rock of Ages Baptist Church in Tuskegee. Rock of Ages is one of 21 predominately black churches now affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

10 Years Ago December 2003

Volunteers of the Year: Ray and Brenda McDaniel were recognized by Reggie Quimby, director of the office of global partnerships and volunteers in missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, as recipients of the 2003 Alabama Baptist Volunteers of the Year award during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in Mobile Nov. 18. Members of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, the McDaniels have been dedicated to missions for more than 20 years. Thomas Spain, a fellow member of Whitesburg who nominated the couple for the award, said "the urgency of missions ... is woven so tightly into the everyday aspects of their lives that there is no distinction."

Geneva church's monthly meeting draws area adults

It takes a break in the summer, and people are more than ready for it to start back up when September rolls around, Nancy Williford said.

The monthly 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood!) nondenominational luncheon is "something I think that the community really does enjoy," she said.

Williford, administrative assistant to Pastor Mike Shirah at

Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva, said the church uses it as a ministry not just to its city but to the surrounding area, including small towns across the Florida line.

"It's a ministry to median-age and senior-age adults," she said. "It's a program of encouragement — an uplifting program."

Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting.

"We're always blessed by the people who come and speak or do

a program for us," she said, noting that pastors from area churches provide the messages, and sometimes the meeting has a musical program instead.

Around 125 come to the meeting, most hearing about it by word of mouth, though it's advertised in the local paper.

Although many come from different walks of life, it's a particularly good way for widows to get together, Williford said. (TAB)

MARKET PLACE

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Calhoun County, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumés to: Oak Bowery Baptist Church, 3300 AL Hwy 144, Ohatchee, AL 36271, or email to: oakbowerybaptist@att.net.

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 resumés 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 resumés to: Harmony Grove Pastor Search, P.O. Box 1432, Winfield, AL 35594, or harmonygrovebaptist@gmail.com.

FULL-TIME/BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR: Patsburg Baptist Church, located four miles NE of Luverne, Ala., is seeking a full-time/bivocational pastor. Small country church in need of a godly person to lead congregation and visit in community. Please send resumés to: Patsburg Pulpit Committee, P.O. Box 544, Luverne, AL 36049.

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.

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.

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 resumés to: scollins@fbcfoley.com. Please include a video of you leading worship. Resumés will be accepted until Jan. 15.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Concord Baptist Church, Hueytown, Ala., is seeking a music minister to lead a blended service with both a choir and praise band. Send resumés to: concordbaptist@bham.rr.com.

STUDENT MINISTER: Cinco Baptist Church, located in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., is seeking a full-time student minister. College degree required. Seminary degree and ministry experience both a plus. Church website: www.cincobaptist.org. Submit resumés to: personnel@cincobc.org.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER: Hillabee Baptist Church in Alexander City is seeking a bivocational youth minister. Please submit

resumés to: hillabeebc@yahoo.com.

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FINANCIAL SECRETARY: Opening for a part-time financial secretary that will require 20-30 hours per week. Experience in accounting/bookkeeping and computer skills are needed. Qualified applicants are encouraged to send their resumés to: P.O. Box 823, Oneonta, AL 35121.

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Want to know God?

Pastor Robbie Weems
Clearview Baptist Church, Pinson

The Barna Research Group did a survey on eternal life that found "[78 percent] of the population believe that it is possible for someone to earn their way into Heaven through good behavior" (March 6, 2009). Is it true that we can be good enough to get to heaven? God's Word states, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Not only do we not meet God's holy and perfect standards for salvation, but most of the time we do not live up to our own expectations. What is the answer to this bad news?

Jesus is the most important figure in all of human history. He is God in flesh (John 1:14), physically risen from the dead, Lord and Savior. He came to die for sinners (Rom. 5:8) to remove the separation between God and sinners and to remove the wrath of God upon us. The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That means your sins have caused a separation between you and God (Isa. 59:2) and the result is death (Rom. 6:23) and wrath (Eph. 2:3). The only way out is to be saved by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). You must trust in what Jesus did on the cross to forgive you of your sins and not trust anything else, not even your own sincerity or works.

If you are not a Christian and want to be delivered from the consequence of your sin, which is damnation, then come to the One who loves you. Come to the One who died for sinners. Turn from your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus.

"Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, amen."

in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders



William "Bill" Edward Hull Pastor, professor, author dies

William "Bill" Edward Hull, who served in many roles at Samford University in Birmingham, died Dec. 10. He was 83.

Hull, a Birmingham native, attended the University of Alabama and later earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University), a master's degree and doctorate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and pursued postdoctoral study at the University of Göttingen, in Göttingen, Germany, and Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.



HULL

Hull served as pastor of several churches including Beulah Baptist Church, Wetumpka (1950–1951); churches in Kentucky; and First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La. (1975–1987). He served multiple churches as interim pastor including Vestavia Hills Baptist Church; Riverchase Baptist Church; Southside Baptist Church and Huffman Baptist Church, all in Birmingham.

The author of 18 books and contributor to 27 others, Hull also was the theologian in residence at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, from 1991 until the time of his passing.

Hull was Samford's provost from 1987 to 1996 and acting president in 1993. He was a professor at Samford from 1996 to 2000 and then research professor from 2000 until the time of his passing. Hull was named the alumnus of the year in 2005 and was awarded a doctor of letters honorary degree in 2008.

He was a professor at Southern Seminary in the New Testament department from 1954 to 1975. He served as the dean of the school of theology from 1969 to 1975 and as provost from 1972 to 1975.

Hull was preceded in death by his wife, Wylodine. He is survived by two children, two grandchildren and one great-grandchild. (Neisha Fuson)

Ronald "Ronnie" Earl Blake Little Sandy's pastor dies

Ronald "Ronnie" Earl Blake, pastor of Little Sandy Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, died Nov. 25. He was 58.

Blake, who attended the University of North Alabama in Florence, later earned his bachelor's degree online from North Mississippi Baptist Bible Institute based in Belden, Miss.

He accepted Christ later in life at the age of 40 in 1995. The following year he co-founded RoadBlock Ministries, a prison ministry that takes the gospel to juvenile detention centers.

In 2001, Blake became pastor of Little Sandy Baptist in Tuscaloosa Baptist Association. He served there until the time of his passing.

Blake also was a talented singer and released seven albums. He sang at Bible conferences and revivals across the country.

He is survived by his wife, Vickie, and one son. (Neisha Fuson)



BLAKE

Charles Raymond Crim Selma's Fairview pastor dies

Charles Raymond Crim, pastor of Fairview Baptist Church, Selma, died Dec. 5. He was 80.

Crim, who spent 60 years in ministry, also served as pastor of Carlowville Baptist Church, Minter, for six years.

Born in Texas, Crim graduated from East Texas Baptist College (now East Texas Baptist University) in Marshall, Texas.

When he was 20, he became pastor of Mission Springs Baptist Church, Henderson, Texas, and later served several churches in Texas.

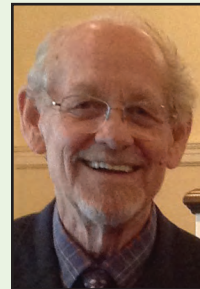
In 1976, Crim and his wife, Lottie, were appointed as Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) missionaries and served in Wyoming.

Charles Crim was instrumental in helping to form the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention in 1982. He later served as director of missions for several areas of Wyoming until retiring in 1998.

In 2001, Charles Crim began to serve as pastor of Lana'i Baptist Church, on the island of Lana'i in Hawaii.

Charles Crim also served as a Home Mission Board consultant, traveling to assist several churches across the nation in forming missions strategies. He and Lottie Crim also traveled to South America and North Africa on missions trips.

Crim is survived by his wife, three children, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. (Neisha Fuson)



CRIM

David Kilburn Morris

Former state missionary Morris dies

David Kilburn Morris, who served as the director of public relations for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) from 1958 to 1971, died Dec. 7. He was 83.

Morris earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Florida in Gainesville.

After serving in the Air Force, he earned his master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He then earned his doctor of education degree from the University of Alabama.

Morris was director of development at Huntingdon College in Montgomery for 20 years. He also served as the director of public relations at Mississippi College in Clinton.

Known as "quite the storyteller," Morris received national honors for the writing and production of the TV ad series, "Mainstream."

Morris and his wife, Claire, were SBOM prayer coordinators through the office of global missions, a volunteer Mission Service Corps position, from 2004 to 2006.

Morris was a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, at the time of his passing.

He is survived by his wife, four children, nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. (Neisha Fuson)



MORRIS

Cane Creek Baptist holds Christmas stocking giveaway for those in need

During the Christmas season, food isn't the only thing the food bank of Cane Creek Baptist Church, Warrior, provides for those in need. The Sulphur Springs Baptist Association church takes the ministry one step further through a Christmas stocking giveaway, which was held Dec. 14.

The stockings are meant to bring a bit of Christmas cheer to the children of families the food bank serves once a month.

Each stocking is filled with small toys donated by members of Cane Creek Baptist and other area churches. The stockings are included in the bags of food people pick up in the month of December so that the children's families, rather than the church, can be the ones to give the stockings to their children.

The food bank, which is located at Cane Creek Baptist, will

celebrate 10 years of serving the community in February 2014. The idea for the stocking giveaway began about five years ago, said food bank director Becky White.

She noted that many churches in Sulphur Springs Association "help tremendously," pitching in for the stocking effort and also helping with the food bank throughout the year — either through volunteering or giving financially.

Harold Donald, pastor of Cane Creek, also acknowledged the church has "a lot of churches in the association who are making this (ministry) possible."

Donald noted the gospel is preached at the beginning of every food distribution day and he has witnessed a number of people accept Christ as their Savior.

"When they come in to get food" they have the need for food but also the need for spiritual food, White said. (Julie Payne)

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Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

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Hawaii Pacific Convention elects new executive director

HONOLULU — The Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention has chosen Christopher Martin, pastor of Lahaina Baptist Church, Maui, Hawaii, as its next executive director.

A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and pastor in Hawaii for eight years, Martin has served in several convention roles and was elected president of the Hawaii convention just weeks before being named executive director. Having resigned as president, he will begin as executive director Jan. 1, 2014.

Martin's first pastorate was at Angie Baptist Church, Angie, La., followed by two years at First Baptist Church, Cedar Key, Fla.

While at Lahaina Baptist, Martin served as a volunteer police chaplain and a Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer.

"I've had a wonderful opportunity to work with so many of our churches and have a great relationship with our staff at the convention office," Martin said. "I look forward to what God's going to do through our convention and through Hawaii's involvement with the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole. I'm excited, and I appreciate the opportunity."

Though geographically vast, Martin said the convention has a "deep concern to be connected and to work together to share Christ."

"There is a strong sense of *ohana* — the Hawaiian term for family — here. We really love each other, care about each other and want to invest in each other's ministries," Martin said. "You can't help but get excited to know that the churches you have an opportunity to work with day in and day out are actually excited about each other and the Kingdom work that's in front of them."



MARTIN

THE Bridge

Huntsville-area churches urged to rally for event

There's only one bridge between man and God — Jesus — and Madison Baptist Association (MBA) churches are rallying together to make sure their area knows about Him.

The Bridge, a four-night evangelistic event, is set for March 9–12, 2014, at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville.

The goal "is to reach the lost of the Huntsville area with the good news of Jesus Christ," said Charlie Howell, MBA director of missions. "I also believe Christians will be revived and churches revitalized as a result of their participation."

Steve Hale, staff evangelist of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., will speak to the adults while Dean and Gayna Forrest of Myrtle Beach, S.C., provide children's ministry for grades 1 through 6.

Special guest speakers include:

► Jeremiah Castille, football team chaplain for the University of Alabama, on Sunday, March 9

► Patrick Nix, former quarterback for Auburn University, on Monday, March 10

► James Pillsbury, U.S. Army lieutenant, on Tuesday, March 11 (the service is also Military

and First Responders Appreciation Night)

► Ashley Smith Robinson on Wednesday, March 12. Robinson is known around the world as the single mother who persuaded Brian Nichols, Atlanta's courtroom killer, to surrender to police after he held her at gunpoint in her apartment for seven hours.

Wednesday will also be Youth Night beginning with a Pizza Blast for youth from grades 6–12 an hour before the event.

Evangelist Bob Smith of Huntsville will lead music. The event will begin at 6:30 each evening.

Howell said many Christians are needed to serve in various capacities — choir, counselors, ushers, children's ministry and other things.

Most of all, they are needed to bring their lost friends to the event and pray for their hearts to be opened, he said.

"Prayer is just absolutely essential for the success of our efforts," How-

ell said. "We want all 87 churches of our MBA to be involved in helping with this great evangelistic event, as well as any other Christians who desire to join us in reaching our city with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

For more information, visit www.thebridgeevent.com. (TAB)

The goal "is to reach the lost of the Huntsville area with the good news."

**Charlie Howell
director of missions,
Madison Association**

Faith-Focused Security Training for volunteers to be offered 25 times across Alabama in 2014

Alabama Baptists who do volunteer missions work overseas will have 25 opportunities in 2014 to be trained in safety and security.

Faith-Focused Security Training (FFST) will be taught in locations all over the state by Fort Sherman Academy, one of the world's largest providers of travel-security and crime-survival courses.

"There's risk and danger wherever we go," said Reggie Quimby, director of the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). "We need to be equipped to the best of our ability."

This is important in order to

take the gospel around the world effectively and to protect the work of missionaries and national Christians in the countries where Alabama Baptists travel, Quimby said.

The training helps volunteers learn how to handle "worst-case scenarios" — criminal activity, political disaster, natural disaster and health issues.

Two levels offered

Of the 25 training sessions, 22 will be Fort Sherman Academy's level A course, the most basic training offered for volunteers who travel occasionally to low-risk areas.

Topics will include travel security, code of conduct, crime

and hostage survival, dealing with government detention and questioning, countersurveillance, rescue behaviors, minimizing exploitation and basic crisis policies.

The other three — including one set for Jan. 30–Feb. 1 in Citronelle — will be B+ level training.

This level is designed for church staff and missions team leaders who travel to elevated risk locations.

Sessions will cover security, code of conduct, crime survival, dealing with unfriendly governments, detention and questioning. Role-play will be used.

All instruction will be done from a faith-based perspective.

Level A training is required for anyone participating in the Alabama Acts 1:8 Connections strategy, which connects missionaries with Alabama churches and associations.

For more information or to register for training, call 1-800-264-1225, ext. 238 or visit <http://www.alsbom.org/upcoming-events/faith-focused-security-training>.

For more information about Fort Sherman Academy's training curriculum, visit www.fortsherman.org. (TAB)



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 22

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

CELEBRATE JESUS AT CHRISTMAS! Luke 1:30-35, 38, 46-49; 2:1-7

During the holiday season, many people lose sight of the real significance of Christmas and get lost in the hustle and bustle of the activities. Christmastime gives all adults an opportunity to focus their attention on the true magnificence of the season: a celebration of Jesus' birth — that is, the coming of God in the flesh to provide a way of salvation for sinners.

Declare Who Jesus Is (1:30-33)

The plan for redemption began to unfold fully when Christ took on human flesh in order to become humanity's salvation. The opening event was the visit of the angel Gabriel with a young girl and announcing to her that God was choosing her to be the mother of the promised Messiah.

The angel's announcement contained seven astounding bits of information about the identity of the child. 1) The baby's genuine humanity: "You will conceive in your womb." 2) The baby would be male: "and bear a son." 3) The baby's mission: "You shall name Him Jesus" (which means "Jehovah is salvation"). 4) The baby's inherent greatness in His person and His work: "He will be great." 5) The recognition of the baby's deity: "and shall be called the Son of the Most High" (the title "Most High" is an Old Testament name for the God of Abraham — Gen. 14:18-22). 6) The baby's right as Messiah to the throne of David (2 Sam. 7): "the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David." 7) The baby will exercise kingly authority over an eternal and universal kingdom: "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Appreciate How Jesus Came (1:34-35, 38)

Mary's question, "How can this be?" was not a question of doubt but one of mechanics. Mary knew how children are conceived; she knew *what* would happen, but she was asking about *how* it would happen. In fact,

this question was an expression of faith. She had already believed the angel's message and was now asking for clarification.

The angel's response was more astonishing than his words about the Baby's identity. His answer was the virgin birth, more correctly, the virgin conception, a miracle accomplished by God. By His creative act, the Holy Spirit would "overshadow" Mary. That word is used in the Old Testament to indicate the presence, protection and power of God in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and in the Temple (Ex. 40:35). Consequently Mary's baby will be holy and will be called God's Son.

In quiet submission, Mary yielded herself to the Lord for the accomplishment of His purposes. For every follower of Christ, she is an outstanding example of voluntary obedience to the will of God.

Proclaim God's Greatness (1:46-49)

In song, Mary proclaimed God's greatness. The song, called "The Magnificat" (the first word in the Latin translation), is filled with Old Testament quotations, demonstrating that Mary's mind and heart were filled with God's Word. She did not see herself as one who bestows blessings but as one who receives blessing. In fact, she knew she was not sinless, but needed God as her Savior.

Welcome Jesus (2:1-7)

Augustus Caesar thought he was demonstrating his supreme authority over the Roman Empire when he ordered a census for the purpose of collecting taxes. This edict required Joseph and Mary to make a 90-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Caesar was the tool God used to get Joseph and Mary to the place the prophet Micah said Messiah would be born (Mic. 5:2).

Arriving in Bethlehem, the couple, with childbirth approaching, found no place to stay except an animal shelter, a stable. So the Sovereign Lord of the universe took to Himself a human body and came into our time/space history as a helpless baby in order to provide salvation by means of His death and resurrection. Happy birthday, Lord Jesus! 🎂

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

COURAGE Matthew 1:18-25; 2:19-23

It is a commonly quoted maxim that courage is not the absence of fear but the resolve to press on in spite of your fear. However true this may be, it begs the question, "What is the source of the resolve that gives rise to such courage?" Matthew provides a "profile in courage" of Joseph, who faced an extremely difficult situation with the resolve of faith in God and God's revealed word.

(1:18)

Crisis is the crucible in which the courage rooted in faith is formed. In one verse, Matthew relates a serious crisis: Mary is "found to be with child" while betrothed to Joseph. By Jewish law, betrothal was a binding contract, which could only be terminated by the death of one or both parties or by a formal decree of divorce. For all intents and purposes, the couple is considered husband and wife, though the woman has neither left her father's house nor has the couple consummated their union. The penalty for unchastity before marriage was death by stoning (Deut. 22:13-21). Joseph faced a life-or-death dilemma.

(1:19-23)

We get a glimpse of Joseph's character in his initial reaction to the situation: He "resolved to divorce her (Mary) quietly" — a divorce before two witnesses. In a scene reminiscent of Abraham raising the knife to slay his son Isaac, God's messenger likewise warns Joseph to refrain from divorcing Mary. In a dream the angel brings God's word to Joseph, not only counseling him to refrain from divorcing Mary but encouraging him to proceed with the marriage. By conventional standards, the revelation is fantastic, i.e. the stuff of fantasy. Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit; she will give birth to a son "who will save God's people from their sins;" and He

will fulfill the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

If Joseph's original dilemma was not sufficiently difficult, it was made more difficult by the introduction of God's word. Or was it made easier? Such is the dilemma of faith in God's revealed word. "What will people think if I take Mary as my wife under these circumstances? What will they say if I explain that God told me to do this?" By conventional wisdom, Joseph's courage is religious fanaticism. The courage to face difficult situations by faith will often be deemed foolish and fanatical. The angel's revelation, however, was consistent with the word of God, prompting Joseph to respond in faith.

(1:24-25; 2:19-23)

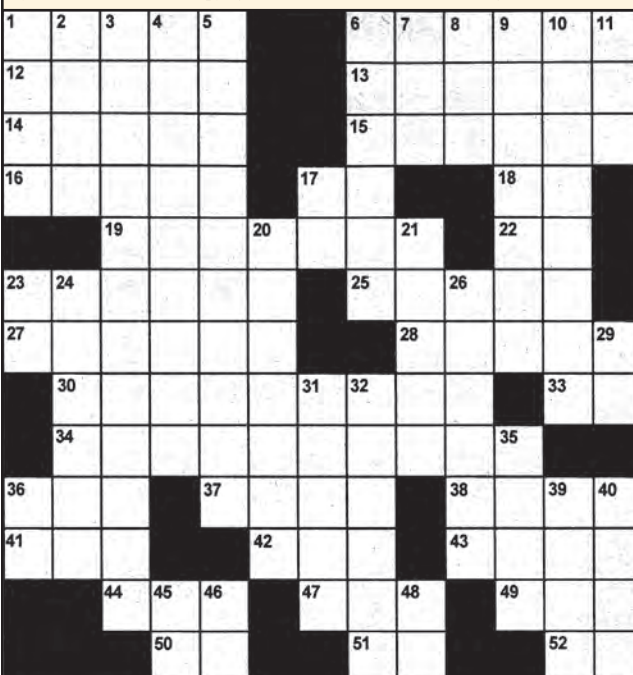
The real courage of Joseph's story is evidenced in his obedience: that he "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." This was true not only in his taking Mary to be his wife and in the naming of the child to whom she gave birth (1:24-25), but also in Joseph's responses to other revelations instructing him 1) to take his family to Egypt (2:13-15); 2) to return to Israel (2:19-21); and 3) to settle in Nazareth in Galilee rather than in Judea (2:22-23). Consistently Joseph demonstrates the courage to trust the word of God as revealed to him in the angelic visitations in his dreams.

Joseph undoubtedly faced fears and concerns that would reasonably call into question the wisdom of his decisions. Time after time he faced those fears with faithful obedience, staking his reputation and his very life on the certainty of God's revealed word. While Joseph played a key role in the extraordinary events of Jesus' (the Messiah's) birth, we should learn from and follow his example. Trusting God and God's Word, we too can face the fears and difficulties of the Christian life with courage rooted in faith. 🎂

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue Dec. 26.
Sunday School lessons for Dec. 29 will be available at
www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Son of God.
- The book of the generation of Jesus _____. (Matt. 1:1)
- Nebuzar-_____, captain of the guard, ____ servant. (2 Kings 25:8)
- Thou mayest prosper and be in _____. (3 John 2)
- And flee into _____. (Matt. 2:13)
- Published throughout all his _____. (Esther 1:20)
- Behold, there came a _____. (Matt. 8:2)
- I have given ____ into the children of Lot. (Deut. 2:9)
- Knockout. (abbr.)
- _____, the chamberlain of the city. (Rom. 16:23)
- Blessed are the pure ____ heart. (Matt. 5:8)
- ____ it is not _____. (Acts 22:22)
- If ye then, ____ evil. (Matt. 7:11)
- Did ____ lightness? ... that with _____. (2 Cor. 1:17)
- Put off all these; ____, wrath. (Col. 3:8)
- Party after a wedding.

- Do, ____, Mi. (Matt. 5:44)
- In the very ____ Moses ... us, ____ (John 8:4,5)
- The sons of Caleb, ____, Elah and Naam. (1 Chron. 4:15)
- Day after Monday. (abbr.)
- By faith, ____, being warned of God. (Heb. 11:7)
- City that is ____ on a hill. (Matt. 5:14)
- And when the ____ heard it. (Matt. 20:24)
- Whosoever shall ____ me before men. (Matt. 10:33)
- They did all _____. (Matt. 14:20)
- As a ____ lappeth. (Judg. 7:5)
- The son of _____. (Luke 3:36)
- Let your light ____ shine. (Matt. 5:16)
- They may appear unto men ____ fast. (Matt. 6:16)
- Registered nurse. (abbr.)
- ____ went out to meet Sisera. (Judg. 4:18)
- Fall by the ____ of the sword. (Luke 21:24)
- But I ____ unto you ... use you and ____ you. (Matt. 5:44)
- My substance, yet being _____. (Ps. 139:16)
- And ____ upon it ... his ____ white as snow. (Matt. 28:2,3)
- Every ____ had two faces. (Ezek. 41:18)
- Touched the ____ of his garment. (Matt. 9:20)
- Hit sharply.
- ____ fear my lord ... your faces worse _____. (Dan. 1:10)
- Weakness of God is ____ than men. (1 Cor. 1:25)
- Blessed are ____ merciful. (Matt. 5:7)
- Heaven is ____ hand. (Matt. 3:2)
- If my ____ hath turned ____ of the way. (Job 31:7; reverse order)
- Zidon: for the ____ hath spoken. (Isa. 23:4; reverse order)
- Fe, ____, Fo, Fum.
- For ____ lamps ____ gone out. (Matt. 25:8)
- Brought him to an ____, _____. (Luke 10:34)

- Do, ____, Mi.
- Wool fabric.
- Growth of ____ own ... shalt ____ reap. (Lev. 25:5)
- As the ____ of the feet. (Dan. 2:42)
- Theirs ____ the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3)
- ____, Eshcol and Mamre. (Gen. 14:24)
- And when they had sung a _____. (Matt. 26:30)
- Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
- Think not that I am come ____ destroy the law. (Matt. 5:17)
- ____ and search diligently. (Matt. 2:8)





Photo by Jamee Houston

EPIC Light members (l to r) Kerry Shows, Joe Crawford, Lisa Cameron, Jud Cameron and Jeremy Houston share the gospel through song throughout several states.

Eternal Peace In Christ

Alabama-based group witnesses to many

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

Booked solid for months now, Alabama-based music group EPIC Light (Eternal Peace In Christ) has seen God open doors and entire families saved, said vocalist and lead guitarist Jeremy Houston.

The contemporary Christian group formed in 2012 when Houston, a member of Moundville Baptist Church in Hale Baptist Association, met couple Lisa and Jud Cameron. All three were at a youth camp to perform and began playing some music together that day. Houston, who had been experiencing a growing desire to start a band to witness to people through song, felt led to share that desire with the Camerons.

The three decided to form a group with Lisa Cameron as a vocalist and keyboardist and Jud Cameron as a vocalist and drummer. They then added two more members, Joe Crawford, who plays bass guitar, and Kerry Shows, who plays acoustic guitar. “[God] brought us together,” Houston noted.

The group began to pray about where the Lord wanted to use them, and Houston said “it’s been such a blessing” to witness to others through their music.

‘Humbling experience’

One of these witnessing opportunities for EPIC Light came just recently when they were invited by a chaplain to perform at a prison. Not knowing what to expect, the group arrived and watched as the room they were going to perform in filled up.

During the performance, Houston said he spotted one particular man sitting on the front row who looked very angry at first.

“As I was playing, I [saw] a

tear rolling down his [cheek],” he said of the change he began to witness in the man. And when Houston began to share his testimony, the man began to cry out loud.

After the performance, Houston felt led by the Lord to talk to him. Houston was wearing a cross that Crawford had made. Houston took it off his neck and told the man he wanted him to have it. The man replied that he had never been given anything. After witnessing to him about God’s love, Houston said the man was so excited that he helped the group load their equipment. “It was a humbling experience,” Houston noted.

EPIC Light plays cover songs and also writes their own original music. In addition to playing at churches and even out of state, they also play for the youth groups of Moundville Baptist and East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, on a regular basis.

The group is currently working on its first album and saying they hope to “get into the studio” in early 2014.

Along with Houston, Crawford and Shows also are members of Moundville Baptist, and EPIC Light recently played a new song titled “Son of God” at the church. The song was written by Houston and the Camerons.

Jason Duckett, pastor of Moundville Baptist, said he is excited about the manner in which God is using EPIC Light in his own church, the community and beyond.

“Their creativity and giftedness glorify the God of mercy Who uses whomever He chooses to share the gospel,” Duckett noted. “While God does not need our contributions or talents to accomplish His tasks, He wants to use us by filling us with Himself.” ❧

Messages of hope

NewSong shares gospel through song, missions partnerships

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For more than 30 years, the Grammy-nominated contemporary group NewSong has been sharing timeless messages of hope and salvation at their concerts.

By partnering with a variety of missions organizations such as World Vision and Holt International, the group has been able to use their platform to meet needs in Jesus’ name and increase awareness about adoption.

“For us, music has always been a tool to promote ministry,” lead singer Russ Lee said. “At our concerts, we want people to know that there is such a sense of hope and future in knowing Christ. Our desire is that God would allow us to take the gifts that He has given us and convey a message that gives people a glimpse of who He is and how wonderful it is to know Him.

“At the end of the day, our goal is that we don’t get in the way of the message. We simply set the table for the truth and reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Spotlight on Christ

The group has recorded 18 albums and garnered an impressive array of achievements, including 20 No. 1 Christian radio hits and being inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. Despite the awards and accolades, the group keeps the spotlight shining on Christ.

Desiring to increase their platform and ability to reach more audiences with the gospel message, NewSong founded the Winter Jam Tour Spectacular featuring a variety of Christian artists in concert together. For the past three years, this highly attended and anticipated tour has ranked as the largest tour in the country — even surpassing tours of secular artists, according to Pollstar Ticket Sales Chart.

While performing concerts across the country, NewSong remains committed to connecting audiences to Christ. Through the years, band members have heard numerous stories about how their music



Photo courtesy of Turning Point Media

The Grammy-nominated group NewSong has created several unique platforms to share the gospel message.

has inspired people to surrender their life to the Lord.

“You never know who is going to walk up to you and say something about how a song has impacted their life,” Lee said. “We’ve heard that some of our songs have encouraged people in the darkest time of their life.

“What we really want to do through our music is to ... shine a light of hope that will encourage people, point them in the right direction and let them know that God loves them and wants to rescue them.”

In addition to the Winter Jam Tour, NewSong will kick off a 15-city Very Merry Christmas Tour.

Along with several special guest artists including Audio Adrenaline and Sidewalk Prophets, NewSong will perform selections from their best-selling holiday recordings, “The Christmas Shoes” and “The Christmas Hope,” as well as their upcoming release, “Swallow the Ocean: Christmas Edition,” which will be available through digital retailers.

During concerts, the group explains and emphasizes to audiences about their desperate need for a relationship with Christ, Lee said.

“When we take the stage, we want to share a message about God’s unconditional love for His children and (that) the reason that He pursues us so passionately is because He loves us so completely.” ❧



Photo by Doug Rogers

Heart Behind the Music in Montgomery

The Heart Behind the Music” concert Dec. 3 featured (left to right) Richie McDonald, former lead singer of Lonestar; Lenny LeBlanc, Christian singer/songwriter; guitarist Jesse Michael Howard; country singer/songwriter Billy Dean; and Christian and country singer Susan Ashton. Held at Troy University’s Davis Theatre for Performing Arts, the performers shared the stories behind some of their songs, along with a selection of Christmas songs. (TAB)

Healthy living

Pros, cons of food-and-faith programs debated

Ministers who specialize in health and spiritual formation are hopeful Rick Warren's new food-and-faith program may boost ongoing efforts to link body and soul in the minds of Baptists and other Christians. The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life, the Saddleback Church pastor said in a release, "is far more than a diet; it is about living a healthier life based on biblical principles."

Warren said he was inspired after baptizing 800 people in 2009 and realizing many of them were overweight — just as he was. Two years later, 15,000 members of his church lost a combined 260,000 pounds using Warren's approach. He released the program with much fanfare in early December.

But reaction to the plan has been varied from enthusiastic praise to cautious reminders that weight-loss plans — even those based on spiritual principles — can still miss the spiritual mark designers like Warren are seeking.

And one way that can happen is when participants become too focused on weight loss, said Gary Gunderson, vice president for faith and health at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Forget the Body Mass Index (BMI) and focus on how health can serve Christ, he said.

"We don't know what Jesus' BMI was," Gunderson said. "He wasn't crucified because He was fat, and He isn't worshipped because He was skinny."

Gunderson said that's not a critique of Warren's plan but of the tendency many Americans have to put body image issues ahead of biblical teachings about food.

Mix of natural food, physical activity

Others said The Daniel Plan's call for a mixture of natural foods and physical activity used on the congregations and small groups may actually lead some participants to more holistic attitudes about the body's role in Christian salvation.

Warren said his plan was inspired by an Old Testament passage in which Daniel refuses to eat a king's rich foods and instead challenges the monarch to 10 days of healthier eating. The plan calls for eating whole foods, viewing physical activity as fun instead of as exercise and urges users to participate in groups for encouragement and accountability.

Warren's idea could be helpful in countering old Christian attitudes pitting body against spirit, said Michael Sciretti Jr., minister of spiritual formation at Freemason Street Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

"From the very beginning of Christianity there was a tendency to denigrate the body," Sciretti said.

"Early on,

in the gnostic sects, the spirit was good and the body was evil."

It's an attitude that has survived, perhaps in softer forms, in some Protestant traditions and particularly among many Baptists, he said.

Sciretti said he knows that from experience. He was raised a Southern Baptist in Louisiana, a context in which little thought was given to the spiritual potential of simply eating, let alone fasting.

But there are those developing mindful and healthy eating practices from the apostle Paul's call to view the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, Sciretti said.

"A lot of people are working on (the idea that) we are embodied beings," he said. "There is a spiritual practice to honoring the body and caring for the body."

Warren's plan may give a boost to that movement, Sciretti added.

Warren's foray into physical health comes at a time of rising interest in finding spiritual solutions to ailments such as hypertension, depression, heart disease and obesity, said Randy Ashcraft, pastor in residence at the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

Ashcraft said Christians are finally paying attention to the intersection of mind, body and spirit. "Especially among younger people ... there's an

awareness of what I put in my body," he said.

But there also is plenty of resistance, especially among some Baptists. Many remain more focused on opposing smoking, alcohol and dancing than promoting physical health.

But that needs to end because overweight and otherwise unhealthy Christians — especially pastors — can be a turnoff to younger and more fit unchurched people.

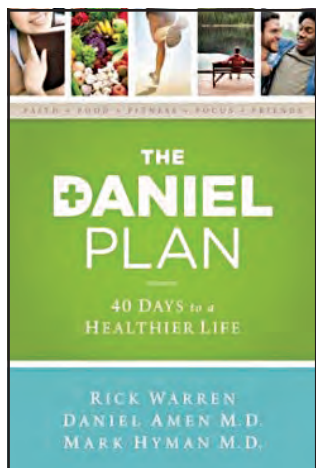
"We need to drive this into the core of Christian living," Ashcraft said. "It's part of the witness."

For that transformation to occur, Gunderson said, Christians must come to see their food and bodies as having a larger purpose. And that purpose is spelled out in Scripture, he said, where food is a gift from God for nourishing the full life of the individual.

Gunderson said that can get lost in diet and weight-loss plans named after biblical passages, such as the Ezekiel Diet. "Ezekiel is not in the Bible because of his diet, but because he was a prophet who preached repentance and justice to the poor."

The purpose of food and good physical health is to enable Christ's followers to do the same, Gunderson said. "If you focus on the dietary only instead of the full context, you are going to gain your BMI and lose your soul."

(ABP)



PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Noted convert in Egypt arrested, likely tortured

CAIRO, Egypt — Egyptian authorities recently arrested a Christian who is arguably the nation's most well-known convert from Islam and are investigating him for several activities, including allegedly inciting "sectarian strife."

Bishoy Armia Boulous, 31, formally known by his Muslim name, Mohammed Hegazy, was arrested Dec. 4 at a cafe in the city of Minya. It is likely that he is being tortured, sources said.



MS photo

Security forces said he had a camera and four flash drives when they arrested him and claimed he was working for The Way TV, a Coptic Christian-owned, U.S.-based religious television channel that broadcasts into Egypt via satellite.

Security forces claimed that Boulous was contributing to a "false image" that there is violence against

Christians in Minya. Those familiar with Boulous said his arrest had nothing to do with any reporting work but constituted retaliation for becoming a Christian.

Boulous gained fame, and many would say infamy, across Egypt when he decided in August 2007 to file a legal case to have his religion and name changed on his government-issued identification card. In a country where 84 percent of Egyptian Muslims polled in 2010 said the state should execute those who leave Islam, Boulous became an extremely controversial figure, and his face was plastered on newspapers and magazines across the country.

Sudan revokes citizenship of Christian, jails him

JUBA, South Sudan — A Christian has been jailed in Khartoum, Sudan for declining to leave the country after authorities revoked his Sudanese citizenship, sources said.

Early this year National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) personnel had required Zawengel Abraham Mikael, a 41-year-old deacon of Eritrean descent, to report frequently to their offices in Khartoum because of his activities at a church and at a Christian-run international school where he worked as an administrator, the sources said.

NISS personnel told Mikael in May that President Omar el-Bashir had revoked his Sudanese citizenship and ordered him out of the country.

Following the secession of South Sudan in July 2011, Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians, bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese and arrested church leaders. Many foreign Christians have either left or been deported.

Someone You Should Know



If you know of a person who should be featured,

send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: **Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209, or to news@thealabamabaptist.org.**

