



INSIDE



Ukrainian Baptists ask Southern Baptists to join them in intense prayer for their nation

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Church responds after Washington mudslide

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Foley assistant principal stirring up Elvis memories among Snowbirds

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How important is attending church?

Alabama Baptists, others consider why only half of U.S. adults say attending church is important

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The answers are as varied as the 375 people who answered them, but one thing they all agree on is that church is indeed important.

And they aren't ready to lose the battle over church attendance.

According to a Barna Group study released March 25, U.S. adults are almost evenly divided on the importance of attending church. The study found that 49 percent said it is "somewhat" or "very" important to attend church, while 51 percent said it is "not too" or "not at all" important.

The Alabama Baptist staff emailed the question "Why do you think only half of U.S. adults believe attending church is an important part of life?" to several thousand people the evening of March 25. More than 100 responses came in within the first hour and most of the rest within the first 24 hours.

Some of the common answers included:

- ▶ People are too busy and there are lots of commitments competing for their time.
- ▶ Church is not relevant to them or is not meeting their needs.
- ▶ They were not raised in church and have not been taught about church.
- ▶ They are not believers, are weak in their faith or are not grounded in the Word of God.
- ▶ They have been hurt by church or Christians in the past.
- ▶ They are following a perception established by society.

Several people also said that if the church attendance naysayers knew

what they were missing, then they would want to attend.

Patty Burns, of Prattville, said, "Only half of U.S. adults realize that attending church is about worship. It's about quality time with Jesus. It's not about checking something off a things-to-do list."

Still overall church attendance has dropped from 43 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2014, according to Barna Group's tracking data.

'Regular churchgoers'

Along with the growing sense of not needing church at all, the trend of an inconsistent participation among churchgoers also seems to be growing. More than one-third of Americans had gone six months at a time without participating in church functions of any kind in the early 2000s, but that number has now grown to two-fifths, according to Barna Group.

"The nature of churchgoing is changing," Barna Group reported. "Regular attenders used to be people who went to church three or more weekends each month — or even several times a week. Now people who show up once every four to six weeks consider themselves regular churchgoers."

Part of the reason for the inconsistency is that church is no longer the center of the family's activities like it used to be, said Sammie Jo Barstow, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

"Busyness is also a factor," she said. "Families under a great deal of 'time stress' will sometimes choose to use Sunday as a day to relax and renew, but that doesn't necessarily include attending worship services."

Barstow also said she senses a decline in fathers leading their families to worship. "Mothers frequently step in to take that role," she said. "But when parents are not united in their commitment to Christ, church attendance is weakened."

Jim Reaves, of Mobile, agreed.
(See 'Voting,' page 5)

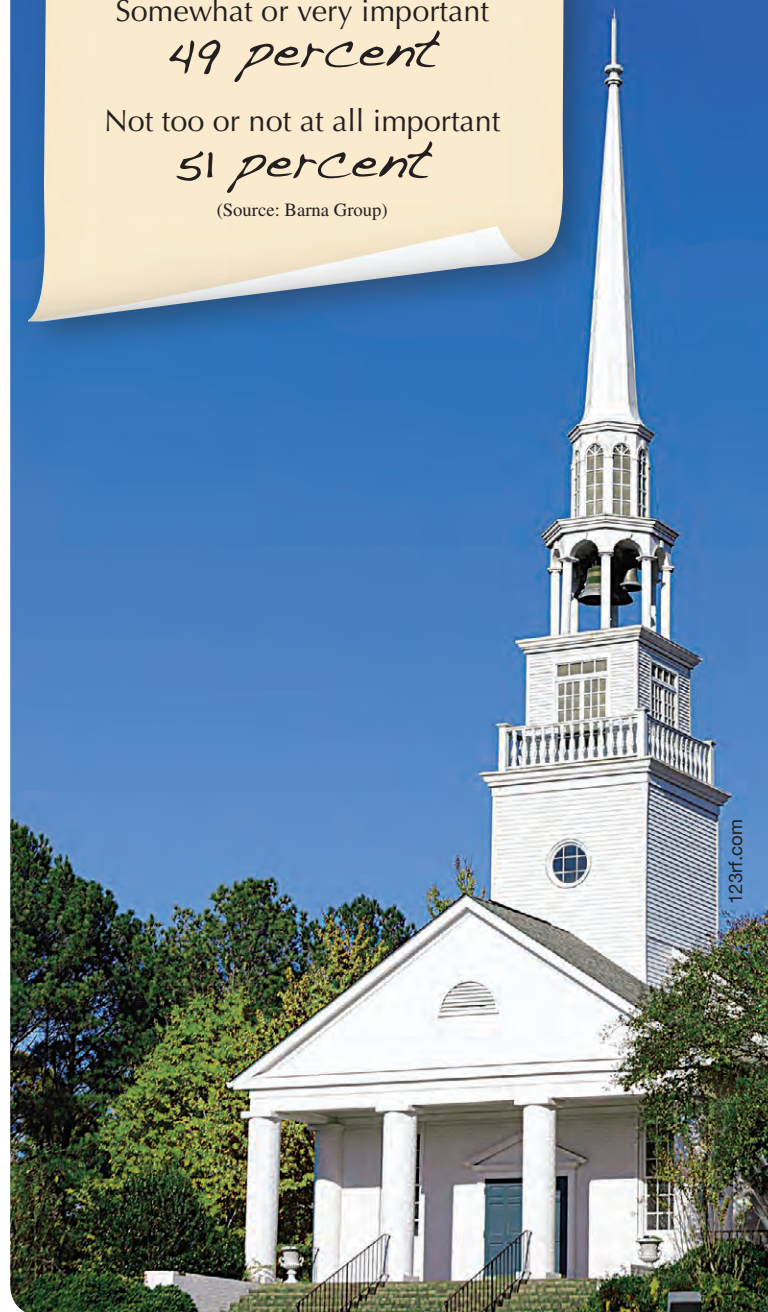
church?

A SURVEY OF U.S. ADULTS SAID

Somewhat or very important
49 percent

Not too or not at all important
51 percent

(Source: Barna Group)



COMMENT

Who Killed Jesus?

Every Easter season the arguments start again about who killed Jesus. Unfortunately many people seem focused on finding a scapegoat for that hideous event rather than recognizing the role their own sin played in the death of the Son of God.

The issue is far from insignificant because of the evil done by Christians motivated — at least in part — by their conclusion that all Jews are to blame for Jesus' death. Through the centuries that conclusion has been used to justify anti-Semitism, pogroms, Jewish ghettos and more. Jews have been called "Christ killers" and blamed as if each and every Jew shared the fault of that day.

Some have read the Gospel of John's use of the collective noun "the Jews" to refer to those opposing Jesus as meaning all Jews. Add Matthew's record of the crowd's statement that Jesus' blood should be on them and their children (Matt. 27:25) and some have concluded that all Jews forever and ever are guilty of Jesus' death.

It is no wonder that at least one Jewish scholar declared, "In its effect upon the life of the Jewish people Christianity's New Testament has been the most dangerous anti-Semitic tract in history."

The walk to Calvary

The Gospel of Luke points out the fallacy of blaming all the Jews. Describing the walk to Calvary, Luke 23:27 clearly states, "And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him." The tendency is to conclude that the women "bewailed and lamented Him" but that is not what the verse says. It says a great company of people including women bewailed and lamented Him.

Many of these may have been the same Passover pilgrims who greeted Jesus as Messiah-King on Sunday. They may have been dashed to see the one in whom they placed their hope treated in such a way by the Romans. After all, when they had gone to bed on Thursday, Jesus was free and had been teaching in the temple. It was during the night that He had been arrested and shuttled back and forth between tribunals. Shortly after the sun rose Jesus was before Pilate. It was still morning as Jesus was paraded toward Golgotha where He would die. Imagine how many people were surprised by such a rapid turn of events.

History records that the startling statement in



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Matthew about Jesus' blood being on those in the crowd and on their children was not so startling after all. It was a common way of finalizing the sentence of a criminal, a way for the court to express a sense of responsibility. The statement was never a curse for only God can place a curse, and no record exists in all of Scripture of God agreeing to such.

Other Christians conclude the Roman authorities killed Jesus. Certainly it was Roman soldiers who flogged Him and then nailed Jesus to a cross to die a shameful, humiliating death. Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest and ruler of Jerusalem, sent Jesus in bonds to Pilate, the chief Roman official in Israel, asking that Jesus be put to death. Ultimately Pilate complied.

Pilate was in Jerusalem to make sure no trouble started on this religious holiday. In the years before Jesus no less than four anti-Roman uprisings had occurred on religious holidays. Pilate's job was to make sure another did not occur. When Jesus arrived before him accused of being a political instigator of rebellion against Rome, death was almost certain.

The Gospel of John recounts Pilate hesitating to grant Caiaphas' request. Such a reaction was out of character for him. The famous Roman historian Philo wrote the Roman emperor complaining of "the briberies, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injustices, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the endless and supremely grievous cruelty" of Pilate's rule. Pilate eventually lost his position because of his cruelty and greed.

It is no wonder that Jesus was tortured so by Pilate's soldiers once the sentence was imposed.

Since only Rome could execute a political troublemaker, Rome is to blame for Je-

sus' death, this line of reasoning goes.

That Joseph Caiaphas, the temple priest and scribes played a part in Jesus' death, is true. That is the clear testimony of the four New Testament Gospels. But even of them the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that if they had understood what was happening in their midst, they would not have crucified Jesus.

That Romans played a part in the death of Jesus is undeniable. Pilate alone had the authority to order Jesus' execution. He consented to the death and commanded his soldiers to carry it out.

Yet Jesus Himself declared, "I lay down My life only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me but I lay it down of My own accord" (John 10:17-18). It was not Caiaphas' misguided zeal that killed Jesus nor was it Pilate's egotistical

claim to power that put Jesus on the cross. Jesus died on Calvary's cross because He chose to.

But why? John the Baptist answered that question when he said of Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

In Romans 4:25, the apostle Paul wrote, "He (Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." The apostle Peter reinforced that teaching in 1 Peter 3:18 when he added, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous,

to bring you to God." In 1 John 4:9-10, the apostle John echoes, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Atoning sacrifice

All teach the same thing. Jesus died to take away sin — your sin and mine. "(Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). He makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God.

Since it was sin that caused our Lord to go to the cross, the only truthful answer from a human perspective about who killed Jesus is each of us because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Talking about anything else misses the point of why Jesus died.

"Since it was sin that caused our Lord to go to the cross, the only truthful answer from a human perspective about who killed Jesus is each of us because 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23)."

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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

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PRAYING for Ukraine

Ukrainian Baptists ask Southern Baptists to join them in prayer for their nation

Pray for Ukraine. That's what Baptist Union of Ukraine President Vyacheslav Nesteruk asked of Frank Page, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee (EC), and Baptists in the United States during a recent phone conversation.

Roger S. Oldham, EC vice president for convention communications and relations, said, "In the conversation, Page expressed his prayer support and his intention to call on all Southern Baptists to pray for our Baptist brothers and sisters in Ukraine as they minister to a nation in crisis," Oldham noted.

Prayers needed

Page noted that Nesteruk specifically asked Southern Baptists to pray:

1. That there would be no war in Ukraine, but peace.
2. That there would be a sense of peace in the hearts of Ukrainian people, rather than a sense of unrest or anxiety.
3. For the economic situation, as sanctions imposed by Russia have already begun making life difficult in Ukraine.
4. Most of all, that people would be open to the gospel and actively seek the gospel during these troubled times.

An unidentified Baptist worker in Ukraine who facilitated the phone conversation stated that it is "indeed a special spiritual time" in Ukraine, Oldham related.



"Almost all of the Ukrainian Baptist churches have been joining in special prayer for the nation," the worker said. "In fact, many have begun gathering in their city squares, hundreds at a time, for a concentrated time of prayer in their locations. In one location over 100 men had begun gathering for prayer every morning

at 7 a.m. in eastern Ukraine and (there were reports) of the same happening in western Ukraine."

The Baptist worker also stated that for the first time since the early '90s, when restrictions against evangelism were eased, that "people are again very open to a gospel witness." (BP)

World Vision reverses decision on same-sex 'marriage' hiring policy

Leaders of Southern Baptists are thanking World Vision U.S. for reversing a two-day-old change in its employee conduct policy that would have allowed the major hunger relief organization to hire legally "married" gay Christians.

World Vision's U.S. board of directors announced March 26 its abandonment of a change it had made March 24 to allow the hiring of legally "married" gay Christians. World Vision reverted to its longstanding conduct policy requiring sexual abstinence for all single employees and faithfulness within the biblical covenant of marriage between a man and a woman.

Southern Baptist lead ethicist Russell D. Moore, who had called the original change a mistake that threatened the gospel of Jesus Christ, tweeted thanks and praise to World Vision for its decision.

"World Vision has done the right thing. Now let's all work for a holistic gospel presence, addressing both temporal and eternal needs," tweeted Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "World Vision's right decision, as articulated in their board letter, conveys a spirit of Christlikeness and humility in tone and content," he added.

World Vision U.S. President Richard Stearns

and board chairman Jim Bere announced the reversal in a letter to supporters, expressing regret that they ever changed their policy in the first place.

"We are brokenhearted over the pain and confusion we have caused many of our friends, who saw this decision as a reversal of our strong commitment to biblical authority," the letter reads. "We ask that you understand that this was never the board's intent."

"The board acknowledged they made a mistake and chose to revert to our longstanding conduct policy requiring sexual abstinence for all single employees and faithfulness within the biblical covenant of marriage between a man and a woman." Moore urged Christians to rejoice at World Vision's repentance.

"It's the older brother who questions motives in repentance. Don't be like that," Moore urged, evoking the Luke 15:11-32 story of the Prodigal Son. "The father's house rejoices, receives."

World Vision never intended to indicate an abandonment of the biblical definition of marriage as between a man and a woman, the board said, but had sought to be inclusive of all supporters, who represent some 50 religious denominations.



STEARNS

'Sincere apology'

In the statement, lead singer Mark Hall shared in part, "World Vision released a statement yesterday reversing the decision that was made earlier this week. After hearing their humble and sincere apology, we are walking through all of the information, seeking godly counsel and praying for God's direction on our partnership in the future. We will always be a voice for the poor and the powerless. Our families will continue to sponsor the World Vision children we've committed to and we encourage others to do the same."

In an interview March 27, Stearns suggested that the number of World Vision sponsors lost was under but around 5,000. Those who sponsor a child pay \$35 each month, so the loss could have tallied up to \$2.1 million a year.

Stearns said, "We're learning that a number of people are calling back since the reversal to reinstate their sponsorship. They're forgiving; they're saying, 'Hey we stand with you.'" (BP, RNS, TAB)

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host GLORY 2014, April 3 from 9:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m., featuring Paid in Full gospel trio from New Albany, Miss., as well as Guy Anderson, Fiddlin' in the Parlor and Ashley Arderton. Tickets will be available at the door or call 205-393-7020 or email fjm1117@gmail.com. Bill McCall is pastor. ► **Living Faith Cathedral, Hueytown**, will hold a four-day tent revival April 8-11, 7 nightly. Johnny Williams, pastor of Living Faith, will be the host. Barry Cosper, director of missions for Bessemer Association, will speak and evangelist of the week will be James Willis Jr., pastor of Carver Desire Church, New Orleans, La. For information call 205-744-9898.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood!) nondenominational luncheon April 8, 11 a.m. The program will feature Bill King as Bro. Billy Bob Bohannon. For reservations call 334-684-9617. Mike Shihrah is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **First Church, Guntersville**, will host GLORY 2014, April 4, 9:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m., featuring

Paid in Full gospel trio from New Albany, Miss., and other Christian artists. Tickets will be available at the door or call 205-393-7020 or email fjm1117@gmail.com. Joel Samuels is pastor.

MUD CREEK

► **Crossroad Church, Hueytown**, will hold a women's conference and will serve as a host location for the Priscilla Shirer Live simulcast April 5, 8:30 a.m. Register by phone at 205-401-4405. Allen Drew is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **Ronnie Graves** is the new pastor of **Corinth Church, Trussville**. He previously served as pastor of the former Revelation Independent Church in Blount County and Village Springs Church, Reamlap. He and his wife, Debra, have two children and three grandchildren. ► After more than a decade of ministry at **South Roebuck Church (Birmingham Association), Senior Pastor Chris Crain** began serving on the church's **North Valley Church** campus in Margaret exclusively in March rather than splitting his time between the two campuses. South Roebuck Church constructed North Valley in 2007, and Crain had served as pastor of both campuses since that time. Crain's full-

time attention became needed as a result of the growth of the North Valley campus. South Roebuck's other two congregations — the Chapel at North Valley and South Roebuck Community Church — will remain part of the South Roebuck Baptist family. Gary Fisher is serving South Roebuck Church as interim pastor until a campus pastor is selected.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Lake Pointe Church, Dadeville**, will celebrate Resurrection Sunday beginning with a sunrise service at 7 a.m. on the church grounds. At 10 a.m., worship will include an Easter musical and the observance of the Lord's Supper. Russell Dean is interim pastor. ► Seven children participated in the Bible Drill at **Wayside Church, Alexander City**, with three of those children advancing to the Tallapoosa Association Drill on March 9. Those participating at the church level included: Jay Chance, Hayleigh Wall, Brody Milstead and Ashlee Chance. The three children who advanced to the Tallapoosa Association Drill were fifth graders Lexi Garrett, Skyler Oliver and Matthew Alford, all from Wayside Church. Garrett qualified to advance on to the Regional Bible Drill in April. Larry Cummings is pastor. ☞

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, *The Alabama Baptist*

David Todd



TODD

Tillman; Alicia Smiley and Candace Morgan; seven grandchildren

First Baptist Church, Tillman's Corner Mobile Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: Philippians 4:13

FAVORITE HYMN: "How Great Thou Art"

HOBBIES: Golfing and writing music

FAMILY STATUS: Wife, Mary Ann; children: David Todd Jr.; Susan

David Todd served as a full-time music minister in churches in Louisiana and Alabama. Then, for 19 years, he was the bivocational music minister of Azalea Baptist Church, Mobile, in Mobile Association. Recently Todd, 69, has been interim music director of Cloverdale Baptist Church, Grand Bay, in Mobile Association. In spring of 2013, he also became a music evangelist. The singer, songwriter and worship leader formed the quartet Endless Praise, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2014. Todd, who served in the Army, is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: It demands a love for winning the lost to Jesus Christ, leading people to praise the Lord. It demands a lot of concentration on music, to be able to teach those in the church about music and how they can enjoy it. It's a unique way of sharing Jesus Christ.

Q: What do you get from the ministry?

A: Joy, a sense of accomplishment that I'm serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: They're willing for me to be gone to go to other churches. They know what it means to me to serve. Mary Ann goes with me when she can.

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

A: I still like to sing. I still like to write music. It's a joy to share that with people. It fulfills my life. I don't plan to give it up until I'm at the age that I can't go anymore.

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

A: I don't look for it to make me anything in the future, except a servant for God. My main purpose or goal is for people to come to know Jesus Christ, using the tools that I have through music.

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

A: It has made a tremendous difference. I don't know what I would be doing if I didn't have Christ in my life. It has turned me around. I want to share with people what He can do in our life. ☞

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

A: My dad took me fishing in Mobile. The Sand Island Lighthouse is in Mobile Bay. My dad was telling me what the lighthouse meant. A Sunday School teacher at Hollinger's Island Baptist Church, Mobile, told me that Jesus is the Lighthouse. At the age of 12, that all just clicked. I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. The lighthouse has become a very meaningful symbol in my life.

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

A: I was doing the music at Hollinger's Island in '69. I decided it was something that I enjoyed doing. There was a need for ministers of music. I felt the Lord leading me in that direction. I needed training. That's when I enrolled in Mobile College and took all the music I could there.

Dale County's Morgan Baptist burglarized; church members see opportunity for ministry

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

In the early morning hours March 24 a man broke into Morgan Baptist Church, Skipperville, claiming he was "hungry."

Church members Ed Roberts and Shaun Thompson, who both have homes next to the Dale Baptist Association church, called the police when they heard their dogs barking and saw a man leaving the church pulling a garbage can filled with items from the church.

Stolen goods

Andrew Payne Hartzog, 23, broke a window to get inside the building and piled frozen meats, canned goods, drinks, grits, ketchup, paper plates, cleaning supplies and other items into a garbage can and proceeded to drag the items back to his mother's home in the community near County Road 64 in Skipperville.

According to deacon Ralph "Pete" Gassett, Thompson ran after the burglar and caught him just before Dale County police officers arrived on the scene.

Hartzog was arrested and charged with felony third-degree burglary and misdemeanor third-degree theft of property and taken to the Dale County Jail.

He was later released on a \$3,000 bond.

And according to Gassett the church will not be pressing charges against him.

All the stolen items were returned to the church and the window was replaced with a window left over from previous renovations.

"We didn't incur any expense. We were blessed," Gassett said.

And instead of dwelling on the

burglary, Gassett and his wife decided to take some food to Hartzog's mother later that day.

Having lived in the community for years, the Gassetts knew where the house was located "just up the road" and took the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the woman.

"We only want to help (the Hartzog family)," Gassett said, noting he hopes to see this become a witnessing opportunity and

wants to invite the family to church.

Bivocational pastor Kyle Robertson said he also saw the situation as "just another way to minister to people in need." ☞

"(We see this as) just another way to minister to people in need."

**Kyle Robertson
bivocational pastor,
Morgan Baptist Church**

"[T]he assumption among Christian leaders ... is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates — edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, an updated website that includes online giving.

But ... we're not easily impressed with consumerism or performances. In fact, I would argue that church-as-performance is just one more thing driving us away from the church."

Rachel Held Evans
CNN Belief Blog
July 27, 2013

"Since a lower percentage of Americans are identifying as religious in general, it's not surprising that half of them think that attending church is 'not too' important."

Jerry Z. Park, Ph.D.
assoc. prof. of sociology
Baylor University

"Since God's church constitutes our family of faith, we are designed to connect to the Lord and each other for nurturing encouragement and accountability. Here's God's great truth: We need Jesus and we need each other."

Pastor Jay Wolf
FBC Montgomery

"Christians tend to blend in with the world rather than stand out. There's nothing attractive to the lost world when we've become just like them."

Tommy Marsh
children's pastor



'Voting with their absence'

"When we complicate the gospel we are not meeting the needs of people. And when we don't meet their actual needs, in their hearts and souls where they are hungry for truth and peace, then we see [these] statistics." — Suzy Lowry Geno, Blount County

Churches 'responsible' for apathetic attendance; need to 'listen'

(continued from page 1)

"Look around the sanctuary in your next weekend service," said Reaves, a member of Covenant Church, Mobile. "What is the ratio of men to women?"

"Large numbers of men believe the church is no longer relevant to them," he said. "Without the men/fathers in the church, there is less direction for the children. ... Churches must focus on programs to help men find a place where they will feel the message of the church is more important than the other distractions for their time."

But the problem isn't only with men in the churches, several responders noted.

"I believe many churches have failed to make necessary changes to remain relevant in the eyes of many in our society today," said Steve King, pastor of Ozark Baptist Church. "People are voting with their absence, but we, the typical church, isn't listening."

"I think we have so programmed our churches to death that we have failed to rely upon the supernatural provision of the Holy Spirit to create real life transformation among us," he said.

Jason Duckett, pastor of Moundville Baptist Church, added, "The fateful choice of many local congregations to prioritize religious tradition over biblical relevancy, finite reliance over Spirit empowerment and self promotion over Kingdom advancement has led countless souls to believe that the message of the church is simply unbelievable."

Larry Morrison, minister of education and administration for First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, agreed the church must shoulder the responsibility.

"The cultural response is a result of the church failing to obey Jesus," he said. "Jesus said, 'Come. Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.'"

"The church has chosen not to come and not to be fishers of men," Morrison said. "Until we expect church members to attend church why should our culture place value on church attendance?"

Randy Howell, of Wadley, noted, "We must also cultivate a lifestyle of discipleship. "Jesus spent time with His disciples and

taught them to be fishers of men," Howell said. "The local church must not change the message, but we must change the fishing bait as we strive to exhibit excellence in worship."

Attitudes make a difference

Edwin Jenkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Athens, added that many church members' attitudes also are impacting church attendance.

"Those of us who are in the church have not demonstrated by our examples, attitude and teaching how vital church attendance truly is," he said. "The world is following our lead. When we recover the joy and enthusiasm for God and the things of God, the world will want what we have. They will follow us to church."

Maintaining a vision for the glory and grandeur of God is vital, said Roger Willmore, pastor of Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville.

"Christians are now affected by the culture of casualness in their understanding of the nature and character of God," he said.

"This casualness is seen in how they talk about God and the things of God.

"It is seen in how they approach God in worship," Willmore said. "We have lost our awe of God and our reverent respect for Him."

John Alexander, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, Romulus, described it as regaining "a sense of mystery in worship."

"We need to regain a sense of the sacred and pass it to the next generations," he said. "We need to understand — and teach — that certain benefits come only to those who attend corporate worship."

Tim Gold, minister of education and administration for First Baptist Church, Pell City, said concern over church attendance can be boiled down to one question.

"Is church attendance important because of ... the need to impress ... or do we have a true relationship with God through His Son and see the biblical value of gathering together as a corporate body?"

"To worship Him, learn about Him ... pray for and encourage each other, hold each

(See 'A place,' page 6)

READERS RECOMMEND books to read

Ben Chandler recommends

"Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them" by Thom S. Rainer.

Cary Hatcher recommends

"I Am a Church Member" by Thom S. Rainer.

Carol H. Bailey Jr. recommends

"Why Men Hate Going to Church" by David Murrow.

Jessica Palmer recommends

"Every Member in Sunday School" by Bob Wood.

CHURCH BECOMING 'irrelevant' for younger generations

Millennials (those 30 and under) stand out as least likely to value church attendance; only two in 10 believe it is important. And more than one-third of Millennial young adults (35 percent) take an anti-church stance. Millennials who are opting out of church cite three factors with equal weight in their decision: 35 percent cite the church's irrelevance, hypocrisy and the moral failures of its leaders as reasons to check out of church altogether. In addition, two out of 10 unchurched Millennials say they feel God is missing in church, and one out of 10 senses that legitimate doubt is prohibited, starting at the front door. Millennials are the generation born between 1984 through 2002.

(Source: Barna Group)

REFLECTIONS

THE COUPLES CLASS IS EVENLY DIVIDED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SUNDAY SCHOOL—

"THOSE PRESENT VOTE YES AND THOSE ABSENT VOTE NO."



ABOUT THE research

The research used in this coverage is part of Barna Group's FRAMES project. The project included four separate nationwide studies conducted between May and August 2013. Additional details about the research effort are available here: www.barna.org/frames/methodology

(Source: Barna Group)

A place to call home

'Church is the encouragement that gets us through life'

(continued from page 5)

other accountable — in short to be the disciples Christ has called us to be.

"There is a world of difference between adhering to and practicing cultural Christianity as opposed to adhering to and practicing true biblical Christianity," Gold said. "And there is an eternal difference between being a disciple in name only and being a truly committed disciple of Christ who takes up his or her cross daily and follows Him."

Church attendance is a vital part of following Christ, said Katie Jones, a member of Safford Baptist Church.

"Attendance shows sacrifice putting God before all other plans," she said. "Church is a choice."

Micah Simpson, college minister at Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook, added, "You cannot live the Christian life apart from the local body of believers."

"We hear from God in community. We are encouraged in our walk in community. Scripture should only be interpreted in community," he said. "Theology should be done in community, and we grow into Christlikeness as we are sharpened by one another in community."

Ginger Cain, a member of Keener Baptist Church, Attalla, described church as her "fueling station."

"It helps me survive in the world we live in," she said. "Worshipping God and being with His people who are going through life's trials just like I am ... helps me so much."

'Need to attend'

"If we show the world through our everyday lives and actions how Jesus changed us, loves us and helps us, then I think more people will feel a stronger desire and need to attend church," she added.

As responders referenced "attending" church, most inferred or stated directly that strictly attending is not enough. Involvement is the key.

Lisa Clem, secretary at Cave Spring Baptist Church, Decatur, said, "Being involved with a church is one of the most important things you can do in your life other than believe in, live for and worship our loving God."

"The church was built to support God and a place where all believers can come and worship Him freely."

Kris Green, pastor of Rockwood Baptist Church, Russellville, added, "Church is the encouragement that gets us through life. To me Sunday being the first day of the week is the pregame speech.

By Wednesday we are all a little tired and beaten down, so Wednesday night is the halftime speech.

"Church members are there to encourage one another," he said. "If you are not there, then who is not getting encouraged or who is not able to encourage you?"

Stephanie Woods, a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Monrovia, echoed the others' reasons for attending church and added that it also is an opportunity to be a positive role model.

"Attending church sets a positive example for your children, non-

believers and even believers," she said. "It's an inspiration."

But even with all the positives of being active in church, the numbers prove that church is becoming less and less important to people in the U.S.

Benjamin Gray, pastor of Gravel Hill Baptist Church, Phil Campbell, agreed with the previously discussed

variety of reasons why but also offered two main reasons.

1. "The advent of other avenues of community."

2. "Lack of effective discipleship in churches," which is not a new thing, he said.

Jane Blankenship mentioned the second item herself.

"The church is not helping U.S. adults

grow in a significant way in their relationship with Christ," she said. "They don't see the value of the church service because it only presents itself as an activity to participate in."

"Adults are still searching for something the church is supposed to provide but is not."

The Christian mask is another issue turning people off, said Jan Hunter, office manager for Southside Baptist Church, Huntsville.

"We go inside our clean buildings, in our clean clothes and sit in classes where everyone is wearing the 'good Christian' look and no one says what is really going on in their life," she said. "People are looking for truth and in many of our churches all they get is a list of things to not do."

It's this type of lack of connection and involvement that can provide an easy out for even the typically active church members, said Jessica Palmer, small group minister at The Church at Eastern Oaks, Montgomery.

She speaks from experience. Despite being brought up attending church every Sunday and Wednesday and continuing that routine into



**COMING
NEXT WEEK...**
How Sunday youth
sports affect believers
and church life.

"If we show the world through our everyday lives and actions how Jesus changed us ... then I think more people will feel a stronger desire and need to attend church."

Ginger Cain
member, Keener Baptist Church, Attalla

her young adult years, Palmer found herself not making it to church consistently shortly after getting married.

"I craved the encouragement, discipleship and fellowship ... but once the routine was abandoned, it was easier to come up with excuses to miss church," she said. "Once we decided missing church was not an option ... those excuses were no longer valid."

Martha Green, a member of Tannehill Valley Baptist Church, McCalla, also walked through a period in her life where she was out of church. But unlike Palmer's experience of other commitments and situations conflicting with her church schedule, Green left church over some deep hurts.

"I put my Bible on a shelf and didn't open it at all ... for about 10 years," she said. "My heart was cold since I had some hard things happen to me. ... Deep down I always wanted to glorify God in my life, but I just felt like church was not relevant since my previous church had failed me when I needed them the most."

"The Lord was gracious ... and pulled me back to Him and the church," Green said. "In a good church, we are always pointed to Jesus and taught to be responsible for our lives in the Lord."

Another McCalla resident, Cindy Berry, is still working through her painful church experience from three years ago.

"It has been a difficult path," she said. "We are still not active in church but do attend fairly regularly. ... We still seek because we are not giving up believing our role in a church family is important."

"While I believe church attendance is important, finding a church that is true to the Word of God and where God is truly first and people and their agendas are not is difficult," Berry noted. "I believe this, coupled with misplaced priorities, lead to so many convincing themselves that church attendance is not important."

Becki McAnnally, pastor's wife at Bethlehem East Baptist Church, Hanceville, encourages those "jaded by things that have happened in some of our churches" not to let that prevent them from accepting Christ and/or finding a church home.

And Caroline Jones, a member of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, said finding the right church is key.

"The right church embraces individuals in ways that are comfortable and supportive, providing acceptance, encouragement and a safety net when needed," she said. "Staying away from church once one has identified the right church for him or her makes one hungry to experience that special fellowship again and again."

Janie Johnson from Baldwin County added, "The Church needs to go back to seeing people like Jesus sees them and loving people like Jesus does. Then we can 'have church.'"

And while the Church definitely has work to do, the individuals do as

well, said Dara Murphy, assistant to the minister of worship at Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston.

"Commitment to attending church services and serving within the church involves sacrifice and self-discipline. In as much, so does living your life for Jesus Christ," she said. "Jesus commands us to honor and glorify Him with our lives and to put Him first."

"If we truly love the Lord and have committed our life to Him, I would say we would desire to come to His house as we would an old friend's,"

Murphy said. "We would want to come and worship Him, our Creator, to give thanks and praise for all He does."

David Patty, director of missions for Sand Mountain Baptist Association, agreed.

"To identify with the person of Christ is to join yourself to the body of Christ," he said.

"To surrender to His commands is to commit to His Church."

"How can we say we love Jesus and not love His bride, the Church?"

Andy Wilbanks, minister of children at Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, added that while we are saved as individuals, "we are also saved to be part of the people of God — the Church."

"Like the family, the Church was designed by God to bring Him glory, spread the gospel and pass down faith to the next generations," Wilbanks said. "Through authentic community in the Church, we belong to a group of people who can teach, love, support, encourage and hold us accountable."

Authentic community

"We are designed for authentic community because God Himself exists in authentic community," he noted. "Many have replaced this void with false community found in other places or do not realize the necessity of such a community."

Cleve Mallory, minister of music and students at Bethsalem Baptist Church, Billingsley, said, "We can't just preach 'church attendance.' We must be willing to admit that the problems with people's perceptions of any aspect of church life, whether fair or unfair, are our problems to solve."

"The longer I complain about those in my congregation or community who view attendance as unimportant, the longer I contribute to the problem." ❧

Thank you to everyone who shared your responses with us. We read each one and used them all in some way to develop this story. If you would still like to comment or would like to read more comments on this topic, look for the online version of the story at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

"Church attendance adds value to life.

It is a place of spiritual vitality."

**Ben Chandler
director of missions
St. Clair Association**

Bible verses

ABOUT FELLOWSHIP AND CHURCH

COLOSSIANS 3:16 (ESV)

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:25–27 (NIV)

There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it.

MATTHEW 18:20 (NASB)

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

HEBREWS 10:24–25 (NKJV)

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

ACTS 2:42 (NRSV)

They devoted themselves to the

apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

PROVERBS 27:17 (NLT)

As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.

1 TIMOTHY 4:13 (KJV)

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2 (NCV)

Does your life in Christ give you strength? Does His love comfort you? Do we share together in the Spirit? Do you have mercy and kindness? If so, make Me very happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and having one mind and purpose.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12 (HCSB)

For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body — so also is Christ.

GALATIANS 6:10 (RSV)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

WHY DO YOU attend church?

43 percent
of all churchgoers say "to be closer to God."

34 percent
of Protestants say, "The Bible says to be with other believers."

31 percent
of Millennials say, "I need to learn more about God."

WHY DON'T YOU attend church?

40 percent
of all churchgoers say, "I find God elsewhere."

35 percent
of all churchgoers say, "Church is not relevant to me personally."

(Source: Barna Group)

‘Heart to reach out’

Church responds after Wash. mudslide

Oso Community Chapel is the only church on a 30-mile stretch of State Route 530, the roadway sliced in half March 22 by a massive landslide in Oso, Wash., that killed at least 25 people and destroyed some 50 homes.

None of Oso Chapel’s 80 members were injured and none lost their homes, said pastor and church planter Gary Ray. But in the rural community of 500 along the Stillaguamish River, all of the members of the Southern Baptist church know people affected by the tragedy.

“We are the only church on the only road through here,” Ray said. “The church is less than 2 miles from the impact area.” Ray hosted a community response meeting at the church March 26 to determine next steps in the response to survivors.

‘Mobilize the church’

“The roads are blocked, the power is out and communication is a challenge. We want to mobilize the church and the community to support the recovery work,” Ray said. “We want to be able to do anything we can to help, with an eye to long-term community support and rebuilding. This area is highly unchurched.”

Northwest Baptist Convention Disaster Relief Director Gary Floyd said he is supporting Ray’s efforts and asks people to pray for the relief work.

“This is currently a local response,” Floyd said. “The biggest thing I would ask people to do now is to pray for [Gary] and his wife, Tina, and for the recovery efforts. Local emergency management has had to suspend work because the ground is unstable and more rain is moving in.”

The death toll remained at 25 at press time with as many as 90 missing, according to news reports. At least 50 structures were destroyed, 35 of which were primary residences.

“The nature of the response will take time to tell what is needed,” Floyd said. “Gary is

doing a great job coordinating things. One thing is certain; the rebuild effort will take three to five years. There will be opportunities to help well into the future.”

The possibility of establishing a shuttle service for area residents is one immediate idea, Ray shared.

“What was a 20-mile trip now takes more than 60 miles,” he said. “We want to identify needs and address those. Are there child-care needs, communications, pet care needs? We will assess what is needed and try to meet those needs. We have a heart to reach out and help our community.”

Oso Chapel has planted a new church in Standwood that will launch on Easter and is planning a new church on Camino Island. Ray echoed Floyd’s request when asked what people can do to help in the response.

“Pray. That is what we need most and what the families here need most. We will be here to help them as much as we can in any way we can. We need people to pray,” he said.

The North American Mission Board coordinates and manages Southern Baptist responses to major disasters through partnerships with 42 state Baptist conventions, most of which have their own state disaster relief programs.

Southern Baptists have 82,000 trained volunteers — including chaplains — and 1,550 mobile units for feeding, chainsaw, mud-out, command, communication, child care, shower, laundry, water purification, repair/rebuild and power generation.

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) is one of the three largest mobilizers of trained disaster relief volunteers in the United States, along with the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

To donate to SBDR efforts, visit www.alsbom.org/ministries/dr/donate/ and fill out the donation form online or mail checks to Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, P.O. Box 11870, Montgomery, AL 36111. Note “Alabama Disaster Relief” on the check. To designate your donation toward a specific event, indicate that with the donation. (BP)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Doctrine of Christ

Jesus: The Outworking Christ

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

In previous weeks we have thought about Christ as the eternal Word who was made flesh. As the Word incarnate, Christ continues to be the Word of gospel proclamation, as well as the Word of Christian experience. Our personal experience of Christ begins when we receive Him into our hearts by faith. The incoming Christ intends to continue in us as the indwelling Christ. Not content to be only the indwelling Christ, He seeks across the days and years of our Christian living and growing to become the outworking Christ. Becoming Christians is not the final goal of God’s plan. Jesus did not come into the world, endure suffering and die simply to enable the Christian life to begin, as wonderful and miraculous as this is.

Once Christ is in our lives, He continues to indwell us in order to shine forth from us with the beauty of His character and winsomeness. A growing Christian is one who is becoming increasingly Christlike. Not only is the outworking of Christ to show in character but is also to shine forth in deeds of kindness and compassion. He wants His life to express itself in our character and our conduct. In fact, the Bible says that others should be able to see our good deeds and glorify God for them (1 Pet. 2:12). When the living Word dwells richly in us, we want others to look at us and conclude like they did about Peter and John that we too have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Flowing waters

Ponder an illustration from nature. A major difference exists between the Sea of Galilee north of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea to its south. Water from the Sea of Galilee flows out and down the Jordan, whereas water flows into the Dead Sea but not out of it. The result is one sea in which life abounds and the other that is dead so far as supporting life is concerned. Without water flowing out, the Dead Sea is a

harsh environment in which life-forms cannot live. We escape becoming stagnant, lifeless Christians only when we experience the outworking of Christ. Having Christ flowing out of our lives is somewhat analogous to the Sea of Galilee having its waters flow out into the Jordan River.

Some of us grew up in church expressing through song such sentiments as letting the beauty of Jesus be seen in us as well as admonishing one another in spiritual songs by singing about letting “others see Jesus in you.” Such sentiments set to music speak to us of the outworking of Christ in our lives.

Living Word of God

Across many weeks we have thought about Christ in terms of being the living Word of God. From the Gospel of John we have seen Him both as the Word that was and the Word that became. From 1 John we have thought about Him as the Word that is — the Word being proclaimed and experienced.

At some future time we may want to think together about Christ as the Word that will be, according to Revelation 19:11–13. Those verses refer to Him as the Conqueror who is yet to return, portraying Him as riding a white horse and wearing a robe dipped in blood. We are told that at that future time “the name by which He is called is The Word of God” (v. 13).

But His future victory must be the topic for another time. ❏

Jerry Batson, retired associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor at several schools of religion, is pastor of First Baptist Church, McCalla.



FOCUS on One Mission

Alabama Baptist Convention State Board of Missions

ONE MISSION:
The Great Commission

ONE PROGRAM:
The Cooperative Program

MANY MINISTRIES:
Great Commission Ministries

ONE Mission

news and features about missions and ministries from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (800) 264-1225 | www.alsbom.org

CROSSing North America

CROSSing North America is the theme for the 2014 Associational Missions Emphasis. (The suggested date among Alabama Baptists for Associational Missions Week is May 19-26.)

You can access all the materials for promotion without cost to your association by going to www.sbcal.org and establishing an account of access.

CROSSing North America contains five initiatives as you cross: Pray, Equip, Love, Give and Plant. Jesus was very clear when he said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers."

Our churches many times are great places for preaching and for worship, but how often are our churches known for being praying churches?

The second initiative is to

equip. Your associational leadership has been put in place by your association to assist the churches in making disciples and equipping the saints for service.

Your association is there to help you love your community. Many churches have learned how to have a special day of service for their community, even using the Sunday morning time of worship. (Now that's out of the box thinking!) Work with your associational missionary (director of missions) in discovering opportunities next door!

Your association

By Rick Barnhart
State Missionary



is a missions hub where

local, state, national and international missions come together. At your local association, you will find staff who are constantly interacting directly with ministry needs in those areas. Not only that, but your association also acts as a minister to your church's ministerial staff and a resource for your church's internal needs. Realizing the impact your local association has in your community, your country and around the world, giving to it makes all the sense in the world.

CROSSing North America finally emphasizes church planting locally and throughout North America. The church to population ratio of New England is staggering. There is only one SBC church for every 48,000 people. In Canada there



is only one Canadian National Baptist Church for every 117,000 people.

Don't forget www.sbcal.org is your resource portal for the Associational Missions Week in May.

For other information, please contact your local Baptist associational office or State Missionary Rick Barnhart at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 220, or (334) 613-2220, rbarnhart@alsbom.org

ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries



"Celebrating Ethnic Diversity in Preaching the Gospel"

April 25-26, 2014 • Conference Center • Shocco Springs Baptist

For more information, please visit www.alsbom.org/rrc or contact State Missionary Ronald L. Davis at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 270, or (334) 613-2270, rdavis@alsbom.org, or Ministry Assistant Sandra Jones at (334) 613-2315, sjones@alsbom.org.

For reservations and cost information, please call 1-800-280-1105.

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



BY CLARKE SKELTON

Pastor, Valley Grande Baptist Church (Selma Association)

Having grown up as the son of an Alabama Baptist pastor who also served as a state and associational missionary, the Cooperative Program was always an important part of my life. When I was growing up, my parents taught me to tithe any money I received or earned.

As I grew older, I also came to the conclusion that churches need to practice tithing as well as individuals. Tithing for a church requires giving at least 10 percent of its undesignated offerings to missions work beyond its local community.

The Cooperative Program is a great avenue for churches to demonstrate that they practice what they preach about stewardship. I believe that God led Southern Baptists to establish the Cooperative Program so that we would become a denomination that not only talked about missions but also did mission work together effectively.

My wife and I also served for 15 years as missionaries in South Korea

with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. During those years, my family and I experienced firsthand the results of the vision and faithfulness of Southern Baptists

all over America who gave through the Cooperative Program.

During our time in Korea, my wife and I became friends with several independent missionaries who had to raise their own financial support. As I got to know these independent missionaries, I became even more appreciative and supportive of the Cooperative Program.

These independent missionaries had to spend approximately 50 percent of their time writing and calling churches in the United States to get them to support the missionary work that God had called them to do.

In addition, every time that these missionaries left Korea for stateside assignment, they were not sure that they would be able to return. They could not be sure because they did not



know from one month to the next whether or not the churches that had supported them in the past would continue that support.

Additionally, we also saw the heartbreak of several independent missionaries who suddenly had to return to the U.S. because one or more of their sponsoring churches ended the support that they had pledged to provide.

Having served both as a Southern Baptist missionary and as a Southern Baptist pastor, I have become even more convinced of the strategic importance of the Cooperative Program.

As Southern Baptists, we preach and teach the importance of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20 and in Acts 1:8, Jesus clearly commanded us to “make disciples of all nations” and to “be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” Yet no church can fulfill the Great Commission alone.

In fact, Jesus Himself indicated the importance of joining with fellow believers

to accomplish the Great Commission. In the original Greek language of the New Testament, Jesus’ commands to “make disciples” and to “be my witnesses” are both plural. In other words, a literal translation of Jesus’ command into good Southern English would be “(you all) make disciples” and “(you all) be my witnesses.” The Great Commission itself is Christ’s command to do missions together, and I believe that the Cooperative Program is the best vehicle that we have to accomplish the Great Commission together.

Finally, as a lifetime Southern Baptist, I believe that our polity of local church autonomy is most consistent with what I find in the New Testament. However, because Christ commanded us to do missions together, we must choose to join with

fellow Southern Baptist churches to accomplish the Great Commission. In addition, Christ never commanded us to build our individual churches. Instead Jesus instructed us to “build God’s kingdom.” Although God wants each of our individual churches to grow, no matter how large our churches are, they only comprise a tiny corner of God’s kingdom. Therefore, to be obedient to Christ’s command to “build God’s kingdom” and His commission to “make disciples of all nations,” Southern Baptists must choose to work together. Since Christ commanded us to work together to “build God’s kingdom,” I believe that the Cooperative Program is the instrument that God has given Southern Baptists to accomplish our task most effectively.

APRIL 13 IS COOPERATIVE PROGRAM SUNDAY

Please visit

www.cooperativeprogramresources.org
for help in promotion.

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

ALABAMA BAPTIST BOYS CAMPS: DATES & COST

A camp experience where boys participate in uniquely “boy” activities.

Southeast Alabama - Vineyard Christian Retreat Center, Ariton (near Ozark)

- June 23-26, 4th-12th grade boys camp, \$150
- June 26-28, 1st-6th grade boy & Dad or Mom, \$160

Northeast Alabama - Marshall Baptist Retreat Center, Guntersville

- July 7-10, 4th-12th grade boys camp, \$150
- July 10-12, 1st-6th grade boy &

Dad camp, \$130/pair

Northwest Alabama - Earl Trent Assembly Baptist Camp, Florence

- July 14-17, 3rd-12th grade boys camp, \$70-\$80
- July 17-19, 1st-6th grade boy & Dad camp, \$140/pair

Central Alabama - WorldSong Missions Place, Cook Springs

- July 28-31, 4th-12th grade boys camp, \$150
- July 31-Aug. 2, 1st-6th grade boy & Dad or Mom camp, \$160/pair

A boy does not have to be in Royal Ambassadors to attend. One or two boys, where they are the only boys in the church, will feel comfortable at the camp. Chaperones are welcome but not required.

All camps include missions education, spiritual growth through twice-a-day “boy interest” Bible study and outdoor chapel, opportunity for decisions, respect and relationship building, and camp activities

(archery, air rifles, tomahawk throwing, blow darts, canoeing, cooking on a campfire and a buddy burner, swimming, adventure recreation, compass and ropecraft skills, and nature study).

— **4th-12th Grade Boys Camp:** Those completing the third grade are eligible.

— **1st-6th Grade Boy & Dad/Man:** For boys going into grades 1-6 and their dads or a significant male adult. Dad participates in all activities with his son. (Special Bible studies in 2014 will be dads sharing life experiences with sons.)

— **1st-6th Grade Boy & Mom Camp:** For boys going into grades 1-6 and their moms. Mom participates in all activities with her son.

For more information and to register online visit alsbom.org/boyscamp.

For more information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, sstephens@alsbom.org.



FOCUS on One Mission

SENIOR ADULT, SINGIN'



~ Tuesday, **SEPTEMBER 16**: First Baptist Church, 830 U.S. Highway 43, Winfield
 ~ Thursday, **SEPTEMBER 18**: Southside Baptist Church, 423 East Cottonwood Road, Dothan

Gas up the church van, and be ready to hit the road! Come to one of the locations above, and let's make some joyful noise. Pianist Frank Jones will be there to lead us as we sing hymns and worship the Lord together. The singin' begins at 10 a.m. and ends with lunch. The cost is \$10 per person, and that includes lunch!

REGISTER ONLINE:

www.alsbom.org/senioradultsingin

For other information, contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org. You may also visit www.alsbom.org/ssd for updates as they become available.

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission Program MANY MINISTRIES: The Cooperative Program

LEADERconnect FORUM

PREACHING WITH STORYTELLING



Register online at alsbom.org/leaderconnectforum

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2014
9 A.M.-4 P.M.
 REGISTRATION 8:30-9 A.M.



BAPTIST BUILDING,
 2001 E. SOUTH BLVD.,
 MONTGOMERY

PRICE: \$30 PER PERSON, INCLUDES LUNCH.



~~~~~ For more information, please contact State Missionary Mike Jackson at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 210, or (334) 613-2210, [mjackson@alsbom.org](mailto:mjackson@alsbom.org)

■ Preaching with Storytelling will give guidelines on how to use storytelling in preaching. The emphasis will be twofold: telling and preaching Bible stories, and telling stories to illustrate Bible truths.

Jesus often told stories when He spoke. Preachers who are faithful to the Carpenter's message need to be faithful to imitate the Carpenter's storytelling approach.

■ Jack Day will lead the training. Jack was a pioneer in using chronological Bible storytelling in Brazil when he served for 33 years as an IMB missionary. Jack was the Eastern South American Bible Storytelling Trainer. Jack always searched for stories with life-lessons that illustrate biblical teaching.

■ Jack returned to the U.S. to expand his storytelling activities. He does storytelling, leads training seminars and does consulting on storytelling across North America and internationally.

## Alabama Campers Mission Fall Rally

Wednesday through Saturday, April 30 - May 3, 2014

National Peanut Festival Fairgrounds, Dothan

Campers on Mission (COM) is a national fellowship of Christian campers who share their faith while they camp. Though sponsored by Southern Baptists, membership is open to Christian campers of all denominations.

The Alabama Chapter of COM sponsors fall and spring rallies and more than 20 mission projects per year. Visitors who are interested in possible membership are welcome to attend the rally. Friday night at 6:30 p.m. is a time of project reports and would be an ideal time to visit.

Campers on Mission projects include state fairs, motor speedways, sewing, nursing home ministry, puppets, prayer walks, Seaman Center, association camps and disaster relief, but mostly construction of churches, ministry camps and church additions.

Any adult may join Campers on Mission: single or family, young or older. COM is family-friendly and provides a great way to experience the relaxation of vacation with the satisfaction of a mission project. It is a great pathway to become an on-mission family.

**Enrollment Form and Other Info:**  
[www.alabamacom.org](http://www.alabamacom.org)

For more information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, [sstephens@alsbom.org](mailto:sstephens@alsbom.org).



# Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

Monday, May 5, 2014  
9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Lakeside Baptist Church  
2865 Old Rocky Ridge Rd.,  
Birmingham

**Music:** SQUIRE PARSONS

**Speakers:** Harper Shannon,  
Jay Wolf, Ray Newcomb

**FREE ADMISSION**

No registration necessary (lunch on your own)

*For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Pam Davis at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 245, or (334) 613-2245, pdavis@alsbom.org.*



Squire Parsons



Alabama Baptist Convention  
State Board of Missions

This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



## GET ACQUAINTED DAY

**At the Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd. in Montgomery**

**Tuesday, May 6,  
10 am - 3:30 pm  
9:30 - 10 - Check-in and refreshments**

- Meet your state missionaries
- Discover how we can partner together to fulfill the Great Commission
- Tour the Baptist Building
- Spouses welcome
- Lunch provided

**Ideal for pastors, church staff, secretaries or associational staff who are new to Alabama, new to their position, or who have never attended a Get Acquainted Day.**

**Register by calling or emailing Charleen Hobbs, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 231, or (334) 613-2231, chobbs@alsbom.org, or go online to [www.alsbom.org/gad](http://www.alsbom.org/gad).**

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[www.alsbom.org/trailride](http://www.alsbom.org/trailride) *(Coggins test required by state law. Please – no stallions.)*

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## WORSHIP & LEADERSHIP CHURCH MUSIC EVENTS

### Children's Choir Summit Leadership Conference

"Next Best" Deadline: May 1  
 July 11-12 at Shocco Springs  
 \$100 per person (based on 3 or more/room)  
 For children's choir leaders and anyone who works with children

CHECK WEBSITE FOR MORE INFO AND TO REGISTER ONLINE:  
[www.alsbom.org/children-summit](http://www.alsbom.org/children-summit)

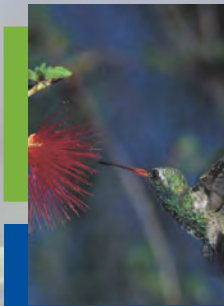
### MIX MusiCamp@Shocco

"Next Best" Deadline: May 1  
 July 14-18 at Shocco Springs  
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Jump into the mix. Unforgettable worship. Lifelong friendships. Aqua jump. Paintball. Uncontrollable fun.

REGISTRATION: [mixmusiccamp.org](http://mixmusiccamp.org)

For more information, please contact State Missionary Keith Hibbs at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 217, or (334) 613-2217, [khibbs@alsbom.org](mailto:khibbs@alsbom.org) or Ministry Assistant Cindy Parrish, ext. 230, or (334) 613-2230, [cparrish@alsbom.org](mailto:cparrish@alsbom.org).



**SPRING SENIOR ADULT RETREAT**  
 MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY,  
 APRIL 14-16, SHOCCO SPRINGS

### DECLARE!

*One generation will declare Your works to the next and will proclaim Your mighty acts. Psalm 145:4 (HCSB)*

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**CELEBRATION LEADER:** Andrew Smith, Vaughn Forest Church, Montgomery

**MUSIC LEADER:** Justin Belew, Phenix City


Senior adults will come together at Shocco Springs for this time of praise, worship, fellowship and spiritual growth. We will leave refreshed and ready to go back to our families, churches and communities to declare God's mighty works to the next generation.

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**REGISTRATION:** 1-800-280-1105. (Cost per person is based upon choice of lodging.)

*For other information, contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, [emitchell@alsbom.org](mailto:emitchell@alsbom.org). You may also visit [www.alsbom.org/senioradultretreat](http://www.alsbom.org/senioradultretreat) for updates as they become available.*

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# LEADER LAB

**Tuesday-Thursday, July 15-17**  
 Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery

Early bird rates available if registered by **May 30, 2014**, [www.alsbom.org/leaderlab](http://www.alsbom.org/leaderlab)

For other information, please contact Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, [ddickey@alsbom.org](mailto:ddickey@alsbom.org).

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**BAPTIST MEN'S DAY • SUNDAY, JUNE 15, 2014**

**THEME: "PRAYER & DISCOVERY, WHO HAS THE GIFTS THAT OUR CHURCH NEEDS?"**

Through prayer, recognize the gifts that each man has to fulfill the mission of the church. In Christianity, spiritual gifts are endowments given by the Holy Spirit. These are the supernatural graces which individual Christians need to fulfill the mission of the church (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4). The gifts are related to both seemingly "natural" abilities and seemingly more "miraculous" abilities, but all spiritual gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through discovery, men realize the gifts they have been given. A "Spiritual Gifts Discovery & Inventory" is available on the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions website. [www.alsbom.org/men](http://www.alsbom.org/men)

For other information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at **1-800-264-1225, ext. 268**, or **(334) 613-2268**, [sstephens@alsbom.org](mailto:sstephens@alsbom.org).



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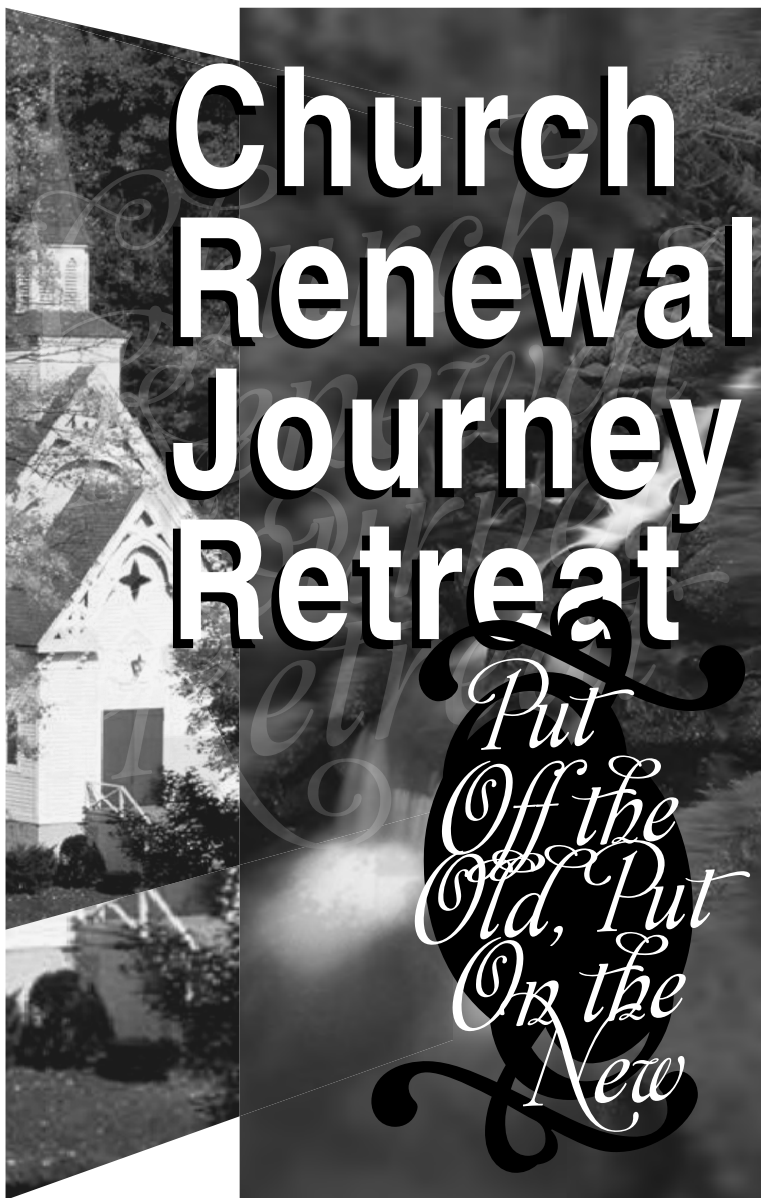
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 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

**ADVANCE REGISTRATION IS REQUESTED.**  
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For more information or to register, visit [www.worldsongretreat.com](http://www.worldsongretreat.com) or contact Brandy Cleveland at 800.264.1225 ext. 223 or [bcleveland@alsbom.org](mailto:bcleveland@alsbom.org).



**FOCUS on One Mission**



**Friday and Saturday, May 16-17, 2014**  
Shocco Springs

**Inspirational Challenge:** WADE WALLACE, pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Russellville

JOHN FRANKLIN, formerly with LifeWay, will be sharing with us on the subject of prayer. Worship leaders for the weekend will be Shirley Berry from Mississippi and Jane Brown from Mobile. Bob and Phyllis Foy, Church Renewal Journey national coordinators with the North American Mission Board, will be sharing updates of the CRJ Ministry nationally. They will also share new ways in accessing the crjmessageboard.com website. This will include the accessing of other team members from other states, how team members may serve in other states and receiving prayer requests from team members from other states.

**Cost:** \$79.50 per person (double occupancy) or \$99.50 per person (single occupancy, private room). Cost includes one night's lodging and three meals.

Check-in/registration: 3 p.m. Friday

**To Register:** 1-800-280-1105

For other information, please contact Tommy Puckett at [tpuckett@elmore.rr.com](mailto:tpuckett@elmore.rr.com) or (334) 224-2082

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FOCUS on One Mission

# FAITH-FOCUSED SECURITY TRAINING

## LEVEL A TRAINING FOR 2014

This is the most basic training for the missions volunteer who travels occasionally to low-risk areas on mission trips. Participants will receive a full day of instruction led by Sentinel Trainers certified by Fort Sherman Academy covering topics like travel security, code of conduct, crime survival and basic crisis policy all from a faith-based perspective.

- **April 26:** First Baptist Church, Jasper
- **May 24:** First Baptist Church, Winfield
- **June 7:** Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia
- **June 28:** North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham

**COST** is \$40 per attendee (includes lunch and breaks). Reservations are non-refundable.

## LEVEL B TRAINING FOR 2014

Four sessions of classroom instruction led by a recognized leader in faith-based training for missions organizations. This level is designed for pastors, ministers of missions, church staff, mission team leaders and other mission leaders who travel or lead mission teams 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.

- **May 29-31:** Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur

**COST** is \$200 per attendee (includes materials, Saturday lunch and breaks). Reservations are non-refundable.

**REGISTER ONLINE** [www.alsbom.org/ffst](http://www.alsbom.org/ffst)

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sheron Poole at 1-800-264-1225 ext. 298, (334) 613-2298, [spoole@alsbom.org](mailto:spoole@alsbom.org).



Alabama Baptist Convention  
State Board of Missions

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For more information, please contact State Missionary Steve Stephens at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 268, or (334) 613-2268, [sstephens@alsbom.org](mailto:ssstephens@alsbom.org).



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Register Online: [onemissionstudents.org/accelerate](http://onemissionstudents.org/accelerate)

For other information, please contact State Missionary Keith Loomis at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 280, or (334) 613-2280, [kloomis@alsbom.org](mailto:kloomis@alsbom.org).

COMPILED BY

RICHARD ROSS

## PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



### Gunmen open fire on church in Mombasa, Kenya

MOMBASA, Kenya — Gunmen entered a Sunday morning worship service in Kenya's coastal Mombasa County on March 23 and sprayed the congregation with bullets, killing at least seven Christians and leaving several others in critical condition.

Two heavily armed men wounded more than a dozen of the 200-member Joy in Jesus Church in the Likoni area of Mombasa, where a mosque said to have ties with the Somali Islamic extremist group Al Shabaab has caused tensions.

Among the dead was assistant pastor Phillip Musasa, sources said. "The pastor had a head injury and succumbed to the injury while being rushed to the hospital," said a pastor who visited victims. "I saw 10 of the survivors in the hospital, and they are in a critical state."

No one has taken responsibility for the attack, which reportedly involved a third gunman outside the church building shooting at Christians fleeing the attack. Church leaders suspected Islamic extremists had carried it out in reprisal for a raid by armed police on the Masjid Musa Mosque (now Masjid Shuhada, or "Martyrs Mosque") on Feb. 2, in which more than 100 Muslims were arrested and at least two killed. Most of those detained have been released.

Authorities have arrested scores of people for questioning but not the primary, unidentified suspects. After the shooting, the assailants tried to attack the nearby Redeemed Gospel Church, known as the Jesus Celebration Center, Christian leaders said.

"Fortunately they could not get inside the church because they found armed policemen manning the place," one pastor said.

Bishop Wilfred Lai, senior pastor of Redeemed Gospel Church and chairman of the County Church Forum, said area Christians will not be deterred. "We as the body of Christ in the coastal region of Kenya will stand firm in spite of the cruel act of terrorism," he said.

At about 5 p.m. March 23, government officials convened a meeting of security agents, Christian pastors and Islamic leaders to discuss maintaining peace in the coastal region of Kenya. Mombasa County Gov. Hassan Ali Joho urged religious leaders to preach peaceful co-existence and tolerance.

### Christians charged after fleeing from extremists

PATRATU, India — A police station official in India's Jharkhand state reviled Christians who sought protection after Hindu extremists beat and threatened to kill them for refusing to convert to Hinduism, area church leaders said.

Accusing Christian leaders of forcible conversion, the Hindu extremists earlier in March attempted to forcibly convert several church members after disrupting a home worship service, beating them and parading them half-naked through the street, area pastor Rampath Nath said.

Police subsequently registered a case of forcible conversion against four Christians, he said.

Virender Singh, the police official at the station in Patratu Thana, Ramgarh District, verbally abused the Christians who fled their homes, rebuked them and sent them away without taking their complaint after the Hindu extremists beat them on two consecutive days, stripped off their clothes and chased them from Pali village, Nath said.

# Elvis remembered



Photo courtesy of Shane Tucker

Shane Tucker, a tribute artist of Elvis Presley, brings the King of Rock and Roll to life with his renditions of the late singer's songs. Tucker is an assistant principal at Foley High School and member of FBC Foley.

## Alabama Baptist incorporates gospel music into Elvis tribute shows

By Bruce Sims  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Elvis is in the building," or "Thank you. Thank you very much," is something Elvis Presley tribute artist Shane Tucker hears a lot.

Tucker, a member of First Baptist Church, Foley, and an assistant principal at Foley High School, said he was encouraged to become a tribute artist after lip-synching several Elvis songs at a party for teachers from his school.

"Like many singers, I started singing in church as part of the children's and later the youth choirs," he said. "During that time I also began singing solos. This helped develop a love of music in me that covers a number of genres."

Tucker's favorite musical genres include country and southern rock, and Elvis is one of his all-time favorite singers.

"Elvis had a captivating style and a powerful, unmatched vocal talent," Tucker said. "Performing as a tribute artist is my way of keeping the King of Rock and Roll's music and memory alive for those who remember him as well as introducing him to younger generations."

While an impersonator attempts to look, act and sound exactly like the performer being impersonated and stays in character throughout the entire performance, a tribute artist doesn't go quite that far. He or she does try to look the part and provide certain similarities, but the main focus is paying tribute by singing the performer's songs.

Tucker — who definitely looks the part — bought his first Elvis suit for \$50.

And while he started out using karaoke tracks, "before long I had a band to back me on stage," he said. "Today it's the Promised Land Band that backs me."

Tucker now finds himself in great demand by fans of Elvis and even younger generations.

"People want to come out, have a good time and hear some great music," he said. "For those who grew up when Elvis was popular, the music has a way of taking them back to their teenage years."

Recently Tucker performed two, sold-out concerts for the local Snowbirds, who are winter visi-

tors to the Gulf Shores/Orange Beach area.

"There were a few people in the audience who had actually seen Elvis perform live," he said.

Tucker, who said he keeps his shows family-friendly, also incorporates some of Elvis' gospel songs.

"A lot of people don't know this, but the [Grammy] Awards Elvis won while he was alive all came from his gospel album and singles," he said.

Tucker has performed at a variety of South Alabama venues, but his talent also took him to a ministry event in the Philippines in 2012. His evangelist and ministry team parents, Johnny and Judy Tucker, have had a ministry in Mati City for 25 years and were leading a pastor and lay ministers' conference that year, so he helped entertain.

He said his parents' ministry kept their family moving around a lot until they settled in Citronelle when he was in third grade.

"I was able to attend high school there, where I played football," he noted. "I was recruited to play at Livingston University on a half-athletic, half-academic scholarship."

It was at Livingston that Tucker met his wife, Carmyn, the baby of the singing Reed sisters from Cullomburg.

"Sometimes Carmyn and I will do a duet, or she may sing a solo (during performances)," Tucker said. "But to this day I haven't been able to get her to dress up like Elvis' wife, Priscilla."

Some years ago Tucker, in full Elvis regalia, was standing alongside Alabama Highway 59 in Summerdale waving at passersby as part of a promotion for a local recreational vehicle store when a car accident took place up the road from him.

"After they had cleaned the highway up the policeman, who worked the scene, asked me if I knew I had caused the wreck," Tucker said. "That staggered me. He went on to say a lady had just passed me and was looking back over her shoulder as she thought she had just seen the real Elvis. That's when she plowed into the car in front of her."

For more information about Tucker and his performances, visit [www.ElvisAtTheGulf.com](http://www.ElvisAtTheGulf.com). #



Photo courtesy of Shane Tucker



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## SBC Representatives Around the World

Imagine how crowded it would be if all 100 million New Yorkers, Texans, Californians and Floridians moved to Alabama. That population density is a present reality for people in Bihar, India, and Nepal where 35 million speak the Maithili language.

There is only one Maithili Christian for every 2,000 Maithili non-Christians — a 0.05 percent Christian population.

I, my wife Joelle, and our three children moved from Oklahoma to South Asia in 2009 with the International Mission Board (IMB). We serve among Maithili peoples, so I was encouraged to learn that several Baptist churches from Alabama also minister among them through the Maithili Alliance they formed.

I recently met two of these pastors: Stanley Kilgore, of Center Grove Baptist Church, Cullman, and Doug Ripley, of Decatur Baptist Church, when they visited India. They and others have done great work, but more than half of Maithilis have never heard the name of Jesus one time. In every ministry context around the world, we each must wrestle with this question: What is it going to take to finish the task? The Maithilis are still unreached for a reason — remote villages, poverty and illiteracy.

However, spiritual resistance is not one of those reasons; one out of five receives Christ when they hear the gospel. Ironically the growth rate of Christianity among Maithili people is being outpaced 100 times



Photo courtesy of Stanley Kilgore

**MAITHILI MISSION** — Pastor Stanley Kilgore (fourth from left), of Center Grove Baptist Church, Cullman, serves on a Feb. 21 to March 3 missions trip to Asia, along with Pastor Doug Ripley (third from left), of Decatur Baptist Church. Alice Lindsey (fourth from right), a member of Center Grove Baptist, conducted the first Vacation Bible School for Maithili children during the trip.

over by the general population. Conclusion: The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (Luke 10:2).

I thank Alabama Baptists for being a few of those laborers and supporting us as fellow laborers through the IMB. Let us pray and cooperate for more laborers and more harvest among Maithili peoples. Practically pray for the Old Testament to be translated into their language, for them to listen to the Bible on their phones or read the Bible regularly, for every believer to be trained in discipleship and ministry, and for an indig-

enous church-planting movement. Hundreds of thousands of more people must enter new fields, share the gospel, make disciples, plant healthy churches and develop Christian leaders in order to finish the task the Lord Jesus has given us.

If you are interested in partnering with the Maithili Alliance churches, contact Ripley at 256-353-8579.

**Dodd Rawnsley**  
Southeast Asia

*EDITOR'S NOTE* — Names changed for security reasons.

## Old Howard 100 bike ride to take place in April

Samford University's Howard College of Arts and Sciences will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its Old Howard 100 bike ride April 12.

The charity ride offers routes of 34, 43, 70 and 102 miles through three counties in Alabama's historic Black Belt, where Samford was founded as Howard College in 1841. Proceeds from the ride benefit health care initiatives of Sowing Seeds of Hope in Perry County and have raised more than \$30,000 to date.

The Old Howard 100 will begin and end on the grounds of Judson College in Marion. Registration will open at 8 a.m., with the ride starting at 9 a.m. In addition to rest stops and full SAG support by Cahaba Cycles and the Pell City Ham Radio team, ride organizers will provide a hot dog lunch starting at noon and a full dinner from 2 to 5 p.m.

To learn more and register, visit [howard.samford.edu/oldhoward/](http://howard.samford.edu/oldhoward/). (Samford)

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- Be as concise as possible

## Church ANNIVERSARIES



### FBC Center Point celebrates 100-year anniversary

First Baptist Church, Center Point, celebrated its 100-year anniversary March 16.

The Birmingham Baptist Association church held a meet-and-greet event in the afternoon March 15 and invited all those who played on the church's baseball, softball, basketball and other athletic teams throughout the years.

On Sunday, an 8:30 a.m. breakfast was held before the morning service at 10 with a message from Mike Shaw, who grew up in the church and now serves as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Pelham. Shaw also was one of former pastor Ralph Feild's "preacher boys." Former pastor Ryan Whitley, who now serves as pastor of CrossPoint Baptist Church, Trussville (a mission church planted by First, Center Point), shared a message during the afternoon service at 3 p.m.

Referred to as an "anniversary reunion," all former staff members and church members were invited to attend. In total the three events welcomed more than 1,200 people, said Billie Davis, the anniversary committee chairperson.

Former minister of music Clell Wright's son, Joshua, wrote the hymn "Find Us Faithful" for the church and directed the choir in performing the piece. Other special music was performed by New Creation, and the choir was led by several former ministers of music throughout the services. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a commemorative plaque, as did Birmingham Association. Mayor Tom Henderson presented certificates from the city of Center Point and the office of Gov. Robert Bentley.

Davis had "memory rooms" — such as a missions room, day care room, bus ministry room, bride's room and sports ministry room — set up throughout the church representing the ministries over the years with pictures and memorabilia from each.

Interim pastor Buddy McGohon said, "It was a terrific weekend and it gave the church a lot of opportunities to reconnect ... a lot of affirmation on what the church has been able to accomplish by God's grace ... and a sense of hope for the future."

(Neisha Fuson)

# Spiritual impact on lives

## New Samford scholarship to honor alumnus, longtime minister

Samford University in Birmingham has announced a new scholarship to honor longtime Baptist minister of music Robert B. Hatfield. Hatfield has served at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, for 35 years.

Priority will be given to academically qualified students pursuing a degree in music and worship who have demonstrated a calling to vocational music ministry, according to Joseph Hopkins, dean of Samford's School of the Arts. Other criteria reflect Hatfield's life and ministry and include a commitment to serve in local and global contexts and an interest in multigenerational music ministry.

Birmingham financial planner Phillip Inman, a 1977 Samford

MBA graduate, is one of several church lay leaders helping with fundraising for the needed endowment.

"This is personal for me because my wife is in the [Dawson] choir and my daughters came up through Bob's children's and youth choir ministries," Inman said. "He has been an important person in my family's lives, and he is a wonderful example for all of us."

"When I think about those who have impacted my spiritual life, I think of Bob," Inman added. "When we began thinking about the scholarship, I asked, 'Who will be the next generation's Bob?'"

Inman noted that Hatfield or a member of his family will be involved in the scholarship selection process to ensure that the scholar-

ship recipient is "representative of the Christian framework [Hatfield] has had for his ministry, his life and his family."

Hatfield received a bachelor of music degree from Samford in 1971 and later earned a doctor of ministry degree in 2001 from Samford's Beeson Divinity School. He previously was on

Samford's adjunct faculty teaching music and worship.

W. Randy Pittman, Samford's vice president for advancement, praised the initiative to honor Hatfield and said the scholarship project would be an inspiration for other churches who want to honor a longtime minister.

"What a wonderful example of a church that will perpetuate longtime, meaningful ministry far into the future by honoring one whose life and ministry already have touched thousands," Pittman said. "It also affirms the strong, decades-long relationship that Samford has had both with Dawson Baptist Church and with the Hatfield family." (Samford)



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## Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon

There are some new reverse mortgage products. In an unprecedented move we can now offer a fixed rate with a growing line of credit. If you ever wanted a nest egg that grows at over six percent, now's the time! I really don't know how long this product will be available. If you take advantage of it you can keep it for as long as you live in your home, and it's guaranteed by the Federal Housing Authority.

Occasionally, I talk with someone who says they read or heard some negative remarks about reverse mortgages. Well, I'm not surprised because some folks even talk negatively about the Lord Jesus. Some bad press by people who did not do their homework caused Linda White of WVTM-TV here in Birmingham to investigate. You can see the video she did



Jimmy Dixon

last year by googling "13 investigates reverse mortgages." She did her homework and got the facts straight. That's more than I can say for some news channels. If

you view the video you'll see Bro. Max and Carolyn Youngblood in the interview. I worked with them over four years ago. You'll also see Jimbo King of McGowin King Mortgage. He and I work together. If you have a question about

reverse mortgages or if you'd like to apply, please call me.

Remember, like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is a Sunday School teacher and active deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown.

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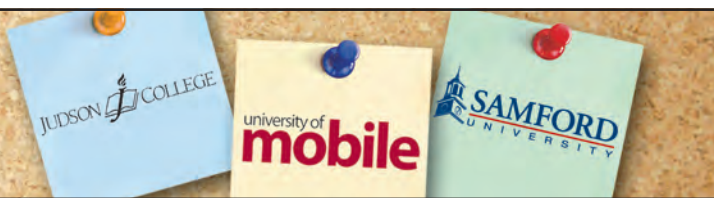


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# CAMPUS News



## JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Signs Outstanding High School Athletes:** At the Feb. 15 on-campus athletics-signing event on Preview/Scholarship Day, Judson College in Marion signed eight senior standouts who will participate in intercollegiate athletics in the 2014–2015 academic year.

The Judson Eagles softball team welcomed two signees from Cleveland High School: Leandra Glass and Tiffany Watson. Laycee Sherbert (Sylacauga High School) and

Lillie Hobson (Emmanuel Christian Academy), join them, along with Faith Knight (Kate Duncan Smith High School). Madison Casale signed with both softball and basketball teams, and her classmate McKenzie Gilchrist (J.B. Pennington High School) signed with both softball and volleyball. Judson Eagles soccer welcomed Jessica Thomas.

## SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Theologian-Ethicist Stanley Hauerwas To Give Hodges Lec-**

**tures at Samford:** Stanley Hauerwas, the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Professional Ethics at the Divinity School of Duke University in Durham, N.C., will deliver the Andrew Gerow Hodges Lectures at Samford University April 14–15. The lectures, sponsored by the Frances Marlin Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership, are open to the public.

Hauerwas will lead a discussion on virtue ethics April 14 at 4 p.m. in Brooks Auditorium. He will deliver the annual Hodges Lecture on April 15 at 10 a.m. in Reid Chapel.

Hauerwas is a distinguished ethicist, theologian and the author of more than 30 books. In his teaching, he attempts to show that theological convictions make no sense unless they are actually embodied in people's lives.

## UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **UMobile Students Featured in Professional Art Show:** The Mobile Arts Council has selected works by six University of Mobile (UMobile) art students to be displayed in its upcoming show, "5."

The six students and their works are: Brittney Anderson, "Good Game Old Sport," oil on canvas; Dakota Cantrell, "Wandering Warrior," ceramics and acrylic; Nichole Demos, "Other," ceramic; Ragan Fleming, untitled, ceramic; Satyn Luker, "Me," compressed charcoal; Emily Williams "Oct-o-pot #2," ceramic, and "Wall-flower," paper and pen.

The exhibition will be displayed at the Mobile Arts Council galleries April 1–25. Pieces include any medium or style created while enrolled at the entrant's current school. For more information, visit [www.umobile.edu](http://www.umobile.edu).

## High Court hears 'landmark' religious liberty case

Do business owners have the right to exercise their religious beliefs despite what a government decree requires?

The answer could have a long-lasting impact.

On March 25, Supreme Court justices heard lawyers from the Obama administration and two corporations debate the constitutionality of the federal government's contraception mandate of the Affordable Care Act, which requires employers to provide abortion-

causing drugs like ella and Plan B for their employees.

Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties contend the federal regulation violates their owners' consciences and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a 1993 law protecting religious liberty.

The justices heard arguments about the contraception mandate after more than two and a half years of protests by pro-life and religious freedom advocates.

More than 300 parties — some

nonprofit organizations and some for-profit corporations — have combined to file 94 lawsuits against the Department of Health and Human Services. The consolidated case March 25 involved for-profit businesses. The nonprofit cases have yet to make it to the high court.

The Supreme Court's decision is expected in late June or early July.

Hobby Lobby's owners said they would not comply with the mandate if they lose in court. (BP, TAB)

## MARKET PLACE

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

**PASTOR:** Chappell Hill Baptist Church of Gilbertown, Ala., is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: [dwgiles58@gmail.com](mailto:dwgiles58@gmail.com).

**PASTOR:** South Hamilton Baptist Church is accepting resúmes for pastor. Full-time and bivocational resúmes are being accepted. Please send resúmes to: 1805 Military Street S., Hamilton, AL 35570, or email to: [southhamilton@gmail.com](mailto:southhamilton@gmail.com).

**PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC:** Hanceville FBC is seeking a part-time minister of music. Primary goal to lead church and choir utilizing blended music in such a way that they encounter God in worship. Additional questions will be discussed during the interview process. Please send your resumé to: [resume@hancevillefirstbaptist.com](mailto:resume@hancevillefirstbaptist.com).

**BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR:** Flatwoods Baptist Church in Northport, Ala., is seeking a bivocational music director who will serve the church by planning and leading our worship/music ministry. The music director will be responsible for coordinating with all the church staff in planning, scheduling and directing the music program and ministries of the church. We are seeking someone who is a talented and passionate leader to plan and conduct a God-inspired music ministry. Send resumé to: [fwbcpersonnel@hotmail.com](mailto:fwbcpersonnel@hotmail.com).

**PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER:** Meek Baptist Church in Arley, Ala., is seeking a godly man to lead our choir and congregation in blended style worship. Email resumé: [meekbaptist@att.net](mailto:meekbaptist@att.net). [www.meekbc.com](http://www.meekbc.com).

**PART-TIME MUSIC/CHOIR DIRECTOR:** Pleasant View Church, Foley, seeks a part-time music/choir director to work with choir and other musicians. Great opportunity for retiree or music student. Information at 251-943-1845 or [pleasantview@gulfnet.com](mailto:pleasantview@gulfnet.com).

**STUDENT MINISTER:** First Baptist Church, Dothan, Ala., is seeking and praying for God's person to fill a student minister position for students in grades 7–12, as well as the college-aged students. If interested, please feel free to forward your resumé to our Youth Advisory Committee Chairman, Courtney Mann. [courtneymann@fbcdothan.org](mailto:courtneymann@fbcdothan.org).

**FAMILY PASTOR:** FBC Valley, Ala., is seeking a full-time family pastor. This position will work to disciple our children, youth, as well as work with parents. Please send resúmes to: [tammy@fbcvalley.org](mailto:tammy@fbcvalley.org).

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

### OTHER POSITIONS

**ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONARY/DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS:** Clarke County Baptist Association, Ala., accepting resúmes for associational missionary/director of missions through April 30. Resúmes may be submitted to: 16183 Hwy 43, Grove Hill, AL

36451, or [cbamoffice@gmail.com](mailto:cbamoffice@gmail.com).

### BUSINESS

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**DESTIN OR PENSACOLA BEACH FRONT RESORT:** Fully furnished, luxury beachfront resort. Great rates. Family-oriented condos sleep 4 to 8. Call 1-800-874-0402. [HolidayBeachResort.com](http://HolidayBeachResort.com).

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**LOG CABIN:** Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to [www.paradisevista.net](http://www.paradisevista.net) to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

## Want to know God?

By Pastor Buddy Nelson  
First Baptist Church, McClellan

Don't make it so difficult. Let's talk about trust.

Before you become overwhelmed by the big picture, try to focus your thoughts on understanding the day-to-day matters of trust. Jesus took events going on around Him and made practical application to heavenly truths. "A sower went out to sow his seed" (Luke 8:5). Can't you see the sower in the background doing his daily tasks as Jesus talked about the soil's condition, the seeds and relating His message to the listeners? This helped Christ's followers to understand a deeper spiritual truth He wanted them to follow.

Do you want to know God? Let me communicate a major truth: Believing Jesus is God's precious Son makes you a Christ follower. The spiritual truth is trust. A person must believe in God and His Son before they can feel the joy of faith believers have discovered.

Today I sat down in my office to write this article. I turned on my computer, opened my word processing software and began to write. All this was done without a thought of how the computer really works. I trust it will work. I depend on the computer to communicate with friends and family. Even though I can't speak the technical language of computers, nor do I understand every detail of how a computer works, I trust the computer will work.

Knowing God as our Father and following Christ is a journey. It all starts with trust (John 3:16–17). If you trust Him, His message will change your life (John 8:32). When you trust, He will prove Himself to you and you will understand more clearly the believer's concepts of love and forgiveness (John 15:11–14; Matt. 6:12). It all begins with trusting God.

Getting to know God isn't difficult. John Sammis penned these words in the old hymn, "Trust and Obey": "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." If you are willing to communicate with God, He will prove Himself worthy of your trust.

Don't make it difficult, just start trusting. It will be the most magnificent journey you will ever experience.

# Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

## Louisiana College president asked to resign

PINEVILLE, La. — Louisiana College President Joe Aguillard has lost trustee support and been asked to resign, according to a story quoting multiple sources published March 26 in *The Town Talk* newspaper.

Aguillard, 57, president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention-affiliated school in Pineville, La., since 2005, reportedly said in a meeting March 26 that he has no plans to step down.

Less than a month ago the newspaper said trustees were working to extend Aguillard's contract after a press release declared the president "fully exonerated" of allegations that prompted a trustee investigation in 2013. The tide began to turn, however, after confidential documents exchanged internally prior to a 17-13 vote by college trustees to retain Aguillard as president in April 2013 were leaked to the public.

*The Town Talk* obtained documents alleging, among other things, that Aguillard misappropriated designated funds, lied to trustees and donors and violated the school's whistleblower policy.

Since then a former vice president sued for wrongful termination, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools announced plans to reinvestigate the school's accreditation and students and alumni gathered for a campus protest.

## BWA releases new men's daily devotional

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — A daily devotional for Baptist men around the world was recently released on the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) website.

A project of the BWA Men's Department, the daily devotional invites readers to reflect on God, life, faith and discipleship. The study was prepared by Ayoola Badejo, president of the All Africa Baptist Men's Fellowship; Lucky Ray, president of American Baptist Men USA; and Roy Scott, first vice president of Eastern Region Laymen of the Progressive National Baptist Convention in the United States.

The guide is available at [www.bwanet.org/programs/men](http://www.bwanet.org/programs/men).

## GuideStone recognized in Lipper Fund Awards

DALLAS — The annual Lipper Fund Awards recognized GuideStone Financial Resources for outstanding fund performance, this time recognizing the GuideStone Extended-Duration Bond Fund as the "Best Fund Over 3 Years" and the "Best Fund Over 5 Years" in the Corporate Debt A-Rated Funds category. In each category, which ended Nov. 30, 2013, the Extended-Duration Bond Fund beat out more than 50 eligible funds.

This is the third consecutive year the Lipper Fund Awards has recognized GuideStone Funds.

# 'Effective & trustworthy'

## Cooperative Program's far reach told in 'Rant' video

A new Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) video communicates to younger generations the vitality and necessity of the Cooperative Program (CP), incorporating humor, fact and colloquial terms, said the team of Louisiana Baptists who produced CP Rant.

"This video presents the absurdity of not cooperating and defends the concept of CP through humor and in a way young adults, those who grew up in the 'Seinfeld era,' might enjoy and more readily understand," said Matt Tullos, production manager with the Louisiana Baptists team that produced the video. "Often in SBC life we tend to soft sell the idea of cooperating and say 'you should.' The CP Rant provides an entertaining yet compelling argument for churches to give through the Cooperative Program."

Southern Baptist churches are encouraged to view the two and a half minute video, available for free download at [www.sbc.net/cp/videos.asp](http://www.sbc.net/cp/videos.asp) (scroll down to the second video labeled "CP Rant") in advance of Cooperative Program Sunday on April 13. The animated video features a fictitious, young antagonist questioning why his church should support the CP and a young protagonist pastor pointing out the CP's far-reaching effectiveness.

"This video is a little edgy for some of us, but I would show it anyway, for the sake of my children and grandchildren. They will get it," said Jim Swedenburg, director of the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. The CP Rant video also can be found at [www.cooperativeprogramresources.org](http://www.cooperativeprogramresources.org).

CP Rant producer John Kyle, director of communications for Louisiana Baptists, said the video is designed to answer questions Southern Baptists voice about the CP.

"CP is really the story of every person who gives to the Lord through his local church," Kyle said. "CP is not simply what the SBC or the state conventions are doing. In fact, it is what the church members are doing, who they are reaching, how they are making a difference, and they need to know. As the primary character states at the end of the video, 'Somebody had to tell the guy.'"

"We attempted to present the case for cooperation in a manner that captures the attention of the audience and makes the case that missions support doesn't have to be an either/or proposition," Kyle added. "Churches can participate in missions and, at the same time, support missions and ministries in their state and around the world. There is more to missions than 'just feeling it,' as one of the characters states."

The title CP Rant is used positively, drawing on the pastor's defense of the CP, Kyle said.

"I guess the idea is you get on a roll and you just can't stop — thus the definition of rant. The main character received a crash course in cooperation, if you will, from his pastor and when the opportunity presented itself, [the pastor] just lets it all out," Kyle said. "There's so much about our cooperative efforts that are good and right and needs to be heard by the average church member."

The CP allows churches to support a wide array of ministries and missions by giving one single donation at the state convention level. Donations support evangelism, children's homes, volunteer missions, missions education, new churches, colleges and universities, collegiate ministries, camps and more.

Nate Adams, chairman of the SBC Cooperative Program Advisory Council, said the video will answer pertinent questions and inspire educational dialogue.

"I think this lighthearted video gives a voice to questions that some young church leaders have about the Cooperative Program, as well as those to whom the concept

of cooperative missions may simply be new or misunderstood," Adams said. "In two and a half minutes it can't deliver all the answers to those questions, but it can open the door for a larger discussion about how CP works and why it is so effective and trustworthy."

"There are many well-done print pieces, articles and other short videos that help tell the CP story and show the life-transforming results of missions done in cooperation," he added. "I would hope this video would help open a whole new dialogue, even with sincere skeptics, about the proven effectiveness of Cooperative Program missions."

Ashley Clayton, vice president for Cooperative Program and stewardship development with the SBC Executive Committee, encourages churches to show the CP Rant video this April.

"This new video resource, CP Rant, along with several other Cooperative Program video resources posted on [sbnet.net](http://sbnet.net), provide our church members an open window to see the good things we do through Southern Baptist Missions and ministries," he said. "I hope every church will take the time during the month of April to present these video resources. Southern Baptist churches are never more strong, never more effective and never more on point for the Kingdom than they are when they join hands together to preach the gospel of Christ at home in North America and around the world."

CP resources are available under the "Cooperative Program" tab of [sbnet.net](http://sbnet.net). (BP)



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Cooperative Program Sunday is April 13.

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*"This video is a little edgy for some of us, but I would show it anyway, for the sake of my children and grandchildren. They will get it."*

Jim Swedenburg, director of the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



## BOOK REVIEWS

### Free at Last: A Life-Changing Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

Leesa K. Donner. Bloomington, Ind.: WestBow Press, 2013. 403 pp. (Large paperback).

Does it seem to you that everyone is climbing aboard the Bible study bandwagon? I get many Bible studies to review, and while all have good points, few are as well balanced as this one. “Free at Last” challenges both the mind and the heart, presenting the depth needed for theological understanding and guiding the reader to personal application.

This study of the Book of Luke, intended to run from September through May, recognizes the time constraints we all have and tries, according to the author, to limit the amount of time that must be spent on “homework” each week. Even so, there is more than enough work in each session to keep participants engaged and active, with both general knowledge questions and highly personalized questions that require some deep reflection.

The author has clearly done her homework. The study has a strong scholarly foundation, drawing from notables such as Warren Wiersbe and Matthew Henry, and includes some in-depth word studies to help the reader understand the language of the original Greek texts.

Although Donner is not a household name in Bible studies like Beth Moore and Priscilla Shirer, this study might be a good choice for the serious Bible student.



### The Crimson Dream

Chad Bianchi. Bloomington, Ind.: XLibris, 2013. 142 pp. (Paperback).

Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes of a college football program? Ok, I haven't — but I found Chad Bianchi's book fascinating anyway. Bianchi was a student staffer for the University of Alabama's (UA) football team from 2002 to 2006 and experienced college football in a way few of us ever will. His intent in writing the book was to “peel back the curtain and give you a glimpse inside a major college football program.”



“The Crimson Dream” is not an exposé — there's not a bit of gossip in it. Instead Bianchi simply chronicles his years with the program, inviting readers to a close-up look at what goes into supporting the team for practices and football games. During his time with the team, Bianchi was able to travel to

every SEC stadium, worked several bowl games and even managed a trip to Hawaii with the team, all the while staying true to his faith.

Sadly Bianchi began to experience some balance issues after he graduated from UA. A still undiagnosed neurological condition persists and limits his activities, but he writes that he is improving. ❧

### Meet the reviewer

Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D., reviews books and movies for The Alabama Baptist. She is a university professor and retired principal. She is a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur.



[Martine@kingdomresearch.org](mailto:Martine@kingdomresearch.org)



Photo courtesy of Merge PR

Robby Earle and Molly Reed make up the acoustic duo known as City Harbor.

# ‘Faith is a choice’

## Duo known as City Harbor reminds listeners of God's grace

By Leann Callaway  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While performing concerts across the country, Molly Reed and Robby Earle — the acoustic duo known as City Harbor — hope to encourage audiences to study God's Word while listening to their songs.

“I think sometimes when we listen to Christian music, we forget to dig deeper and really look at Scripture and see how it applies to our lives,” Reed noted. “But also be reminded that God's grace is always there and always available.”

Their group name reflects their source of strength and shelter, especially during the storms of life. “We love the meaning of harbor and what that represents — a safe place, refuge, a sanctuary,” Reed said. “And then city is defined as any place people are gathered. We love the theme and imagery behind our name — that people can come to Christ and find refuge in Him. We can find rest and peace when we come to Him.”

Their self-titled debut album features the song, “Come However You Are” and is based on Matthew 11:28.

“I think the common thread throughout our album is the constant reminder of God's grace and His love that is always available to us on a daily basis,” Reed said. “We want to encourage people to come to Jesus in whatever shape they are in and to find the rest, love and peace that only comes from Him.”

While explaining the message behind their music, the duo often shares personal stories and struggles in hopes of connecting audiences to the life-changing love of Christ. “Sometimes it's

beneficial when you can relate to people through a personal hardship. They can be reminded that we all have struggles and there is hope in the midst of these circumstances because of our Savior,” Reed said. “In my life, I've had to battle through seasons of depression and anxiety. We included a song on the album called ‘I Still Believe’ to offer

**“Because of His grace we are set free. That's the message of the gospel.”**

**Molly Reed  
singer, City Harbor**

an encouragement — proclaiming ‘faith isn't always a feeling, it's a choice.’ You have to choose to believe Christ in the good times and bad times.

“It makes such a difference to realize and rest in the fact that even when we struggle through situations, that Jesus has already overcome it and His love never fails,” she said. “Because of His grace, we are set free. That's the message of the gospel. Through this song and sharing about my personal struggles, it's been really cool to see all ages admitting that they have gone through similar

seasons and struggles. Many people have said that after hearing this song, they have been able to put things in perspective and be reminded to believe, trust and know that God's love is unfailing and unwavering,” Reed noted.

### ‘A calling on our lives’

City Harbor's concerts are focused around what their lyrics say and a desire to lead people to Christ, Reed said.

“Robby and I both feel this ministry is a calling on our lives,” she added. “Music has such a cool way of breaking down walls, barriers and emotions, and it opens the door for God to provide opportunities for us to meet people, talk with them on a real level and share stories about what God is doing in our lives. We love getting to the end of the show, meeting people and finding out how we can pray for them.” ❧

# Keeping God No. 1

## Pro baseball player Spencer 'lives his life for God'

By Bill Sorrell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**A** Damascus Road experience, it was not. "I was 7 years old. I was not a drunkard," said Matthew Spencer of his conversion. Nonetheless it was dramatic. "It changed my life. I knew I was going to heaven. I try to live for Him."

On Nov. 18, 1993, Spencer was saved during a revival at Eastwood Baptist Church, Morristown, Tenn.

"It was on a Thursday night. The preacher's name was Billy Baugh," Spencer said. "I went to the altar and asked God to save me, and I put my faith in Him. I definitely felt like I understood and as soon as I understood, I needed to get saved."

Spencer was also 7 when he was baptized at Eastwood Baptist.

A professional baseball player since 2007, Spencer grew up in a Christian family. His mother, Sharon Chesney, and stepfather, Gary Chesney, are Christians. His uncles Larry Seals and David Epps are Baptist preachers.

Twenty-one years later Spencer, 28, is still taking the high road with his faith.

"You are supposed to keep God No. 1. So even when you have a bad day or a really good day, God is always No. 1. You don't get too low or too high; you keep your focus on God."

Spencer has had plenty of good days in baseball — he got his NCAA Division I status at Morristown West High School. He was an All-American his senior year, all-state three times and conference player of the year. The Boston Red Sox drafted him in the 24th round (725th overall) in 2004.

### College career

He is one of the few players in the nation to play on two different teams back-to-back in the College World Series (CWS). At University of North Carolina (UNC), Spencer played outfield and was a left-handed pitcher, hit .278, belted six home runs and had 29 RBI in 2006. His 15 stolen bases ranked second on the team. He was a sophomore at UNC when the Tar Heels played for the national championship in 2006 and then transferred his junior year to Arizona State University in Phoenix.

He hit a CWS home run for the Sun Devils in 2007 — one of his biggest baseball thrills — and

was a Louisville Slugger National College Baseball Player of the Week. Spencer's stock had risen to third round where the Philadelphia Phillies drafted him 113th overall. He was traded to the Oakland A's for the 2009 season and then to the Chicago Cubs where he spent 2010–2012 on their minor league affiliate teams.

In 2010 with Tennessee Smokies, he hit 17 home runs and batted .268. He was a Southern League all-star in 2011 with the Smokies — he played first base and pitched one game — but his skill is power hitting. He slammed 13 home runs in 2011 while batting .258. He was promoted to Triple-A Iowa in 2011 and in 2012 played with Daytona in the Advance-A Florida State League. He suited for Lancaster, Bridgeport and York in 2013 in the independent Atlantic League. Combined he hit .264 with 27 doubles.

While with the Smokies he organized baseball chapel.

"Every Sunday you pretty much get a smaller message than it would be at church, a little something to tide you over and give some strength for the rest of the week," he said.

He reads the Bible every night and prays.

"I think about God as

much as I can," he added. "They (teammates) probably know that I am a Christian, hopefully by the way I live my life and conversations about religion. I give a Christian perspective."

What would Spencer want teammates to say about him?

"He lives his life for God and he is a good friend."

His own role models are his older brother Brandon Spencer, his mother and stepfather and uncles, he said. The best advice he has heard is, "Don't put your trust in man, put your trust in God," similar to Psalm 118:8.

"I've always felt like God was there for me. I've had a lot of obstacles. I never felt like 'God, why did You do this?' A couple of times in baseball, I was having a really bad day. You are in the dugout and kind of frustrated and say a little prayer, 'God, I really need You right now.' He has come through."

"I'm pretty much living a dream," he said.

There is another dream. "I dream of getting to the big leagues and doing something for God. The Lord means everything. He is pretty much why you are living and why we're here." ❧



Photo courtesy of the Bridgeport Bluefish  
Professional baseball player Matthew Spencer plays in the field for the Bridgeport Bluefish in 2013.

## RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



### Cremation 'new response' to death, survey finds

NASHVILLE — Cremation may be the new American response to death, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

The study, which surveyed 1,036 Americans, shows that about 4 in 10 (41 percent) say they plan to be cremated. Six in ten (58 percent) say being cremated will not keep you from being resurrected to live in heaven. And few (14 percent) say cremation is wrong.

The LifeWay online survey reflects the growing acceptance of cremation, which has become common in the United States. About 4 in 9 (43.5 percent) Americans who died in 2012 were cremated, according to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). That is nearly double the rate from 1996 (21.8 percent). More than 7 in 10 (71 percent) disagree with the statement, "I believe it is wrong to cremate a body after someone dies." Only 3 in 10 (30 percent) disagree with the statement, "I plan to have my body cremated when I die." Forty-one percent agree, while 29 percent do not know.

The survey found that few Americans think cremation has any consequences for the afterlife. Fifty-eight percent disagree with the statement, "If someone's body is cremated, there is no way for them to be resurrected to live in heaven." Only 8 percent agree. One in 5 (20 percent) don't know. Fourteen percent say there is no resurrection to live in heaven.

Evangelical Christians have been wary of cremation in the past. And the practice does remain less common in the Bible belt. In Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee, the cremation rate is among the lowest in the country, at 23.9 percent, according to CANA. By contrast, in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington, the cremation rate is 60.3 percent.

### Virginia girl 'not feminine enough' for Christian school

TIMBERLAKE, Va. — The family of a little girl in western Virginia has removed her from her school after administrators said she did not appear feminine enough.

Sunnie Kahle, 8, likes autographed baseballs and hunting knives alongside stuffed animals and jewelry, according to CBS affiliate WDBJ. "It's fun," Sunnie said.

Sometimes her schoolmates at Timberlake Christian School (TCS) asked whether she was a boy or girl, Sunnie told the station.

Her grandmother, who is her legal guardian, said she has just always been like that. "Sunnie realizes she's a female but she wants to do boy things," Doris Thompson said.

But administrators at the school in Timberlake, Va., did not appear to agree. They sent Sunnie's grandparents a letter reminding them of school policy.

"You're probably aware that Timberlake Christian School is a religious, Bible-believing institution providing education in a distinctly Christian environment," Doris Thompson said, reading from the letter. "We believe that unless Sunnie as well as her family clearly understand that God has made her female and her dress and behavior need to follow suit with her God-ordained identity, that TCS is not the best place for her future education."

School administrators told ABC 27 they have not accused Sunnie of any wrongdoing and simply want the family to follow all guidelines set for students.

### Gospel for Asia to drill 5,000 'Jesus Wells' by year end

CARROLLTON, Texas — Gospel for Asia (GFA) plans to drill 5,000 water wells across India and South Asia over the course of this next year.

There are millions of Dalits or "untouchables," those deemed inferior simply because of their caste. "Untouchables" are likely barred from using village water wells, placing individuals and families in desperate situations.

"Jesus Wells," a GFA ministry, are often the only water option for "untouchables" and countless others. The wells not only provide critical access to drinking water but also ensure villagers have clean water essential for cooking and other household chores.

"It is our heart to provide clean water to all people regardless of their background," said K.P. Yohannon, founder/international director of GFA.

For more information, visit [www.gfa.org/ministries/jesuswells](http://www.gfa.org/ministries/jesuswells). ❧