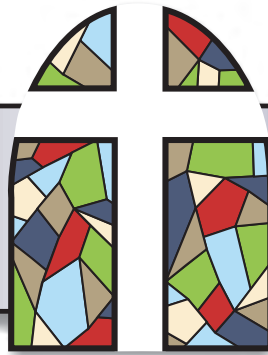


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INSIDE



SBOM offers online theological training for youth pastors through new website

◆ Page 3



Two Mobile Association churches merge to form 3Circle Church's Semmes campus

◆ Page 7



New Jersey lawsuit seeks to ban Pledge of Allegiance, claims religious discrimination

◆ Page 19



SINGING

God's love

Photo by Neisha Fuson

Members of the Alabama Singing Men sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at a Birmingham Barons game at Regions Field on April 23 as part of its Ministry Tour 2014.

Alabama Singing Men use musical talents to share Christ on its 2014 tour

By Neisha Fuson
The Alabama Baptist

For members of the Alabama Singing Men (ASM), the Ministry Tour 2014 was an opportunity to do more than just sing Christian music, Keith Hibbs said.

Hibbs, who has served as ASM advisor for about seven years, said, "The tour itself is an opportunity for us to use our musical gifts to share about God's love to people we talk with and sing for."

And that's exactly what the 40

men on tour were able to do April 22 at The Lovelady Center in Birmingham — share God's love.

Doug Wood, current ASM president and minister of music and education for Bay Springs Baptist Church, Dothan, said the more than 200 women and children at the concert gave one of the "greatest responses" ASM has ever received with "shouting and spontaneity." "They related to what we were singing and they were so enthusiastic. I mean after every song, even the quiet songs, (the response was) boisterous applause," Wood said, an ASM member since 1995.

The Lovelady Center is a program for women and children "designed to restore hope and rebuild lives" by offering access to medical services, counseling, life-skills training, parenting classes, job training, housing and post-secondary education, according to its website. Several Alabama Baptist

churches support the center in various ways.

The 2014 tour (April 21–24) also made stops at Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover; Simmons Middle School in Hoover; The

Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla; Brookdale Place at University Park in Birmingham; Samford University in Birmingham and even a Birmingham Barons game at (See 'Missions,' page 6)



Photo courtesy of Tim Hall

The Alabama Singing Men sing with choral classes April 22 at Simmons Middle School in Hoover as a part of their Ministry Tour 2014.

COMMENT

SBC Executive Committee Proposal Needs More Work

Southern Baptists have long debated the role of theology and doctrine in qualifying a church to participate in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Over the years my own position has evolved. Now I number myself among those who believe some doctrinal guidance is necessary and appropriate. After all Baptists are Baptists and do have a group of doctrinal positions that distinguish us from other Christian groups.

Saint Augustine's famous quote, "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity" is descriptive of where I understand Southern Baptists to be related to what is doctrinally required to participate in SBC life.

The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) Statement of Faith reflects that view when it declares, "The sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience."

Doctrinal guidance

The statement continues, "Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches."

Advocacy for some doctrinal guidance and the respect for soul competency in matters of faith results in tensions from time to time. This may be one of those times.

The SBC Executive Committee is considering an amendment of Article III of the SBC constitution. The article deals with how a church qualifies to participate in SBC life. The proposed amendment reads, in part, that "the Convention will only deem a church to be in friendly cooperation ... which has not intentionally operated in any manner demonstrating opposition to the doctrine expressed in the Convention's most recently adopted statement of faith."

Said another way, if a church openly disagrees with a position outlined in the latest version of the BF&M, that church can be excluded from participating in Southern Baptist life its



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

missions programs, its benevolent programs, its educational programs, etc.

For example, the latest version of the BF&M teaches in Article XVIII, "The Family" that "a wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband" based in part on Ephesians 5:22. If a church chooses to teach mutual submission of husband and wife based on the verse immediately above (v. 21) instead of wifely submission then that church could be excluded from participation in SBC life.

In 2006, Alabama's Mobile Baptist Association withdrew fellowship from Hillcrest Baptist Church because the church called a female associate pastor. The association considered the move a violation of the 2000 BF&M, which states in Article VI, "The Church" that "the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

Proposed amendment

The association reported, "Our exegesis confirmed no distinction biblically in the office of pastor between the contemporary titles of pastor, senior pastor and associate pastor." If this understanding prevailed at an SBC annual meeting then any church with a woman serving as associate pastor, worship pastor, youth pastor or children's pastor could be excluded from SBC life based on the proposed amendment.

Some correctly point out that the Convention has always had the right to determine its own qualification for participation because messengers to the annual meeting have the inherent

right to determine who may participate and who may not.

Still there is a difference when the SBC moves from determining participation primarily from a size of church membership or church contributions basis to requiring compliance with every position of the BF&M before ever considering membership or financial contributions.

If the amendment is adopted as presently worded the result will be a convention of churches willing to walk together in lock-step at every point expressed not only in the current version of the BF&M but in all future versions. The SBC may not be able to force a church to adopt various theological positions but the threat of exclusion from its historic faith family is an immense informal power that can be used.

Doctrinal agreement

It is difficult to reconcile the demand for formal doctrinal agreement codified in the SBC constitution as proposed in this amendment with the words of the BF&M itself that "confessions are only guides in interpretation having no authority" and "denying the right of any ... religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches."

If not a violation according to strict legal interpretation, the amendment violates the spirit of the BF&M as well as Article IV of the SBC constitution which says, "the Convention does not claim and will never attempt to exercise any authority over any other Baptist body, whether church, auxiliary organization, associations, or convention."

It is hard to see how the nature of the SBC will not be drastically changed, and I believe for the worse, if this amendment is adopted as presently written. Making agreement with every point of the BF&M a litmus test for participation in SBC life is not a wise step. Certainly it does not demonstrate "in essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty and in all things charity."

Was it the intention of Executive Committee members to move the SBC toward a time when certain powers could control what cooperating churches believe and practice? I do not think so. The Executive Committee was concerned with updating the qualification process from 1845 standards to the present. Discussion focused primarily on contribution levels moving from one messenger for every \$250 (the 1845 requirement) to one messenger for every \$6,000 contribution (the present day equivalent). For that, the Executive Committee deserves support.

However, I urge the Executive Committee to revisit the section of Article III producing the unfortunate and unintended consequences outlined above before bringing their recommendation to the convention floor.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

AD FOR MOVIE

First, please forgive me if I misread, however, in the April 10 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* I thought I saw an advertisement for the movie "Heaven is for Real." Did I? If so, I am so disappointed in this paper using a movie like this for advertising in its publication. We cannot call ourselves

"people of the Book" when you allow this type of false advertising. Again, if I misunderstood this, please forgive me and disregard this message.

Deborah D. Young
Rainbow City, Ala.

BUDGET GIVING

Early in life, I was taught to tithe to

God's house as giving to the Lord. Today, while I know that we need budgets in the Lord's work, I feel strongly that giving, as part of our worship should not be referred to as budget giving.

(See 'Letters,' page 21)





"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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ONE MISSION STUDENTS

classroom2classroom

SBOM offers online theological training for youth pastors through new website

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Many churches in the state of Alabama count on volunteer, part-time or bivocational leaders to assume the role of youth minister to their congregations. The people who fill these roles are critical ministers at their churches, but youth ministry changes quickly, and it's historically been difficult to get these leaders the training — and the connection with one another — that would help them be more equipped to serve as youth ministers.

That's where One Mission Students Classroom 2 Classroom comes in.

Classroom 2 Classroom is an online training tool that will be available to any youth leader in the state. Better still, the courses are available to youth ministers for free, with program costs covered by the Cooperative Program.

Keith Loomis, an associate in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) office of collegiate and student ministries, first had the idea for this online training as a way of equipping and uniting people involved in youth ministry in Alabama. Loomis saw the site as a way to bring cohesive seminary lessons to people ministering all across the state.

"In essence, it's youth ministry training from the seminary classroom to the classroom of life, local church and school campus," Loomis said. "There are four general areas of growth to consider for youth ministry: personal, professional, spiritual and relational."

The site (<http://omsc2c.org>) will be live starting May 1 at 10 a.m.

Two professors, Allen Jackson, of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Richard Ross, of



123rf.com

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions launches Classroom 2 Classroom (<http://omsc2c.org>), a free online training tool available to any youth leader in the state.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, will teach in the training program this year. Each will be teaching two lessons per month for a total of 48 lessons by the end of 2014.

Magazine format

Brian Harris, an associate in the SBOM's communications and technology services, had a significant role in getting the program developed as he serves as the SBOM Web and social media strategist.

"[Classroom 2 Classroom] is laid out in a magazine format, where the newest content is at the top," Harris said. "You can search the lessons via search areas located at both the top of the page and the bottom of the site. In addition, tags for specific content matter are listed at the bottom to aid in your search for specific information."

This format seemed to work well both from a convenience and availability standpoint but also was a good way to embrace technology, knowing that it might help combat some of the separation youth ministers around the state can feel

at times.

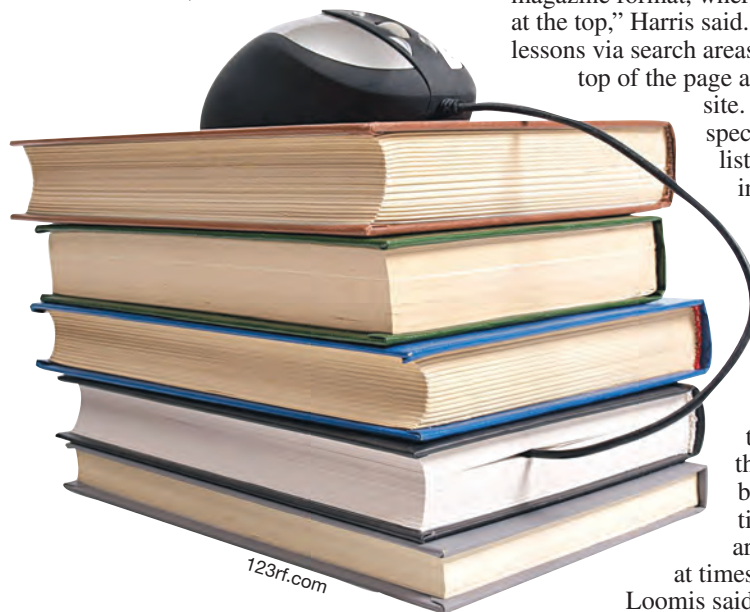
Loomis said, "In the ever-

changing world of youth ministry, we want to utilize technology to get information, training and resources to local church youth ministers in a timely and cost effective way. "Sometimes youth ministry leaders can feel isolated, and this resource allows them to connect with leaders in the field of youth ministry and to be a part of the larger youth ministry family of Alabama Baptists."

For more information on the program, visit <http://omsc2c.org> or email Loomis at kloomis@alsbom.org.

**"It's youth ministry
training from the seminary
classroom to the classroom
of life, local church and
school campus."**

**Keith Loomis
associate, office of collegiate
and student ministries,
State Board of Missions**



123rf.com

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.

ETOWAH

► **Abel Garcia** is the new pastor of **White Springs Church, Rainbow City**. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Freeport, Texas, for nearly 10 years. He also has served in other areas of ministry, including church administration, student ministry, children's ministry, senior adult ministry, family ministries and education, in churches in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. He and his wife, Lynn, have four children.



GARCIA

BIRMINGHAM

► **Pioneer Church, Birmingham**, will celebrate homecoming May 4. Sunday School will be at 9:15 a.m. and the worship service will be at 10:30 a.m. A covered dish lunch and singing will follow. Darryl Castleberry is pastor. ► **Vestavia Hills Church** will hold the Betty Sue Shepherd Memorial Concert on May 4, 7 p.m. presenting Randall Thompson's "Testament of Freedom"

with a special Preview Performance of Terre Johnson's "Missa Femina." Singers include The Sanctuary Choir of Vestavia Hills Church, The Vestavia Hills High School Choirs, The Judson Singers and The Magic City Choral Society, with special guests Sadie Frazier, soprano, and The Southeastern Chamber Orchestra. An offering will be taken during the concert to benefit the Betty Sue Shepherd Scholarship Fund assisting music students in area colleges. For information visit www.vhbc.com. Gary Furr is pastor.

COFFEE

► **Victoria Church, Jack**, will celebrate homecoming May 4. Sunday School will begin at 9:45 a.m. and morning worship will begin at 11 a.m. Buddy Hood will speak. There will be special music by The Victoria Choir led by Reatha Mandello and other members of Victoria also will present special music. A covered dish lunch will follow the morning worship service. Donnie Marler is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Josh Sammons** is the new pastor of **Hillabee Church, Alexander City**. He previously served New Concord Church, Alexander

City, as pastor. He holds a bachelor of science in building science from Auburn University and a bachelor of theology from Lake Martin Bible Institute. He is presently pursuing a master of divinity from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Erica, have three children.



SAMMONS

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood!) nondenominational luncheon May 13, 11 a.m. The program will feature Mark McDuffie and Lane Geizeleman speaking on the Wounded Warriors Hunting and Fishing Project. For reservations call 334-684-9617 by May 6. Mike Shirah is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Lookout Mountain Association** will hold its annual Evangelism Rally on May 4, 5:30 p.m. at Mount Bethel Church, Lyerly, Ga. Mike Rainey will speak and music will be provided by the association choir. Andy Kellett is pastor.

SAND MOUNTAIN

► **New Home Church, Pisgah**, will celebrate homecoming/decoration day May 4, 10:45 a.m. The Greesons from Chickamauga, Ga., will be in concert. David Smith is pastor.

SELMA

► **Jonathan S. Jenkins** is the new pastor of **Sister Springs Church, Tyler**. He previously served Mount Carmel Church, Buena Vista, Ga. He holds a bachelor's degree in Christian ministry from Leavell College of New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Paige, have one son.

SHELBY

► **Fourmile Church, Wilsonville**, will celebrate its 190th homecoming/memorial service May 3, 10 a.m. The church's former pastor Gary Jones, who now serves as pastor of Pates Chapel Church, Jemison, will speak. A covered dish meal will follow. Roger Chambers is pastor. ► **Mount Zion Church, Westover**, will celebrate homecoming May 4 with To The End from Sylacauga. Lunch will be at noon. Everyone is welcome. Delford Isbell is pastor.

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Palmer retires after 57 years in music, youth ministry

Don Palmer, minister of music and worship at Bay Springs Baptist Church, Shelby, retired April 20 after serving there 10 years. Palmer, 78, has been in the music and youth ministry for 57 years.

A.J. Smith, pastor of Bay Springs Baptist in Shelby Baptist Association, said Palmer is "gifted and skilled in planning services" and brought many years of experience to the ministry of Bay Springs. "Don was a delight to work with."



PALMER

Palmer served in the Army from 1960 to 1962 and received his education from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He served full time at the former Roebuck Park Baptist Church, Birmingham (now NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville) and Green Valley Baptist Church, Hoover, both in Birmingham Baptist Association; at First Baptist Church, Anniston, in Calhoun Baptist Association; and Byne Memorial Baptist Church, Albany, Ga.

In a bivocational capacity, he served at Bethel Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove; Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham; Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek; Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster; and at Bay Springs.

While at Bay Springs, he organized two evangelistic antique car shows, done in conjunction with neighboring Bethlehem Baptist Church, Shelby. The events identified 400 prospects for the two churches, Palmer said.

Also at Bay Springs, Palmer formed a ladies' ensemble and a senior adult ministry. The ensemble performed at many area churches and was active between 2006 and 2010, Palmer said.

A widower for six years after 45 years of marriage to wife Jeanelle, Palmer has three children and five grandchildren.

To contact him for interim or supply work, call 205-664-5570 or 205-999-9866 or email dmimipawpaw@aol.com. (Leigh Pritchett)

Jones retires after 28 years at Dawson Memorial

Jan Jones was teaching fourth-grade Sunday School at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, and loved it.

When the children's minister at the church had to move, Jones was asked to be the interim children's minister.

Twenty-eight years later — on April 13, 2014 — Jones retired from Dawson Memorial Baptist.

For the first eight years on staff at the church, she was minister to children. Then, for 20 years, she was minister of education.

Being able to serve God and serve through the church "always brought me joy. (It was) a joyful way to live," Jones said.

Her church celebrated her years of service with a reception April 13. "Jan had a great amount of energy, passion and creativity that contributed to our ministry," Pastor Gary Fenton said. He noted Jones' commitment to Sunday School and Bible study and added Dawson Memorial is a better church as a result of her ministry.

Jones' ministry was marked by such activities as holding Vacation Bible School off-site to encourage community participation and establishing an additional Sunday School time.

Although she has retired from her staff position, she already has identified areas where she will minister. This summer, she will teach in preschool Sunday School and, in the fall, third-grade Sunday School. She also plans to assist with the church's homebound ministry.

In addition, she wants to become involved in Kairos Outside, a ministry to women who have an incarcerated family member.

As for other service opportunities, Jones said, "I'm going to pray a lot and see where God leads me."

Jones and her husband, Dale, have two daughters and four grandchildren. (Leigh Pritchett)



JONES

REFLECTIONS

During Calvary Church's Read-the-Bible-Through, Pastor Riddle stayed nearby to help with all the difficult names.





Photo by Gary Hardin

Jake Gibbs, who serves on the crossing guard ministry team at Pine Grove Baptist Church, Centre, in Cherokee Baptist Association, assists Margie Chandler in crossing a busy street.



Photo courtesy of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church

A ministry team volunteer greets members and visitors at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham.

First impressions

Volunteer ministry teams help Alabama Baptist churches reach out to members, guests

By Gary Hardin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

David Birdsong stands in the parking lot of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, each Sunday and gives a high-energy greeting to members and guests.

"It's all about putting your best foot forward," Birdsong said. "You never get a chance to make a second impression on your guests."

He understands the Sunday morning experience begins in the parking lot, not inside the building. As part of Liberty Baptist's parking lot ministry team, Birdsong and other members of the team assist people in finding a parking space as well as walk first-time guests into the building and direct them to the church's welcome center.

"And if it's raining we hold an umbrella over their heads," he said.

Birdsong's team also works closely with the church's shuttle ministry team.

Wade Pugh, an Alabama Power Company engineer, drives a golf cart on Sunday mornings to shuttle people from their cars to the church's front door and back to their cars.

Parking ministry

"We encourage our members to park their cars on our back parking lot and reserve the more convenient spaces for first-time guests, the handicapped and the elderly," he said. "We run four golf carts on Sundays to shuttle those who park in the back lot."

These are only two of the ministry teams working tirelessly each Sunday at Liberty Baptist, but they are similar to the thousands of other volunteer ministry teams in Baptist churches across the state helping church members and guests have a first-rate Sunday experience.

Pine Grove Baptist Church, Centre, in Cherokee Baptist Association has parking

lots across from two busy county roads. So the church organized a crossing guard ministry team. Crossing guards, wearing orange vests and holding "stop" signs, help members cross these roads and get into the building.

Jerry Benefield, a Pine Grove Baptist crossing guard, said, "Our ministry is to keep people safe. It's a ministry that has to be done."

GuideStone Financial Resources encourages churches to have in place safety and security procedures that protect members and guests, an important dimension of giving people a quality Sunday morning experience.

Diane Johnson and her security ministry team at Liberty Baptist have taken GuideStone's advice to heart. "We have policies and procedures in place for dangerous weather, fire, missing child, intruder, lockdown and medical emergency," Johnson explained. "Even small churches need to have procedures in place for these things."

The ministry of greeting is often the first impression people get from a church. For this reason Jackie Davis gives volunteer leadership to an extensive greeter ministry at Central Baptist Church, Phenix City, in Russell Baptist Association.

"Our greeters serve four-week rotations. We make sure two greeters stand at each entrance door. We give first-timers a guest packet containing a pen, a devotional book and information about our church," Davis explained. "You can't believe how the greeter

ministry has changed the atmosphere in our church. Greeting people with a warm smile and big hello sets the tone for Sunday mornings."

First-time guests can feel anxious about their visit. They wonder whether the church offers child care, if they will be welcomed, where to sit and more.

Ken McKissack and Butch Drew, ushers at Bay Springs Baptist Church, Dothan, in Columbia Baptist Association understand the anxiety of a first-time attendee.

"They are hesitant about coming into a church building filled with strangers," McKissack said. "But when they see a smiling and friendly face it really helps calm their anxiety."

Drew, a retired military pilot trainer, added, "I believe it's important that people feel welcomed when they come to church. I'm a firm believer that the first impressions of your church show what's inside."

Jerry Roberson, pastor of Chatom Baptist Church, gives high praise to the greeters in his Washington Baptist Association church. "Our greeters are enthusiastic, positive, welcoming and help create a warm and loving environment in our church," he said.

At Chatom Baptist, Regina Thornton brings the power of prayer to Chatom's Sunday morning services. Thornton heads up the pastor's prayer ministry team. Thirty individuals who serve in rotation spend time on Sunday mornings in the church's prayer



Photo by Kenny Hoopes

Cary Fuller serves as the general Sunday School secretary at FBC Montgomery.

room (nicknamed by church members as "the pretty room"). Team members pray for the morning service, the pastor and for any prayer requests mentioned on their updated list.

Thornton knows these times of prayer are important. "We have seen this ministry set a positive tone for Sundays," she said.

The women's prayer team at Liberty Baptist, led by Maggie Boggan, gathers to learn about prayer and to pray for the church's ministry and for people's needs. The team maintains an up-to-date prayer list and sends and receives email prayer requests.

Presence in the community

Liberty's associate pastor Alan Kuykendall said, "The prayer ministry team has blessed our church greatly by giving our church a presence in the community, which has allowed us to minister to people not connected with Liberty."

Staff members of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, also commend the blessings of volunteer ministry teams.

Associate pastor Bill Johnston said, "Teams mobilize people into active ministry. Teams help people find places where they can serve."

Tom Thompson, minister of stewardship, added, "We would not be able to meet the needs of people without the effective ministry of volunteer teams."

Speaking of the Sunday morning experience, Jamie Baldwin, associate in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' office of Sunday School and discipleship, reminds churches of the importance of first impressions. "First-time guests decide whether to return to your church during the initial minutes of their visit," he said.

For information about developing Sunday morning ministry teams, contact Baldwin at jbbaldwin@alsbom.org or call 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240. ☞



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Thomas Smith, Alabama Singing Men's director for 14 years, leads the group of 40 men in singing during the Ministry Tour 2014. Smith also is retired chair of the department of music at Auburn University.

'Missions-minded'

ASM sees 'paradigm shift' in tour schedule

(continued from page 1)

Regions Field, where the group sang "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Every three years the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) sponsored singing group alternates between two in-state tours and one out-of-state, or even international, tour. In the past the group has traveled to Michigan, Wyoming, Indiana, Korea and Spain, among other locations.

Since 2013 there has been a "paradigm shift" in the tour schedule, Wood said.

"In the past we've traditionally sang more in churches, especially while in-state, but when we went to Michigan in 2013 in the greater Detroit area we scheduled our days fairly full ... of non-church venues. We really liked that we were more missions-minded," he said.

Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the SBOM, has been an ASM member for 33 years and said he most appreciates being a part of leading the "worship opportunities" on tour at churches and at places like The Lovely Center.

"[Music is] the vehicle that we use in order to do ministry," he said.

But ASM also serves as a ministry of sorts to the very men who make up its membership.

Frank Jones, who celebrates his 30th year as ASM accompanist this year, said ASM is a "great

support group and a great group of friends."

"We share each other's joys and we have walked through the valleys together," Jones said.

The group also seeks to impact younger generations interested in music.

Johnny Arnett, associate pastor of music and senior adults for Linden Baptist Church, said he enjoyed visiting Simmons Middle School and singing for the choral students.

He explained how he got his start in music during elementary school and how those experiences, concerts and mentors throughout middle school and high school inspired him to pursue music ministry as an adult.

Originally organized in 1976 to include full-time ministers of music, ASM has expanded its membership to include bivocational music ministers, laymen, pastors, church staff and music faculty from Alabama Baptist colleges and universities. ASM has about 80 members this year, Hibbs said, with members ranging in age from 25 to 83.

For more information on ASM, visit www.alsbom.org and click on the "ministries" tab at the top, then the "music" tab and scroll

down to find "Alabama Singing Men and Women." Alabama Singing Women (ASW) is made up of women across the state who are active in their church's music ministries.

More information about ASW can be found on the same website. ☪



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Doug Wood, minister of music and education for Bay Springs Baptist Church, Dothan, serves as the 2013-14 Alabama Singing Men's president and has been a member since 1995.

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Suit filed against Georgia's ban on gay 'marriage'

ATLANTA — Seven people filed a federal class-action lawsuit April 22 challenging Georgia's ban on same-sex "marriage."

The suit, by three gay couples and a woman who was unable to get recognized on the state death certificate when her same-sex spouse died, makes Georgia the last Southern state to face a challenge to its ban on gay "marriage."

There are 65 pending lawsuits in federal courts of appeal, federal district courts and state courts challenging marriage laws in 30 states and Puerto Rico, according to Lambda Legal, the national legal group seeking full recognition of the legal rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June 2013 that struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, federal judges in Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Virginia have ruled that state laws banning same-sex "marriages" were unconstitutional; those decisions are being appealed.

Georgia, where 76 percent of voters ratified a constitutional amendment to prohibit same-sex "marriages" in 2004, was late to the table because "there's been an attempt to make strategic decisions about the places where we'd have the best chance of success," Lambda Legal's senior attorney Tara Borelli said. "But it became clear as time went on that Georgia should be on that list."

A poll in September 2013 by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* found that 48 percent of Georgians favor gay "marriage" and 43 percent oppose it.

US voters favor prayer at public meetings, survey finds

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court will soon rule on the constitutionality of prayer at public meetings. But a new survey finds U.S. voters clearly favor prayer — as long as the public prayer is generic and not specifically Christian.

Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind survey asked about attitudes on high profile cases before the court, including *Greece v. Galloway*. That case addresses whether elected officials can open public meetings with religiously specific prayers, such as praying in Jesus' name.

Most registered voters (73 percent) said "prayer at public meetings is fine as long as the public officials are not favoring some beliefs over others." And 23 percent said "public meetings shouldn't have any prayers at all because prayers by definition suggest one belief or another."

Among those who attend religious services (aside from funerals or weddings) at least once or twice a month, 86 percent would allow prayer, 11 percent would not.

For those who attend services a few times a year, 73 percent support it but opposition doubles to 26 percent.

But even those who seldom or never go to church backed the prayers at public meetings, with 58 percent approving and 36 percent opposing.

Army approves 'humanist' as religious preference

WASHINGTON — More than two years after first making his request, Army Maj. Ray Bradley can now be known as a humanist in the U.S. military.

Lt. Col. Sunset R. Belinsky, an Army spokeswoman, said April 22 that the "preference code for humanist" became effective April 12 for all members of the Army.

In practical terms, the change means that humanists could face fewer hurdles in trying to organize within the ranks; military brass would have better information to aid in planning a deceased soldier's funeral; and it could lay the groundwork for eventually adding humanist chaplains.

According to a survey by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, humanists make up 3.6 percent of the U.S. military.

Bradley, 47, who is stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, was originally listed under the broad category of "no religious preference."

Chaplain (Col.) Kenneth Stice, director of operations for the Army's Office of the Chief of Chaplains, said the religious preference information — though voluntary — helps the military know how best to respect the religious wishes of an injured or deceased soldier.

The Cornerstone Baptist Church, Semmes, recently merged with 3Circle Church, Fairhope. Cornerstone's former church campus (pictured right) now serves as 3Circle's Semmes campus.

Church revitalization



Photo by Carol McPhail — AL.com/Press-Register

Two Mobile Association churches merge to form 3Circle Church's Semmes campus

By Julie Payne
The Alabama Baptist

Easter looked slightly different this year for the church formerly known as The Cornerstone Baptist Church, Semmes.

Not only did the church gain a new name — 3Circle Church, Semmes campus — with its recent merger with 3Circle Church, Fairhope, it also has new physical elements.

Inside the church building, new chairs were installed and old pews were removed. Interior spaces were repainted and the rooms carpeted. New sound, lighting and video systems were installed, and a renovated lobby beckoned guests with coffee and informational areas. Families with preschoolers and children also discovered new areas specifically for them.

And all of this work was completed in just three weeks' time thanks to a team of both contractors and dedicated volunteers from Cornerstone and 3Circle Church.

This revitalization of Cornerstone started when the church, which had been serving in the community for about 50 years, began looking ahead. Over time, its membership had dwindled to less than 20 people, so existing members and the interim pastor began exploring options for the future.

Chris Bell, lead pastor of 3Circle, said through several key relationships the Cornerstone group connected with his church, which culminated with Cornerstone merging with 3Circle to become 3Circle's Semmes campus.

The merger took place on a Sunday eve-

ning three weeks prior to Easter, and the launch of the new 3Circle Semmes campus occurred Easter morning.

"It was a massive amount of work to remodel a campus in three weeks' time for a launch, but we have amazing people involved in the mission of 3Circle and by God's grace we were able to get it done," Bell noted. "In a church that had 19 attenders on its last Sunday in existence and virtually no kids, three weeks later it had 200 people with over 40 kids."

'The next chapter'

The newly opened Semmes campus, which has its own campus pastor and worship director, joins 3Circle as its second satellite location — the other is located in Thomasville.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Baptist Association, said, "Cornerstone members unselfishly gave the facility, so they can enjoy the next chapter in the life of that congregation."

"Cornerstone's legacy will grow and expand because they looked beyond their comfort and some of their preferences to meet spiritual and physical needs of the community," he said.

Mobile Association staff helped the two churches connect and is working with other congregations in similar situations.

"It takes time for a congregation to realize they need to let go," Wright said. "The issue is to build bridges into changing communities so the uncompromised gospel of Jesus can be shared, understood and accepted."

The 3Circle Church revitalization process models that effort, he noted.

Bell said, "I am so very excited about this campus." He added that about 10 former members of Cornerstone are involved there. "We are all about Jesus and the gospel, and we are passionate about the local, regional and global circle of this mission. We are fiercely committed to the Mobile Gulf Coast region, and the Semmes campus ... is part of that plan."

Bell said to get the word out about the Semmes campus, an "invite culture" is being created there. "There is no more powerful marketing than people who are excited about their church and understand that it is their responsibility to use their influence to partner in reaching the community," he said.

He noted the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) was "very involved and extremely helpful" in the recent revitalization process. "It was definitely a partnership between 3Circle and the SBOM," he said.

Dale Huff, director of the SBOM's office of LeaderCare and church administration, said there are "many means of church revitalization, with what was done at Cornerstone being one. Thankfully it seems to be an effective approach for them."

He noted that the vast majority of Alabama Baptist churches seeking revitalization are more open and responsive to efforts to improve their Sunday School ministry, develop new outreach efforts and to train ministerial and lay leadership.

One similar effort to Cornerstone that the SBOM also was involved in was with Highland Baptist Church and Broadway Baptist Church, both located in Florence. "Broadway became a satellite of Highland about a year ago," Huff said. "It is a success story that keeps growing."

SBOM leaders believe revitalization is vital for effective ministry in Alabama. The Alabama Church Revitalization strategy was formed by the SBOM and launched May 21, 2013, during the Send North America Church Growth and Revitalization Conference held at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery.

If a pastor desires to enter this church revitalization process, he will be assigned a church revitalization coach who will

meet with him to identify key areas of the church's ministry that should be improved, Huff said.

"The church revitalization coach leads the pastor to discover available resources within the State Board, the association or the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) that can provide expertise in strengthening that church's particular point of need," Huff said.

The pastor and church revitalization coach then sign a covenant. The covenant includes a quarterly visit from the coach and a monthly phone conversation. This commitment is for a one-year period. So far, 24 church revitalization coaches have been trained and are serving 42 pastors/churches.

One major change within the strategy since it was launched is to recruit and train 26 additional church revitalization coaches, which would result in a coaching corps of 50 people, Huff said. While currently the trained coaches are state missionaries, the effort to recruit additional coaches will look beyond SBOM staff.

Customized strategy

Huff noted that essentially every office at the SBOM is an ongoing resource for church revitalization. "There is a diversity of churches with a diversity of needs, for which there is a multiplicity of church revitalization resources. It is not a one-size-fits-all. That is the reason a church revitalization coach assists the pastor in assessing his church's needs and formulating a strategy to fit and meet those needs. Each church's strategy is customized to that church," he explained.

Church revitalization is nothing new for the SBOM, Huff added. "It has always been our commitment to assist churches in becoming and being vital, effective (and) victorious. What we are experiencing now is a renewed SBC emphasis balancing the efforts of church planting with church revitalization. At the State Board of Missions we are committed to ministers with our churches to see each and all be healthy."

A pastor considering church revitalization for his church can contact Huff for more information at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263 or email dhuff@alsbom.org. ☞

Volunteers prepare the 3Circle Church Semmes campus for Easter 2014 services. Sound, lighting and video systems are among many new items installed in the church, which was formerly The Cornerstone Baptist Church, Semmes.



Photo by Carol McPhail — AL.com/Press-Register



Pastor Daniel McGhee (center) of Connection Church in the Queens borough of New York City serves as emcee at the church's 2014 Easter Egg hunt.

Photo courtesy of Daniel McGhee

Teaching English, sharing Christ

FBC Foley helps support NYC church plant

By Bruce Sims
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Feride visited Connection Church in the Queens borough of New York City for several weeks before she voiced her questions.

A Muslim from Bulgaria, Feride soon became comfortable enough to ask the church's pastor, Daniel McGhee, to meet her for coffee to discuss Christianity. And the answers to her questions eventually led her to become a Christian.

"When she finally accepted Christ as her Savior, I baptized her," McGhee said. "She said that when she came up out of the water it was like a physical feeling of freedom.

"Her family has seen a huge difference in her as she speaks to them," McGhee said, noting she is continually sharing the gospel with them. "For me, her pastor, it was a humbling experience to see someone who has become a dynamo for Christ."

And Feride is not the only "dynamo" associated with Connection Church. There are about 75 active members in the church McGhee planted about nine years ago — a church that First Baptist Church, Foley, helps support.

Speaking to the congregation of First, Foley, on April 6, McGhee, who hails from Star City, Ark., shared about his journey to Queens.

He was pastor of Grace Baptist Church in upstate New York and not interested in moving to New York City.

"I ... had a resistance about coming to New York City, which was based on a preconceived idea about what the place was all about," he said.

But God helped him past those ideas when the opportunity to plant a church surfaced, he said, noting not only did he change locations but also professions.

He became a Yellow Cab driver in lower Manhattan and worked in a bivocational role while the church was in its early stages.

Finding himself in an area of about a quarter of a million residents speaking roughly 600 languages, McGhee said one of the church's main ministries soon became English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

"Everyone wants to learn English in order to be able to communicate with their neighbors," he said. "We have also gone out on the street and offered free cups of coffee. Of course nothing is free in New York so people look at us with suspicion until they have the cup in their hand and find out that we really aren't going to charge them anything."

Church members also reach out to people of a variety of faiths such as Muslims, Buddhists and agnostics.

Connection Church is affiliated with the New York Metro Association, the Baptist Convention of New York

and the Southern Baptist Convention. It currently meets for services Sunday evenings and teaches ESL classes on weeknights in a Lutheran church building.

Along with First, Foley, churches in Texas, Arkansas and Georgia help support the ministry at Connection Church.

For more information about Connection Church, visit www.connectionnyc.com. To schedule a missions team to work with Connection Church, call Daniel McGhee at 347-407-2105. ☞



Photo courtesy of Daniel McGhee

Daniel McGhee and his wife, Kari, have four children (l to r): Kaiden, 6; Ella, 11; Lilly, 6; and Emma Kate, 12.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Aguillard named president emeritus despite controversy

PINEVILLE, La. — Rather than losing his job or getting a contract extension, an embattled Baptist college president in Louisiana will return to the classroom with an honorary title and trustees will search for a new president to replace him.

Louisiana College trustees voted April 15 to designate President Joe Aguillard as president emeritus, a title typically used in academia to recognize distinguished service, effective Aug. 1.

The choice was controversial because of the college's past under Aguillard's leadership beginning with a textbook policy trustees adopted after a student complained about "A Road Less Traveled" by Scott Peck and "A Lesson Before Dying" by Ernest Gaines being used in a values class.

In 2013, controversy intensified when Aguillard declined to renew contracts of three faculty members who were supposedly promoting Calvinism.

Just recently, previously unreleased internal documents surfaced alleging the misappropriation of funds, lying to donors and trustees and ignoring sexual misconduct by a staff member paid hush money after threatening to go public with inside information.

The Town Talk newspaper in Alexandria, La., reported that Aguillard will begin a one-year paid sabbatical June 1 at his full \$202,007 base salary. When he returns to the classroom as a tenured professor, he will receive 50 percent of his current base salary — \$101,003.50 — for his first year as a senior professor and 30 percent of his current base salary for all subsequent years he works at the college.

Judge dismisses lawsuit, says use of Caner video fair

MOUNT VERNON, Ga. — A federal judge has dismissed a Georgia Baptist college president's lawsuit against a blogger who posted video to support allegations that a famous "Jihad to Jesus" testimony is bogus.

A U.S. district judge in Fort Worth, Texas, ruled April 17 that Jason Smathers, a Southern Baptist pastor in Arizona who blogs at Witnesses Unto Me, was entitled to post government videos he obtained through the Freedom of Information Act under the "fair use" doctrine of copyright law.

Ergun Caner, president of Brewton-Parker College in Mount Vernon, Ga., which is affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention, filed a lawsuit in the summer of 2013 claiming ownership of videos that Smathers posted of Caner speaking as an expert on Islamic culture in training for U.S. Marines preparing to deploy in 2005.

However, U.S. District Judge Terry Means said Caner failed to make a case and that Smathers used the material fairly, as copyright law permits, for "purposes such as criticism, comment [or] news reporting."

Smathers has reposted video he obtained in 2010 of Caner telling Marines that he came to the United States at age 14 from Turkey and learned everything he knew about America from watching Andy Griffith, Chicago Cubs baseball and championship wrestling on TV.

Smathers also posted legal documents indicating that Caner was in fact born in Sweden, came to America when he was about 3 and grew up as a normal teenager in a suburb near Columbus, Ohio. ☞

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org;
fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201, ext. 112. Church
announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.



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

Upcoming Inspiration and Enrichment Events

As the summer months approach, let me commend to you conferences, camps and other events sponsored by your State Board of Missions and by our ministry partner, the Alabama Woman's Missionary Union.

For a full calendar and listing, please visit our website at www.alsbom.org, and click on "Upcoming Events." For WMU happenings, go online to www.alabamawmu.org, and click on "Events."

We are grateful for churches

APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Faith Focused Security Spring Ring Leaderconnect Forum ESL Workshop Church Planting Basics Cooperative Program Sunday Spring Senior Adult Retreat Regional Bible Drill Racial Reconciliation Conf. One Voice Tour Library Workshop Camps on Mission Rally	ESL Workshop Faith Focused Security Camps on Mission Rally Accelerate: Training Event CWE Leadership Training State Bible Drill Tournament State Speakers Tournament Senior Adult Evang. Conf. GET Acquainted Day Church Insurance Conf. Church Planting Basics Tutoring Workshop Churches Planting Churches Church Renewal Journey Baptist Boy's Camp Student Life Camp	Student Life Camp Faith Focused Security WMU Annual Meeting SBC Pastors Conf. SBC Convention Baptist Men's Day Missions Camp Small Church Tax Conf. Church Planting Basics Church Admin. Guidelines Boys Camp Ch. & Relig. Liberty Day	Rock Solid Tour Missions Camp Boys Camp Children's Choir Summit Faith Focused Security Camp Shocco for Deaf Mix Music Camp at Shocco Super Summer Alabama Leader Lab Equip Church Planting Basics Churches Planting Churches Youth Evangelism Conference Returning to Disciple-Making

around the state that provide hosting for various events and also for Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, which provides Christian hospitality and a variety of lodging and meal options at reasonable rates.

Since 1990, Alabama WMU

has developed so well the 618-acre WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs as a place for several missions camps and similar events.

Many of the events on these websites are provided at low cost or no cost because of Alabama Baptist gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Pray for those state missionaries and Alabama WMU staff who will be traveling in the upcoming months to provide Alabama Baptists with these spiritual enrichment opportunities.

Pray for those who will attend that they will become

more committed to seeking and doing God's will for their individual lives.

As always, thank you for supporting missions through the Cooperative Program that supports missions and

By Rick Lance
State Missionary
Executive Director



ministries in Alabama, across the U.S. and around the world.

Isaiah 41:10



At the Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd. in Montgomery, Tuesday, May 6, 10 am - 3:30 pm • Check-in and refreshments at 9:30

- 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.

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



BY SCOTT GUFFIN
Pastor, Liberty Park Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills

I believe in the Cooperative Program because I believe in the Great Commission. While no human program is perfect, the

Cooperative Program has for many decades proven itself to be a powerfully strong tool for combining the resources of tens of thousands of Southern Baptist



Christ. In my mind, the

churches, allowing us to accomplish together far more than we could ever accomplish separately in regard to reaching the world for

Cooperative Program is a great picture of the Body of Christ extended beyond the local church level. Whether a congregation has a few people or thousands, each church is able through its God-led generosity to be a part

of some amazing Kingdom work on a grand scale. I encourage every Alabama Baptist pastor and church to support the Cooperative Program through your giving.

ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries

the Strength of a CHAMPION MEN'S Conference

Friday and Saturday, August 1-2
Clements Baptist Church, Athens



Featuring: Hank Parker, Bass Masters Pro; SBC President Fred Luter; Bob Reccord, Total Life Impact Ministries; Living a Life that Matters; Neal Jeffrey.

Cost: \$25 per person (two meals)

Schedule: Dinner at 5 p.m. Friday, conference at 6:45 p.m., Saturday breakfast at 7:30 a.m. and conference at 9 a.m.

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

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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.

Senior Adult Evangelism Conference



LAST
CALL

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

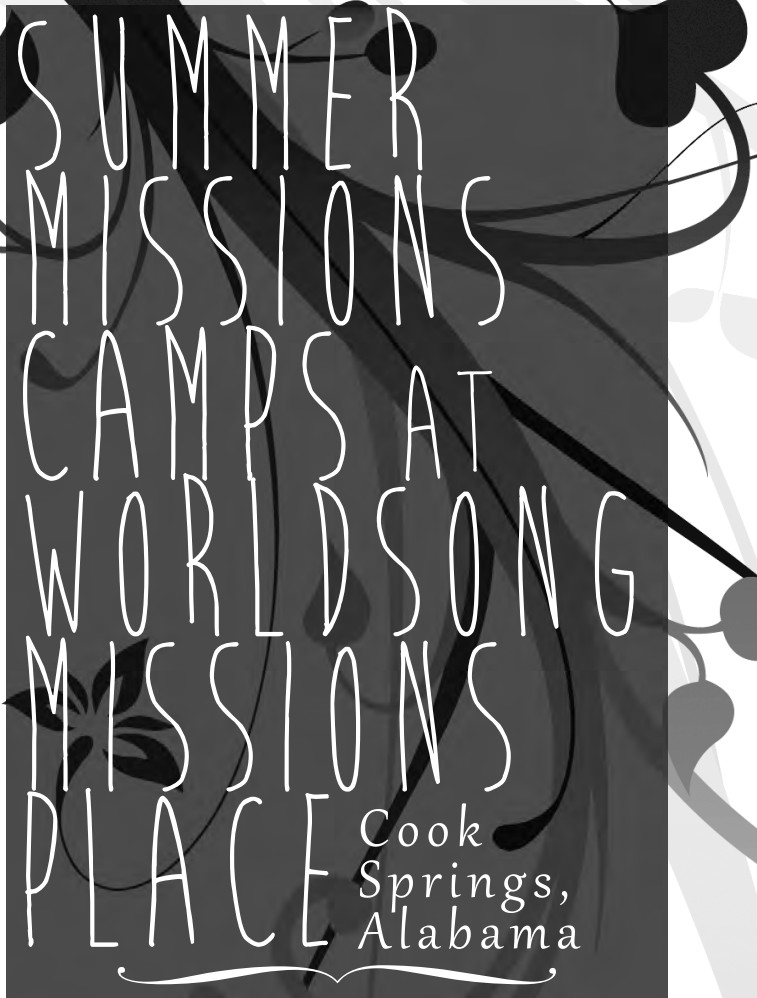
No registration necessary (lunch on
your own)

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



Alabama Baptist Convention
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SUMMER
MISSIONS
CAMPS AT
WORLDSONG
MISSIONS
PLACE

Cook
Springs,
Alabama

for girls in grades K-12 and boys in grades 2-6

High-adventure camping with a missions emphasis,
featuring:

- ☑ Bible study and worship experiences
- ☑ Time with missionaries
- ☑ Crafts and cultural activities
- ☑ Ropes course for older campers
- ☑ Canoeing/kayaking
- ☑ Zip lines for those completing 4th grade and above
- ☑ Swimming
- ☑ Hiking

Missions Camp for Girls (for girls completing grades 3-6)
June 23-27 ☑ July 14-18 ☑ July 21-25

Missions Camp for Teen Girls (for girls completing
grades 7-12)
June 23-27 ☑ July 14-18

Missions Mini Camp for Girls (for girls completing
grades 2-6)
June 16-18

Missions Camp for Children (for coeds completing
grades 2-6)
July 7-11

Missions Camp for Mom & Daughter (for girls
completing grades K-3)
July 11-12 ☑ July 25-26

Missions Camp for Mom & Me (for girls completing
grades 2-6)
June 19-21

For more information, go online to
www.worldsongretreat.com, or please contact Brandy
Cleveland at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 223, or (334) 613-2223,
bcleveland@alsbom.org.

Training For Church Leaders

THE SUMMIT

SHOCCO SPRINGS, *AUGUST 1 & 2, 2014*

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Sunday School Worker



Worship Leader



Family Leader



Mission Leader



Discipleship Worker



All Age Group Workers



Technology Worker



Women's Ministry Leader



Senior Adult Leader

For more information, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240, (334) 613-2240, jbaldwin@alsbom.org, or Ministry Assistant Ramona Noah at (334) 613-2312, rnoah@alsbom.org.



Alabama Baptist State Convention
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This resource is made possible by gifts from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



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

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

**FRIDAY AND SATURDAY,
 AUGUST 8-9, 2014
 LAGOON PARK & FAIR PARK,
 MONTGOMERY**

**Baptist Men's State
 Softball Tournament**

- 40 TEAM MAXIMUM • ROUND ROBIN TOURNAMENT • ASA-SANCTIONED TEAMS ONLY • SINGLE ELIMINATION IN CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND OF 16 TEAMS

EACH TEAM WILL PLAY AT LEAST FOUR GAMES.

ENTRY FEE: \$145

FOR ENTRY REQUIREMENTS TO PARTICIPATE AND AN INFORMATION PACKET, PLEASE CONTACT MINISTRY ASSISTANT MONDENE COKER AT 1-800-264-1225, EXT. 273, OR (334) 613-2273, MCOKER@ALSBOM.ORG.

ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries



**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.

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

WORSHIP & LEADERSHIP CHURCH MUSIC EVENTS

Children's Choir Summit Leadership Conference

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

MIX MusiCamp@Shocco

July 14-18 at Shocco Springs
 \$280 per person
 For grades 3-5, 6-7, 8-10

Jump into the mix. Unforgettable worship. Lifelong friendships. Aqua jump. Paintball. Uncontrollable fun.

REGISTRATION: 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 or Ministry Assistant Cindy Parrish, ext. 230, or (334) 613-2230, cparrish@alsbom.org.

Church Revitalization Book Reviews

This is the first in a series of reviews that can be helpful toward Church Revitalization

and a university that was facing scandal and lawsuit. The principles of relaunching can be summarized as follows:

Relaunch, by Mark Rutland (Colorado Springs, Colo., David C. Cook, 2013), 206 pages.

The author is the third president of Oral Roberts University, a businessman, educator and president of the National Institute of Christian Leadership.

Relaunch is his 14th book.

In this book, he shares the principles he practiced in turning around organizations that were in critical circumstances: a church with a deep debt and attendance decline, a college with a demoralized faculty and enrollment loss

follows:

1. Diagnose the truth about the present reality.
2. Determine what is realistic about where you can take the organization.
3. Develop a strategy to get there.
4. Determine ways to measure progress.
5. Empower people who can impact results.



By Dale Huff
State Missionary

6. Keep on keeping on.

The book is well written, full of anecdotes that make you smile and pithy insights that make you go "Hmm." You will read this book with your highlighter open and ready.

Among the many highlightable statements he makes are:

"The biggest problem is a damaged dream. The turnaround leader is the Chief Culture Officer. It is the leader's job to create and communicate a vision at every opportunity to every person who will stand still or walk slow."

"You are the Johnny Appleseed of the vision."

"An unfortunate truth...is that your opponents will always be more energized than those who are on your side."

This is a great read for

Church Revitalization leadership.



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

Join the **Party** as we begin the celebration of our **125 years of missions through Alabama WMU!**

Be the first to hear the exciting plans for the upcoming year of celebration!

Leave challenged and inspired to fulfill God's mission for your life!

MISSIONS

connect with missionaries from South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, and North America



Leadership training for all missions and ministry leaders

DEBBY AKERMAN
– Bible study
President, National WMU

CHIP COLEE – Worship
Minister of Music at
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Montgomery

REGISTRATION:
1-800-280-1105

For more information, please contact Pat Ingram at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 292, or (334) 613-2292, pingram@alsbom.org or go online to www.alabamawmu.org.

Equip ...for Missions, for Ministry, for Life
Leadership Training of Alabama WMU

FOCUS on One Mission

INTERESTED IN BEING AN ALABAMA BAPTIST BOYS CAMP COUNSELOR?



Characteristics and qualifications of a camp counselor:

- Male
- Spiritual maturity
- Love for the outdoors
- Mission-minded
- Desire to work with boys in grades 4-6 or 7-12

Training: Everything you need to know about campcraft, the ropes course and camp activities will be taught in pre-camp orientation, June 19-22, 2014.

Pay: Besides eternal rewards, you will earn between \$200 and \$400 per week. In addition, all meals and lodging costs will be covered.

Online Information: "Camp Counselor Application" at www.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.

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:

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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.

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.

- **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.

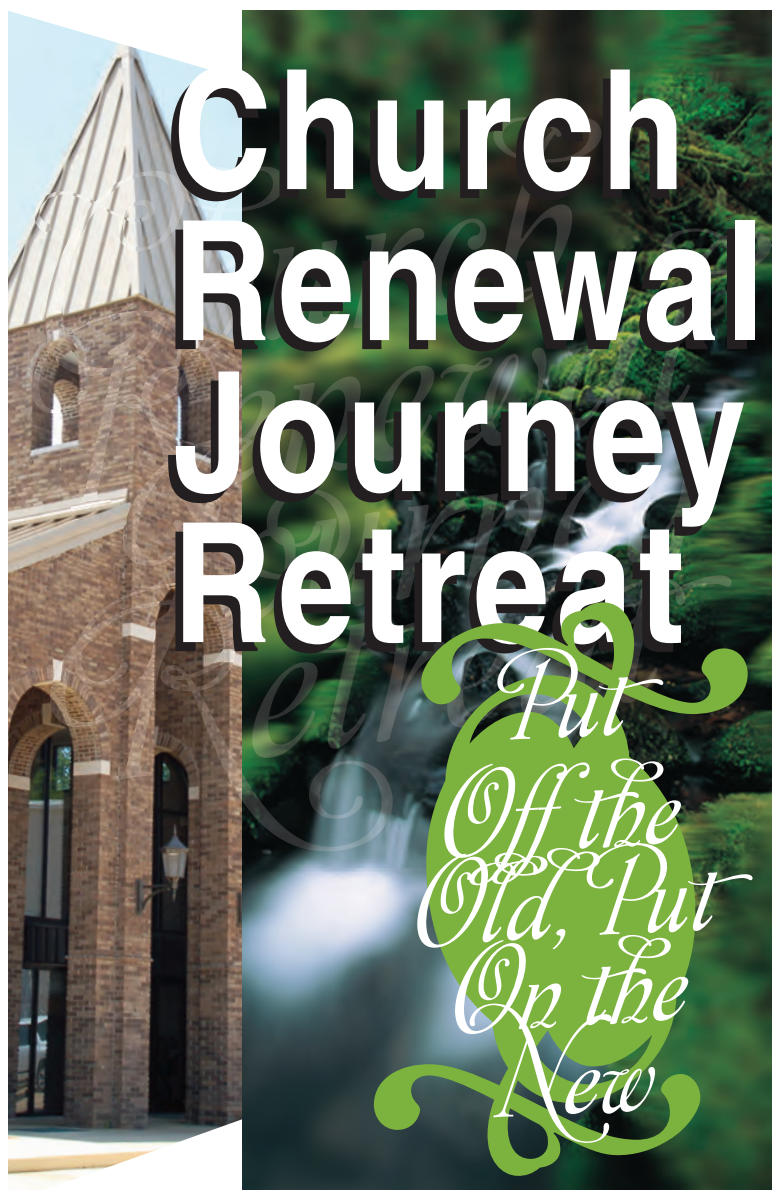
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For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sheron Poole at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 298, (334) 613-2298, spoole@alsbom.org.



GLOBAL MISSIONS

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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

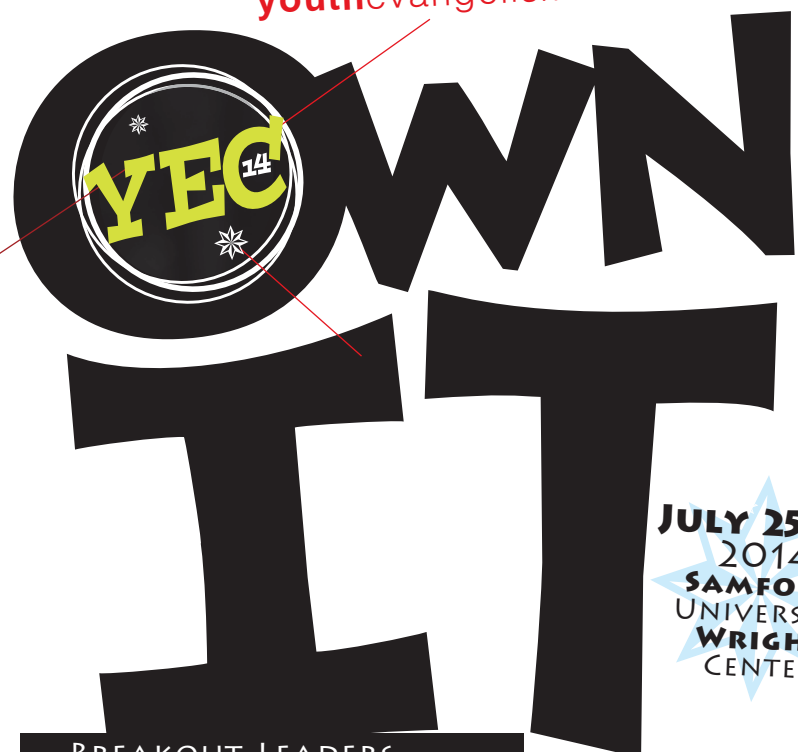
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Most terrifying so far

Islamist militants kidnap about 200 schoolgirls

Islamist Boko Haram militants kidnaped hundreds of schoolgirls in Nigeria in mid-April. The girls were abducted while at school in the Chibok area of Borno State. Initial reports said about 200 were kidnapped, but government officials lowered the figure to 130. On April 21, school officials said 234 were abducted and 43 girls had managed to escape.

The military had said in an earlier statement that it had freed more than 100 of 130 girls it had said were abducted but retracted the statement April 22. The discrepancy in the figures could not immediately be resolved, according to *USA Today*. Government forces were reportedly searching a forest near the border with Cameroon with help of vigilantes and local volunteers.

"We know no religion (that) prescribes abduction or infliction of pain as a way of devotion," said Titus Pona, an official with the Christian Association of Nigeria. "We are calling on them to sheathe their arms

and pursue their case in dialogue with the government."

Boko Haram translates to "Western education is forbidden" in the Hausa language. For five years the insurgents have unleashed violence in northern Nigeria, but the girls' abduction is viewed as the most terrifying so far.

More than 1,500 people have been killed in the insurgency so far in 2014, compared with an estimated 3,600 between 2010 and 2013, according to The Associated Press.

John Bakeni, a Roman Catholic priest in Borno, said, "This violence continues because the militants have support from powerful people in Nigerian society."

Nigeria's top Muslim leader, the sultan of Sokoto, Al-Haji Sa'ad Abubakar III, condemned the abduction.

"We sympathize with the victims and their teachers and families," he said in a statement. "We call on the authorities to put all the needed efforts to free these innocent girls and (let) them continue with their studies." (RNS, *TAB*)

"This violence continues because the militants have support from powerful people in Nigerian society."

**John Bakeni
Roman Catholic priest**

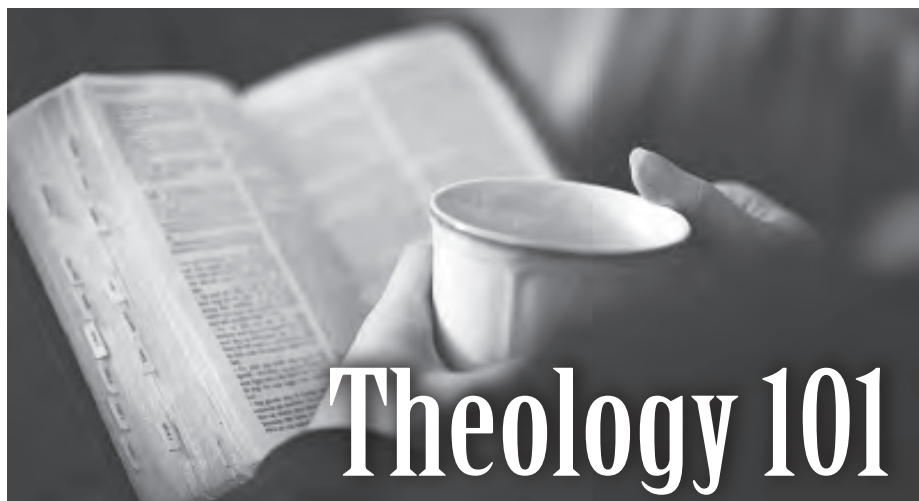
Dogwood Grove uses mobile unit after fire



Mobile chapel

Photo courtesy of Darrell Cook

Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Adger, moved into a mobile unit provided by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions on April 13 and celebrated Easter (pictured here) in the unit. The former building was destroyed by fire in late 2013. Darrell Cook, pastor of the Mud Creek Baptist Association church, said the church will use the mobile unit until a new building is completed and that the congregation is in the planning phase for a new facility.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

From Easter to Pentecost

Ascension Significance (Part 1 of 5)

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

As noted last week, in the Christian calendar Ascension Day occurs 40 days after Easter, putting it in the sixth week after Easter. This year's Ascension Day will be the fifth Thursday of this month, May 29. That Thursday incidentally coincides with the issue date of the last May issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. Counting this week, that gives us five sessions in Theology 101 to think about the ascension of Christ. Last week, we also took notice that the ascension was an essential part of Christ's exaltation. His three-stage exaltation began with resurrection, continued with the ascension and ended with His enthronement at the Father's right hand.

When we read the New Testament through an "ascension lens," we may be surprised at the frequency with which references and allusions to Christ's ascension occur. In this first of the five weeks dealing with this theme, let us simply take note of a sampling of what we might read with our "ascension lens" in place. Not only will this sensitize us to the frequency of mention and doctrinal significance of the ascension of Christ, it also will set us up for the next four weeks of looking into some significant aspects of the ascension.

Greater works

Jesus alluded to His ascension while speaking to the disciples in the upper room the night before His crucifixion. In the beloved passage about the Father's house, Jesus declared, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Shortly after those words, He spoke about one who believes being able to do greater works, saying, "Greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). The ascension was His "going to the Father."

Jesus referred to His ascension on the day of His resurrection when Mary Magdalene clung to Him in joy. His rationale for stopping her was, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to My brothers

and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and Your Father, to My God and your God'" (John 20:17).

In an exalted passage about grace gifts for believers, Paul linked Jesus' incarnation with His ascension by referring to Psalm 68:18 (which speaks of ascending) by commenting, "In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:9-10).

'Mystery of godliness'

Paul reminded Timothy of the "mystery of godliness" with the poetic liturgy that ends with a reference to Christ's ascension: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Hebrews 4:14 encourages us to steadfastness of faith by making reference to the ascension: "Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

At the end of a difficult and much-debated passage about "spirits in prison," Peter wrote a clear and ringing affirmation about Jesus and His ascension and preeminence, saying that He "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22).

This sampling of ascension references in varied places of the New Testament serves to whet our appetites for further thinking about the doctrinal significance of Christ's ascension. ☩

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.



FOOTBALL & RELIGION

Clemson coach says players not coerced by religion

Clemson head football coach Dabo Swinney has responded to complaints from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) expressing “constitutional concerns about how the public university’s football program is entangled with religion.”

According to the Wisconsin-based foundation, Swinney — Helena native and former player and assistant coach for the University of Alabama — has promoted a culture in the program that promotes Christianity and violates constitutional guidelines of the separation of church and state.

In a statement released by the university, Swinney asserted that religious activity is not a requirement of his program.

“Over the past week or two, there has been a lot of discussion of my faith,” he said. “We have three rules in our program that everybody must follow: (1) players must go to class, (2) they must give a good effort and (3) they must be good citizens. It is as simple as that.

“I have recruited and coached players of many different faiths. Players of any faith or no faith at all are welcome in our program. All we require in the recruitment of any player is that he must be a great player at his position, meet the academic requirements and have good character.”

Swinney did not address the specific allegations from the FFRF directly. In a letter sent to Clemson officials April 10, the group alleged that Swinney has

organized religious activities for players while also acting as an official state employee.

The FFRF also alleged that Swinney hand-picked chaplain James Trapp, which violates the university’s policy on team chaplains, which specifies that student athletes should select their own chaplain. The FFRF also contended that Trapp has used his office to proselytize.

The foundation has recommended the elimination of the chaplaincy position. Swinney did not address Trapp’s status and did not address how often he or his staff members discuss or promote their faith with current players.

Swinney did address how the topic of his faith is broached during recruiting visits with prospective athletes even though the FFRF did not submit a specific complaint about Swinney’s recruiting practices.

“Recruiting is very personal,” Swinney said. “Recruits and their families want — and deserve — to know who you are as

a person, not just what kind of coach you are. I try to be a good example to others, and I work hard to live my life according to my faith.”

In a statement posted online April 24, the FFRF said Swinney was dodging the issue.

“His religion is not the issue; it is his proselytizing in a public university football program,” the group said. “It is a bedrock constitutional principle that government employees cannot abuse their position to advance their religion.” (RNS)



SWINNEY

Photo courtesy of Clemson Athletics

“I try to be a good example to others, and I work hard to live my life according to my faith.”

Dabo Swinney
head football coach, Clemson University



If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

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Christians targeted in Vietnam’s northwest region

TRUN PHU, Vietnam — Ethnic Hmong Christians have been the targets of two incidents recently in Vietnam’s northwest.

In Dien Bien Dong District, public security officers Hang Da Sinh and Cu Ninh Vang recruited some 30 villagers of Trun Phu Village to accompany them to the home of Hang A. Khua on Feb. 26, according to Khua. Backed by an intimidating mob, the officers ordered Khua and his family of nine to recant their Christian faith.

Khua refused and the two officers ordered the accompanying villagers to attack the family. They did so vehemently, swinging short lengths of electrical cable at both adults and children, Khua reported in a petition to international human rights organizations and the United Nations.

Finally after three hours of the abuse the officers announced that the family was permanently expelled from Dien Bien Dong District and incited the mob to chase them away.

On March 25 at 10 a.m. two men barged into Thao A. Say’s home while he and his wife were resting. The men picked up chairs and began beating the couple, kicking and punching them.

In his report of the incident Say said, “Please allow us to practice our faith in peace like the law says.”

Court annuls 14-year church ownership in Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — After more than 14 years, a court in Kyrgyzstan has annulled a sales contract of a Culture House bought by the Church of Jesus Christ in the nation’s capital of Bishkek.

“We are not against the Church or its activity, but the contract was null and void from the beginning and must be annulled,” said Aysulu Orozbekova, who represented the State Property Fund in its suit in court.

Orozbekova refused to say why the Fund opened the issue after so many years or if it was linked to a construction company’s interest in the property. She refused to identify the other religious communities whose property may now be threatened.

Baptist imprisoned in Kazakhstan for his faith

SERGEYEVKA, Kazakhstan — Imprisoned for six days over Easter in Sergeyevka, Kazakhstan, was Council of Churches Baptist Denis Yenko. He refused to pay a fine in 2013 imposed to punish him for leading worship without the compulsory state permission.

Yenko is the eighth known Council of Churches Baptist to be given a short prison term in 2014 so far.

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'One nation under God'

New Jersey lawsuit seeks to ban Pledge of Allegiance, claims religious discrimination

Majority of Americans want to keep 'under God' in pledge

In 1954, the U.S. Congress added the words "under God" to the country's Pledge of Allegiance. Sixty years later, most Americans would like to keep it that way, despite ongoing legal challenges to the pledge.

A telephone survey of 1,001 Americans from Nashville-based LifeWay Research found that 85 percent want to keep "under God" in the pledge.

Researchers did find 1 in 4 Americans (25 percent) believe forcing students to say "under God" violates their rights. But less than 1 in 10 (8 percent) Americans want to remove "under God" from the pledge. The survey results show little support for changing the pledge, said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research.

"Most Americans have recited the pledge hundreds of times and are not inclined to

memorize a different pledge," he said. "Changing it may just feel wrong. Most Americans say they believe in God or a higher being and feel comfortable having 'under God' in the pledge."

The study by LifeWay also found younger Americans are more likely to support removal of "under God" from the pledge. Fourteen percent of those ages 18-29 want to remove the phrase, compared to 5 percent of those over 64.

Women (88 percent) are more likely to want to keep "under God" than men (83 percent). Americans with a college degree are more likely (13 percent) to want it removed. And self-identified born again, evangelical or fundamentalist Christians are most likely (94 percent) to say "under God" should remain. (LifeWay)

The American Humanist Association (AHA) is suing a New Jersey school district for its recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public classrooms.

The lawsuit, brought on behalf of a local family in central New Jersey, asserts the mandatory recitation of the pledge is discriminatory against nonbelievers because it includes the phrase "under God."

Change in strategy

The lawsuit, filed against Monmouth County's Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District, is the second case that reflects a change in strategy against the pledge. It contends the pledge violates a state constitution's protection against religious discrimination; previous cases held the pledge violates the U.S. Constitution's ban on the establishment of religion.

The first such case, also brought by the AHA, is awaiting a decision in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. That case, brought by atheist parents of a public school child, claims the "under God" phrase violates the state's equal rights laws.

Lawyers for the parents in the New Jersey lawsuit issued a statement April 21 announcing the suit.

"Public schools should not engage in an exercise that tells students that patriotism is tied to a belief in God," said David Niose, attorney for the AHA Humanist Legal Center, which represents the parents. "Such a daily exercise portrays atheist and humanist children as second-class citizens and

certainly contributes to anti-atheist prejudices."

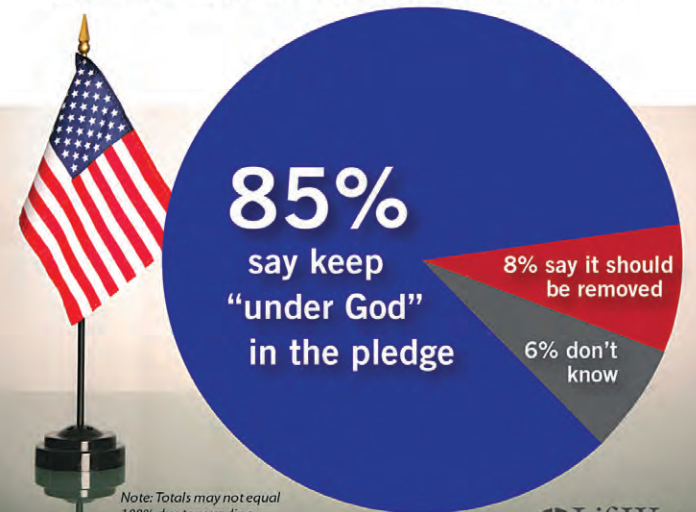
A lawyer for the New Jersey school district responded to the lawsuit by saying the district is following a state law that requires schools to have a daily recitation of the pledge.

The AHA argues the pledge violates the New Jersey Constitution's protection against discrimination due to "religious principles, race, color, ancestry or national origin."

The Pledge of Allegiance did not contain the phrase "under God" until 1954 when it was added by a vote of Congress as a protection against "godless Communism." (RNS, LifeWay)

The Pledge of Allegiance

Should the words "under God" be removed from or remain in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America?



Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding
LifeWayResearch.com

LifeWay RESEARCH

Living with a Reverse Mortgage

By Jimmy Dixon

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

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CAMPUS News



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Garden Project Launched on Earth Day:** The Judson College Garden Project was launched on Earth Day, April 22. The mission of the project is to grow a sustainable campus garden for the college community to enjoy.

According to George Frangoulis, Judson Garden coordinator, the garden also is open to everyone, including citizens of Marion.

The garden's benefits will include providing access to fresh, affordable and locally grown produce, he said. It also will be a way to teach and empower students to grow a garden and make healthy and sustainable food choices.

Additionally the project is seen as a way to utilize the campus garden, a farm stand and educational programs to raise funds and enable both Judson students and Marion residents to learn about organic gardening while building a vibrant food system.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Bob Barnett is Samford Student Employee of the Year:** Bob Barnett, a senior computer science major from Vestavia Hills, is Samford University's 2014 Student Employee of the Year.

Barnett, who works in the reference department of the Samford library, was recognized at a special

ceremony April 17. Barnett was cited for exhibiting a rare combination of dedication, caring, speed and accuracy that has enabled him to produce a very high volume of work while maintaining a heavy student course load and high standards for quality.

Finalists for the Samford honor were Sarah Fort, Tanner Hixson, Charita Lewis, Sam Rogers, Thomas Whatley and Sarah Zadic.

► **Samford Student Named Goldwater Scholar:** Samford University junior Rebekah Brooks of Northport, has been named a 2014 Goldwater Scholar. The honor includes a one-year scholarship that will cover the cost of tuition, fees, books, and room and board up to a maximum of \$7,500.

The Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation selected Brooks and 282 other scholars on the basis of academic merit from a field of 1,166 mathematics, science and engineering students



BARNETT



BROOKS

nominated by the faculties of colleges and universities nationwide.

Brooks is pursuing a double major — chemistry and biochemistry, with a minor in bioinformatics.

In 2013, she won first place in the undergraduate chemistry category at the Alabama Academy of Science conference.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **UMobile Spring Spectacular Showcases Performing Arts Students:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) Center for Performing Arts will showcase the talents of its performing arts students at the Spring Spectacular. The concert is the final performance for the 2013-14 season.

The Spring Spectacular will be April 27 at 7 p.m. at the Saraland Performing Arts Center at Saraland High School.

Al Miller, dean of the UMobile Center for Performing Arts/School of Music and School of Worship Leadership, said the Spring Spectacular started several years ago for students who traveled and performed in the school's many ensembles to have an opportunity to see other ensembles perform.

Tickets may be purchased through itickets.com or at the door. For more information, call the UMobile Center for Performing Arts at 251-442-2383 or visit umobile.edu.

► **UMobile Art Students Win Honors:** Two University of Mobile art students won honors at "5,"

the 2014 art exhibition sponsored by the Mobile Arts Council that is open to area colleges and universities.

Emily Williams won third place for her ceramic piece titled "Octopot #2." Dakota Cantrell received honorable mention for her ceramic piece titled "Wandering Warrior."

The awards were announced April 11.

► **UMobile Professor Elected President of Alabama Historical Association:** Lonnie A. Burnett, assistant vice president for academic affairs and professor of history at the University of Mobile, has been elected to serve as president of the Alabama Historical Association (AHA) for 2014-2015.

Founded in 1947, AHA is the oldest statewide historical society in Alabama. The independent, nonprofit organization promotes the exploration and study of all aspects of Alabama's history. The group's nearly 1,000 members come from the ranks of professional historians as well as non-academicians with an interest in the state's history.

Burnett has been a member of the AHA for 20 years and has served on its board of directors and executive committee, as well as vice president.



BURNETT

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Union Baptist Church in Honorville is prayerfully seeking a pastor. Full-time and bivocational resumes accepted. Please send to: ATTN: Search Committee, P.O. Box 158, Honorville, AL 36042.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Eastside Baptist, Birmingham, Ala., is seeking a minister of music to plan and lead worship/music ministry. Blended service. Email resumé to: jellison@EBCBirmingham.org.

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. www.meekbc.com.

YOUTH MINISTER: Eastside Baptist Church has an opening for a part-time youth minister. Job will be 20 hours a week maximum. Email resumé to: info@EBCBirmingham.org.

BIVOCATIONAL STUDENT PASTOR: FBC Dawes is seeking a student pastor in west Mobile. Previous experience with grades 7-12 with a spiritually focused program. Please send

resumé to: jimglazejr@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES: First Baptist Church of Foley, Ala., is accepting resumes for the full-time position of minister of children and families. Please email resumes to: scollins@fbcfoley.com.

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Want to know God?

Pastor Toney Wales
Elkton Road Baptist Church, Athens

Do you know God? Do you really know Him in an intimate and personal way? It is possible to be around the people of God, the things of God and involved in the work of God but not know Him. This seems to be the case with two of the 12 disciples in chapter 14 of the Gospel According to John.

After Judas Iscariot departed to betray Him, Jesus spent the evening reassuring, comforting and instructing the remaining 11 disciples concerning what was about to take place; that being Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and then His ascension back to God the Father. Just after Jesus said they knew where He was going and the way He was going, Thomas confessed that he did not know and asked how could they know. Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). If we honestly confess that we do not know and ask how to know, God always will answer, revealing how to know without rebuking us. Did Thomas know then? It doesn't appear that he knew since John 20 records Thomas' refusal to believe Jesus is alive without seeing and touching Jesus for himself. When Jesus appeared again, He does not rebuke Thomas but instructs him to believe. Then Thomas believed, confessing "My Lord and my God" (John 20:27-28). Thomas now knew God by knowing Jesus Christ and believing Him to be who He had always said He was.

Following His initial answer to Thomas, Jesus had said, "If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." Philip, the other disciple that did not know, asked for Jesus to show them the Father. After spending three years in Jesus' presence, with Jesus' people and even doing the work Jesus instructed him to do, Philip did not know. Jesus once again gave a simple answer, instructing Philip to believe Him (John 14:7-12).

If you want to know God, He said, "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). In order to know God, you must believe in Jesus with your heart.

Someone You Should Know

Submitted by Bonnie M. Doughty, *Special to TAB*

Alene S. Herd



HERD

*First Baptist Church, Reform
Pickens Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: Luke 2:11

FAVORITE HYMN: "Jesus Loves Me"

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 65 years of marriage to Al; one son, Doug (deceased); two grandchildren; three great-grandchildren

Alene Herd, 92, is an inspiration to others. She has been a member of First Baptist Church, Reform, for 65 years and owned The Waysider flower shop with her late husband, Al. Through the years she has served in a ladies Sunday School class (she taught the class for 30 years), as a VBS teacher and church Woman's Missionary Union president.

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

A: I went to Vacation Bible School (VBS). I went to Sunday School every Sunday. I loved to go to VBS and Sunday School. I remember how special my teachers were to me. I loved them all.

Q: Who led you to Christ?

A: My pastor ... he was a very kind man.

Q: What did you enjoy most about teaching the ladies Sunday School class?

A: The Bible study I had to do. It kept me on my toes.

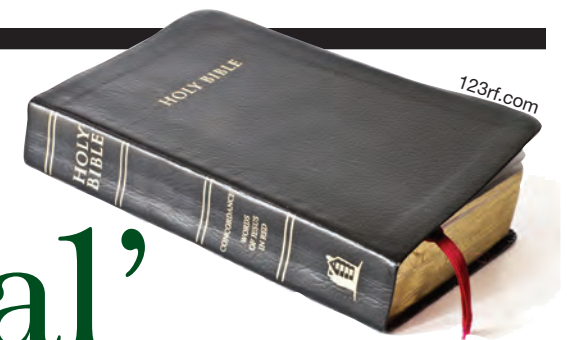
Q: What did you get from your ministry work?

A: I got joy. I got a lot of new friends. The ministries all meant so much to me.

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

A: The joy He has brought to me, and He has given me opportunities to help people. I like to help people. ☺

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



'Notional' vs. 'practicing'

Bible survey shows many Americans scramble their Scripture

The Bible encourages the "repression of women," and it's silent on such fraught topics as war or slavery.

At least, that's what about 1 in 5 U.S. adults believe. But they're wrong. The American Bible Society's (ABS) annual "State of the Bible" survey reveals "the people of the book are not people of this book," said Geof Morin, chief communication officer for the society.

"We know 88 percent of people say they have a Bible. They think: 'I have a Bible. I have had one for a long time. I must know what's in it.' But people overestimate their knowledge," Morin said.

The ABS survey of 1,012 U.S. adults, conducted by Barna Research, found that 82 percent of U.S. adults consider themselves at least somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible.

However, he said, "43 percent can't even name the first five books of the Bible."

When it came to assessing what the Bible says on several critical social issues, many showed fuzzy knowledge of the attitudes and behaviors addressed in Scripture.

Most Christians correctly say the Bible discourages prostitution, gambling and pornography; that it encourages generosity, forgiveness and patience; and that it is most certainly not silent on issues such as slavery, war and homosexuality.

However, there were distinct divides between "practicing Christians" — those who consider their faith important, attend church regularly and believe they are born again — and "notional" Christians who wear the label but disengage from practice.

The "notionals" roughly aligned with people who said they had no religious identity on several questions, including what the Bible says about war or on women.

Morin acknowledged that "repression is strong language. But we wanted to address that within every religious denomination there's some sense of male headship. That can be framed positively, as a view

that all are called to serve one another. Or it can be seen negatively, as (setting up) first- or second-class citizenship."

While 91 percent of evangelicals say the Bible discourages "repression of women," that figure drops to 61 percent for other practicing Christians, such as mainline Protestants.

"Notional" Christians — nearly half of all participants in the survey — have a grimmer picture of the Bible's view on women. Nearly 3 in 10 (27 percent) say the Bible either encourages repression or is silent on women's status (28 percent). Among those who claim no religious identity (nones), 46 percent see

the Bible advocating repression of women and 22 percent say it's silent on the matter.

Questions about same-sex relationships and about war show similar divisiveness. Strong majorities in every category say the Bible discourages homosexuality. But 24 percent of "notional" Christians and 33 percent of nones say the Bible is silent on this topic.

About 2 in 10 (18 percent overall) also said the Bible is silent about war. However, this time the responses divided very differently: Only 11 percent of non-evangelical practicing Christians saw nothing in the Bible on this subject.

The ABS survey differs from a 2010 national survey by the Pew

Research Center on overall religious knowledge. That survey focused on core teachings, history and leading figures in five major world religions. It found the most knowledgeable were atheists and agnostics, Jews and Mormons, who outperformed Protestants and Catholics on most questions. The ABS survey, meanwhile, was specifically focused on the Bible. Its purpose, said Morin, is to give the Bible society ideas for areas where it can work to strengthen biblical literacy and help make Scripture the foundation in believers' lives.

"The American Bible Society wants to track what is happening in the culture and why people are less and less connecting the moral and political issues of the day with their Bibles," he said. (RNS)

"We know 88 percent of people say they have a Bible. They think: 'I have a Bible ... I must know what's in it.'"

**Geof Morin
American Bible Society**

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LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

This terminology certainly doesn't inspire me as a Christian. Budgets are very painful at times while giving to the Lord is a pleasure because of the wonderful gift of salvation and many other gifts He has given to me.

Perhaps our budgets would fare better if we as Christians could think of it as gifts to the Lord instead of a budget.

Harold Junkins
Hueytown, Ala.





Photos courtesy of The Media Collective

After finishing in the top 10 on 'American Idol,' Christian recording artist Mandisa boldly entered the Christian music scene in 2007 with the release of her debut album, 'True Beauty.' Her latest album, 'Overcomer,' features songs written from her experiences overcoming food addiction.

Christian recording artist Mandisa writes songs fueled by experiences, struggles

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As Christian recording artist Mandisa performs concerts around the country, she desires to equip audiences with messages about Christ's redeeming love, forgiveness and grace.

By sharing songs and stories of personal struggles, Mandisa hopes to encourage others while connecting them to the gospel.

In 2006, during her audition for season five of the popular reality TV show "American Idol," Mandisa suffered public ridicule and humiliation after overhearing judge Simon Cowell making inappropriate comments about her weight. However, instead of letting emotions get the best of her, Mandisa graciously responded to Cowell with a message of faith and forgiveness.

"What I want to say to you is that, yes, you hurt me," Mandisa said. "I cried and it was painful. It really was but I want you to know that I've forgiven you and that you don't need someone to apologize in order to forgive somebody. I figure that if Jesus could die so that all of my wrongs could be forgiven, then I can certainly extend that same grace to you."

'American Idol'

Cowell humbly apologized for his remarks and showed great respect for Mandisa's performances throughout the season.

Following an impressive top 10 finish on "American Idol," Mandisa boldly entered the Christian music scene in 2007 with the release of her debut album "True Beauty" and embarked on a busy touring schedule.

"The songwriting process is fueled by what I have been experiencing in each season of life," Mandisa said. "The themes on my albums are pretty unique because of the different stages of life and seasons that I have been walking through."

The songs on her newest album "Overcomer" are designed to provide hope and healing in the midst of dark times by reminding people that a relationship with Christ offers hope, inspiration and the ability to live victoriously.

"The title track is based on my story of battling and overcoming food addiction," Mandisa explained. "I've lost over 100 pounds, and I'm still working to lose more weight. I am an overcomer, not because I'm at my goal weight, but it's through the power of Jesus that gives me the strength to keep fighting this battle daily. I love knowing that I don't have to depend on my own power for strength and encouragement to keep pressing on, but it's through His power. I started writing this song about my own personal story and struggles. Then as I was walking through situations with friends who were also overcoming battles, it was such an inspiration to hear about God working in their lives and using these situations for His glory."

"The message I want people to take away from the album is that if they have asked Jesus to be their Lord and Savior, the Bible says they are an overcomer," she said. "I love to share Scriptures during concerts because I think the Word of God is so powerful. John 16:33 is where Jesus says we can have peace because He's already overcome the world. In 1 John

4:4, it says if we have Jesus in our hearts, that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world and that we are overcomers by that alone. We are also told in 1 John 5:4-5 that if we have Jesus as our Savior that we have overcome the world. I feel like all of these songs are steeped in the Word of God and believe that they are aligned with truth."

'Believing God's power'

"I can attest to this, because I have experienced it in my own life," Mandisa said. "My hope is that as people listen to the song 'Overcomer' that they will begin to respond to the message behind the music, and that it will cause them to walk through their situations in life by having faith, by believing in God's power and walking in the authority that they already have through a relationship with Christ."

Mandisa's message and music are being well received. Earlier in 2014, she garnered two Grammy Awards for "Best Contemporary Christian Music Album" and "Best Contemporary Christian Song." The accolades haven't changed her mission.

"I am so appreciative when my songs do well, having success on the charts and receiving award nominations, but

I cannot define myself by those things," she said. "I realize there's going to come a day when those things are not happening in my life, but that will not mean that I won't effectively be doing what God has called me to do. I try to look at success as whether or not I am having an impact on people's lives. Revelation 12:11 says that we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. When I take the stage, I realize it's not through anything I could do on my own. It's through the Holy Spirit at work through these songs and softening hearts."

"So many people have come up to me after a concert and are in tears because they felt like God spoke to them through something I sang or said," Mandisa noted. "I love when people share their testimonies, and what inspires me the most is hearing that someone gave their life to Jesus as a result of a certain song. That is the biggest honor of my life. When I get to heaven, God isn't going to talk to me about the number of albums sold. My prayer is that God will say that He used me to change people's lives." ❧



"When I get to heaven, God isn't going to talk to me about the number of albums sold. My prayer is that God will say that He used me to change people's lives."

Mandisa
Christian recording artist



IMB photos

'Lesson in miracles'

Autistic man serves in Japan, inspires IMB media representative

By Maria Elena Baseler
International Mission Board

Inside a small Buddhist temple in Shiojiri, Japan, 23-year-old International Mission Board (IMB) representative Steven Kunkel sits at a grand piano playing one of his original compositions called "Creation." Seated on the floor nearby, a Buddhist woman listens to the music, enthralled.

She's the caretaker of the temple and an adjoining Buddhist training center, and she's giving Steven, our IMB media crew and a Japanese pastor a tour of the place. The impromptu concert develops after Steven spots the Yamaha piano and asks the woman's permission to play it for her.

Listening to Steven's music, I feel my own heart stir a bit, too. I remember the first time I heard him play these songs — a half a world away in Asunción, Paraguay. It was the day after he was commissioned by his church as an independent representative to Japan.

Steven sat at the piano in his parents' home, sharing his music with family friend Jonathan Yao, IMB photographer Rebecca Springer and me. As Steven's moving melodies filled the living room, I glanced at his parents — IMB representatives Tim and Iracema Kunkel — who listened nearby.

It was a story I started writing more than 13 years ago, when Tim and Iracema were IMB representatives in Salto, Uruguay.

Then I worked as a writer at IMB's home office in Richmond, Va., but I knew

God was calling me to serve overseas.

"There's no way I'll go," I told God.

I loved traveling to the missions field, reporting stories about representatives and their families. But go myself as a representative?

I had every excuse in the book and voiced each one of them to God. Often.

Unforgettable interview

In the midst of that struggle, I spent a week with the Kunkel family in Uruguay, on assignment for what then was IMB's *The Commission* magazine. Steven was just 10 years old; his older brother, John Glenn, was 12. Their older sister, Julia, had already left home for college.

Down-to-earth, authentic and fun, Tim and Iracema opened their home to an IMB photographer and me that week.

In an interview I'll never forget, the couple shared candidly what they experienced the day they learned Steven had autism, a developmental brain disorder causing problems in communication, behavior and social interaction.

"At first I thought, 'Let's just pack up and go home,'" Tim admitted. "But then I realized that when God called us to missions, He knew the children we were going to have. He allowed this to happen, and He has a purpose in this."

The Kunkels saw that purpose unfold while staying faithful to their missions calling and trying to help Steven — and their two older children — become all God created them to be. At the same time, they shared

the gospel, trained Uruguayan church leaders and helped Uruguayan Baptists start churches.

Because Uruguay offered few educational programs for people with autism, Iracema studied special education so she could teach Steven herself. Soon God opened doors for sharing Christ with Uruguayan families affected by autism.

Iracema added, "A lesson I've learned through Steven is that miracles don't always happen in the blink of an eye. Sometimes God does miracles through a long slow process, using many different people."

After I got back to Richmond, I prayed for the right words to tell this family's story. Five months after the story was published, I was appointed an IMB media representative. In the years that followed, I lost touch with the Kunkels. But this past year at an IMB meeting in Chile, I heard Iracema call my name.

"You won't believe what's happened with Steven. He's going to be a [representative] — to Japan," Iracema said. Over a meal the next day, she and Tim shared the rest of their story.

At age 15 in Uruguay, Steven felt God's call to Japan. No Japanese people lived in Salto, so Steven started trying to learn Japanese on his own. Iracema bought him a Japanese phrasebook and he soon mastered all of it.

The next year, the IMB transferred the Kunkels to Paraguay, where many Japanese immigrants live. Steven attended a Japanese school, served in a Japanese-Paraguayan



Main photo: Volunteer representative Steven Kunkel (center) teaches a Bible study for children at Jesus the Gospel Church in Shiojiri, Japan.

Top photo: At a Brazilian-Japanese Baptist church in Fuji, Japan, Steven Kunkel prays over Filipe Kojikumu, the 21-year-old autistic son of Luis Carlos and Margarete Kakumu, Brazilian Baptist representatives in Fuji. **Bottom photo:** Steven Kunkel (right) and Japanese pastor Saburo Akazawa (center) hand out tracts at the train station in Shiojiri, Japan.

church and learned to speak and read Japanese. In 2011, Steven visited Japan with a family friend and that trip opened the door for him to serve as a volunteer there.

Three weeks after seeing the Kunkels in Chile, I flew to Paraguay to attend Steven's commissioning service at a Japanese-Paraguayan house church in Asunción.

Fulfilling God's purpose

A few months later, on location in Japan's Nagano province, our IMB media crew interviewed Steven about his work there.

"My favorite verse is Philippians 4:13: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,'" Steven said. "No matter how disabled you are ... or what kind of race you are, you just know that if God is with you, who can be against you, because through Him we can do all things."

He added, "I'm fulfilling the work that God called me to do."

Listening to Steven's interview that day, I realized I was following God's dream for me, too.

"Thank you, Lord, for your 'lesson in miracles,'" I prayed. ☞