

# THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



May 15, 2014  
Vol. 179, No. 20

Reporting. Connecting. Inspiring.

Toll free 1-800-803-5201  
www.thealabamabaptist.org

## INSIDE



**Ukrainian believers share glimpse of life amid conflict, ask for prayer**

◆ Page 3



**Evangelism Conference challenges about 600 senior adults to be creative fishermen**

◆ Pages 4-5



**State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament winners**

◆ Page 7



Photo by Bob Terry

Southern Baptist representative Dwayne Brown (left) visits with Marian Jipa, his wife, Coca, and daughter, Maria, outside their home.

## Romanian man donates family inheritance to church in need of land

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

**I**t was supposed to be his inheritance. The land was to be the place where Marian Jipa built his home and raised his family. The land was next to a plot in the Romanian village of Pitulicea where his grandfather lived. And the home where Jipa was raised was nearby.

But his house church needed a building. For nearly 50 years a small band of faithful believers had met in a home. Once the group dwindled to only three elderly ladies, but they insisted on keeping the doors open because they knew God would send them a pastor.

Now times were better. The church was growing and a program called the Romania Chapel Program was willing to construct a building if the church could provide the land, foundation and building materials.

That was the problem. The small number of believers did not have enough money to buy property.

Jipa found himself in a dilemma. God had called him back to his home village to serve as pastor of the small congregation. He remembered his own experience. A neighbor had invited him to activities at the house church when he was 8 years old. Jipa recalled how much he liked what he found there. But after the local Eastern Orthodox priest objected to his participation, Jipa's father forbade him to go back until he was at least 18 years old and on his own.

### Becoming a Christian

During the years that followed God used the witness of evangelical missionaries from Denmark, a Bible given him by his sister and a visit to a Baptist church in the city where he worked at the time to bring Jipa to salvation. It was not long after becoming a Christian that he married Coca, a pretty brunette from the Baptist church where he was saved. Shortly after that God called him to ministry and eventually led him back to Pitulicea.

More than 20 years after first visiting the house church, Jipa was back living with his mother and father — and this time with his wife

and their two children, Philip and Maria.

After praying about what to do God gave the couple a vision. God wanted a church in Pitulicea but it had to be more than a local church. Pitulicea would be like the hub of a wheel with work going out to the many nearby villages that had no evangelical work at all.

Even though the church had no money to build the foundation for the hoped-for building, let alone buy the necessary building materials, Jipa still donated the land where he was supposed to build his family house as the site for the church building. Money for the foundation came in another special gift, which also was an answer to prayer.

Jipa shared how he went to the building supply outlet and told them he needed materials to build a church but that he had no money. He gave his personal pledge to pay for all the materials if the owner would let him have the materials to start the building. God answered the church's prayer as members and other sponsors provided the financial resources needed to pay for the materials. When the building was finished eight years ago, the church was debt free.

The vision God gave Jipa also is becoming a reality. The work is

hard. Resistance to Baptists in the historically Eastern Orthodox area is strong. Still Hope Baptist Church has started Bible studies or outreach activities in 12 other villages since it was built.

### God's calling

Some in Pitulicea still question why Jipa gave away his inheritance. They don't understand why he left a good paying job to become pastor of a church that cannot support him full-time or why he spent four years in Bible college. Many don't understand why he lives with his parents instead of having his own home.

But the Jipas said they are doing what God called them to do. Around a Sunday dinner of polenta and pig organs, Jipa points out the water damage on the ceiling caused by a leaky roof in his father's old home. He shares about trying to add an indoor bathroom to the house for the past two years.

"If God wants me to have a new roof or to finish the bathroom, He will provide," Jipa said confidently. "God called me to be a pastor and to share the gospel in these villages that don't have an evangelical work. That's what I am going to do. That is my inheritance." (See coverage on Baptists in Romania on pages 2, 9-12.)

# COMMENT

## Baptists In Romania — The Impact of History

Look at Romania and one sees a nation shaped by history. Most of the world knows about the Romanian Revolution that ended more than 40 years of Communist rule when dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was shot by a military firing squad Christmas Day 1989.

Most people know Romania originally sided with Germany at the beginning of World War II and paid a heavy price as allies bombed its oil fields and manufacturing centers. At the end of the war, the boundaries of the nation were redrawn by the allies with Moldova being carved out of Romania and eventually becoming a separate state. At the end of World War I the boundaries also had been redrawn adding territory to the western side of the nation.

### Impact on Baptists

But the defining historical impact on Baptists goes back further than either world war. It goes back centuries to the time the Byzantine Empire collapsed and the Ottoman Turks sacked Constantinople. That was A.D. 1453. The Christian faith that had reached from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the icy tundra of Russia was challenged by the invading Muslims. The Ottoman Empire reached northward through the Balkans and Bulgaria into Romania. There it met the forces of the Russian Empire and its Eastern Orthodox faith. The competing empires developed an uneasy peace that lasted for about 400 years.

On the western side of Romania the Ottomans encountered what came to be called the Habsburg Empire, an empire loyal to the Roman Catholic faith, and another uneasy truce developed lasting hundreds of years.

Understanding that Romania was the place the three empires converged is important in understanding Baptists of that nation today.

When the Reformation swept Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, it penetrated every part



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

of the Habsburg Empire. Lutherans emerged in Germany. Reformed faiths appeared in Hungary. Mennonites became common across northern Europe. Among the places Baptists appeared was the eastern frontier of the empire — Romania. Today the vast majority of Romania's 1,800 churches and the majority of its 130,000 members are located in the area that used to be controlled by the Habsburgs. According to the last census, some areas report as much as 30 percent of the population as Baptist.

The Ottoman Empire reached from southern Romania as far north as the Carpathian Mountains. Even though the Turkish rule ended with their defeat almost 100 years ago in World War I, the most recent census shows vast stretches on the former Muslim area as having no Baptists at all. Baptist leaders today describe the work in that part of the nation as hard and report beliefs in spiritualism, witches, evil spells and the like as high among the population.

From the east the power of Moscow and the Eastern Orthodox Church was exercised. Moscow saw itself as the successor to Constantinople and vowed to reign for a thousand years as that city had done. The Reformation of Europe never found hold in the Russian Empire.

In every village a church was built. Priests became power brokers in a way that continues today. In many villages Orthodox priests still exercise control over what the people do. That

is why a priest may order a family to remove their children from a Baptist Vacation Bible School, and the family does so. Other times the priest can threaten Baptists with physical beatings without worrying about civil authorities.

The people have a Christian heritage but some say their God is One whose holiness produces awe and fear. He cannot be approached. God cannot be known and the concept of a personal relationship with God is a foreign idea, they say.

Baptists are often referred to by the Orthodox as "the Repenters," a term of derision but an accurate description of the Baptist message.

Churches in the area of Romania historically under Orthodox control are few in number and small in membership but growing. Emphasizing what the Bible says is the main approach Baptists use in witnessing. Bucharest and its surrounding area fall into the Orthodox sphere of influence. The five counties around the nation's capital, together with the capital itself, have more than 6 million people in it. Baptists number about 7,500.

It was not until the three empires lost their political control that Baptists became a recognized religion in Romania. The Paris Peace Conference following the end of World War I required recognition of minority religions. But even before recognition, Baptists were spreading the gospel in Romania and that continues today.

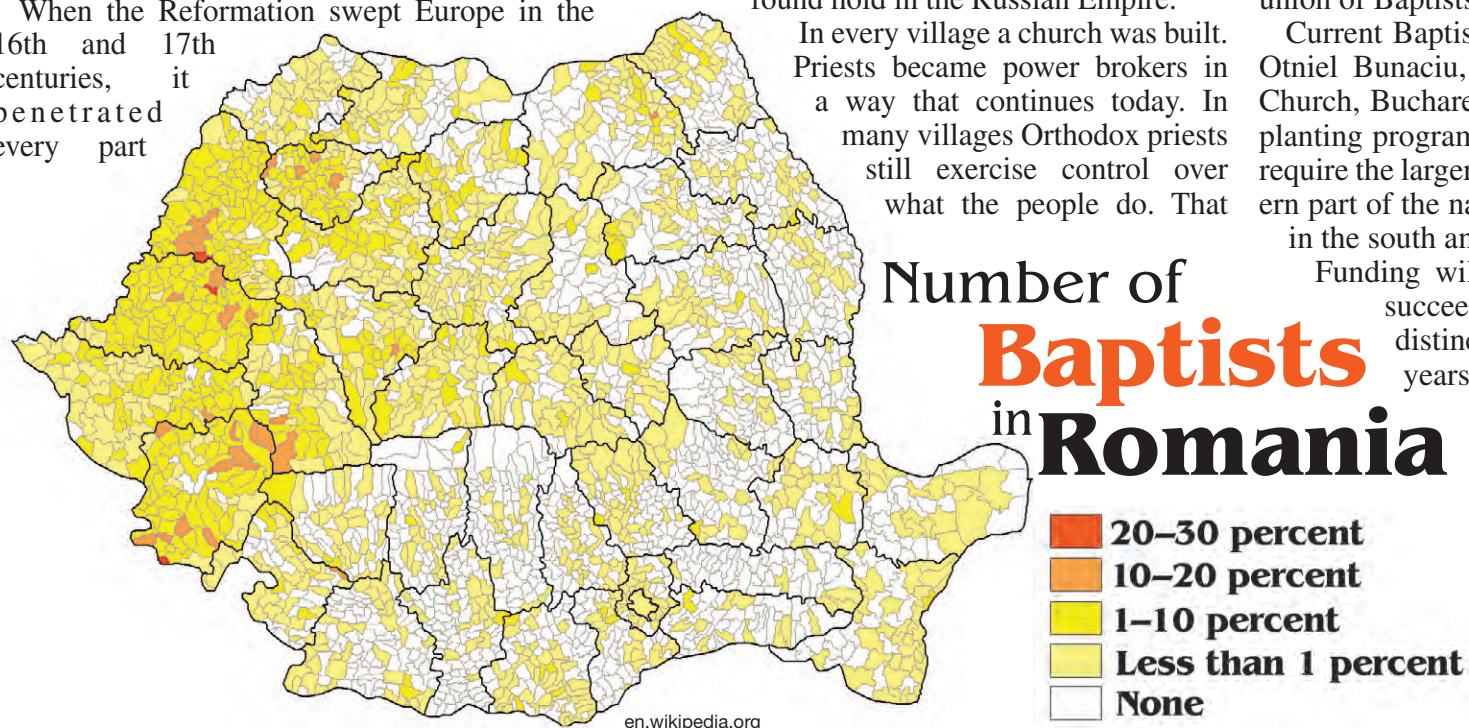
Romanian Baptist officials estimate that about one-third of all modern-day Baptists have migrated to other nations. That is why one finds a Romanian Baptist Association in the United States and Romanian Baptist churches in Canada and parts of Europe.

### 'A sending union'

Romania also sends workers to other nations. One pastor said, "We are not only a receiving union of Baptists, we are a sending union."

Current Baptist Union of Romania President Otniel Bunaciu, pastor of Providence Baptist Church, Bucharest, is trying to revive a church planting program within the union. This would require the larger, stronger churches in the western part of the nation helping to start new work in the south and east.

Funding will not be the only issue if he succeeds. Romania is almost three distinct areas formed by hundreds of years of history that continue to influence the religion and culture of the people. Understanding those influences caused by different histories for the different regions of the nation is the beginning point in understanding Baptists in Romania. (See coverage on Baptists in Romania on pages 1, 9-12.)





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

(ISSN 0738-7741;  
USPS 011-080)

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

**PRINT  
SUBSCRIPTION RATES**  
Church Budget — \$13.75  
Individual — \$22.25

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

**DR. BOBBY S. TERRY  
EDITOR**

Jennifer Davis Rash  
Executive Editor

Neisha Fuson  
Editorial Assistant  
for Online Communications

Julie Payne  
News Writer

Lauren C. Grim  
Designer

Wanda Bergeron  
Local Editions

Linda Harrison  
Financial Administrator

Bill Gilmore  
Advertising Director

Debbie Campbell  
Director of Circulation  
and Public Relations

**NEWS SERVICES**  
Baptist Press (BP), Associated Baptist Press (ABP), Religion News Service (RNS), Forum 18 (F18), Morning Star News (MS).

**POSTMASTER**  
Send address changes to:  
The Alabama Baptist  
3310 Independence Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35209

**ADDRESS CHANGE**  
Send old and new addresses, and name of church to:  
Circulation Department  
3310 Independence Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35209  
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Full member of  
Alabama Press Association

'Nation's Top Regional  
Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008,  
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013  
as judged by Associated  
Church Press, Evangelical  
Press Association or Religious  
Communicators Council



Photo by Brian Harris

**Main photo:** A memorial for the Heavenly Hundred sits in Independence Square in Kiev. **Small photo:** Makeshift barricades are still in place in Independence Square following the deadly riots earlier this year.



Photo by Brian Harris

# 'Pray for us'

Ukrainian believers Sasha (center) and Pavel (right) give Alabama's Brian Harris a tour of Independence Square in Kiev.



Photo courtesy of Brian Harris

## Ukrainian believers share glimpse of life amid conflict, ask for prayer

By Brian Harris  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**D**id you not know this place is dangerous?" Pavel, a Ukrainian pastor, asked as I walked through Independence Square in Kiev on May 7. "What did your wife think (about this trip)?"

I quickly replied, "There are a lot of people praying for me right now while I walk your streets. I wanted to be here so they will be able to see what the Square has become now and so others can pray for you."

Ukraine has been headline news since February when peaceful political protests turned deadly in Independence Square and in March when Russia seized the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Violent demonstrations erupted in other eastern Ukrainian cities in April.

And while the unrest continues in various parts of the country, Independence Square easily tells the story of what happened there.

Every entrance is blockaded and guarded by

Ukrainian military members. Tires, scrap metal and burned-out shells of cars are all around. The bare cement where the passionate fingers of protestors dug to pull out pavers to throw at the police stands as a reminder. The blood of the Heavenly Hundred — as the ones who lost their lives are called — is replaced by makeshift memorials. Candles line the street.

### Walking the streets

As I walked the streets with my interpreter, Sasha, the military members moved in and out of tents in the area. They now depend on donations from the Ukrainian people to feed them, and they want the true story of what happened told.

Sasha, a believer and native of Kiev who also spent five years in the United States, shared about the historical significance of Eastern versus Western Ukraine.

Eastern Ukraine had previously been more of a Russian area before being unified as Ukraine, he explained. Its people speak Russian and it

influences everything including their buildings. Western Ukraine has more European influences and thus its own style and language, he added.

The reason for their unification points to religion, Sasha said. While much of Europe has traditionally been influenced by the Catholic Church, Eastern and Western Ukraine's influence came from the Eastern Orthodox Church, similar to Russia.

And so with three distinct groups grasping for power — one fighting for the continued unity of Eastern and Western Ukraine, another eager to let all of Eastern Ukraine go to Russia and another wanting to allow all of Ukraine to join with Russia — the unrest continues to grow, Sasha said. It was these three views that led to the violence in Independence Square earlier this year, he noted.

As Sasha and I said goodbye to Pavel, he said, "Please pray for us."

I smiled, shook his hand and promised to pray for them, and that I would ask my friends to do the same. 🙏

## Hagee's 'blood moon' reference in previous TAB article clarified

**T**he "Blood moon' lunar eclipses not a sign, Baptist professors say" article in the April 24 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* caught the attention of several readers.

The article, a combination of Religion News Service and Baptist Press articles, stated that John Hagee, author of "Four Blood Moons: Something Is About to Change," claimed Jesus' return would be

tied to the series of four "blood moons" occurring within the next 17 months (one of which already occurred April 15).

Also according to the article, Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, Texas, suggested in his book "that a Rapture will occur where Christians will be taken to heaven (and) Israel will go to war in a great battle called Armageddon."

*The Alabama Baptist* was unable to reach Hagee directly but did receive the following response from the book's publisher, Worthy Publishing, and its in-house editorial team: "In 'Four Blood Moons,' chapter 16, page 244, Hagee explicitly states: 'The fourth series of Four Blood Moons is coming. They are extremely rare even by scientific standards. God is shout-

ing to us, "Something big is about to happen."

However, the coming Four Blood Moons of 2014-2015 does not mean the Rapture is going to happen during that time. Why? Because the Rapture could happen at any moment. What they are telling us is that God is getting ready to change the course of human history once again." (TAB)

## SENIOR ADULT EVANGELISM CONFERENCE



# 'Look unto JESUS'

Photo by Neisha Fuson

The 2014 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference was held at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, on May 5. Harper Shannon shares during the afternoon session.

## Evangelism Conference challenges about 600 senior adults to be creative fishermen

By Julie Payne  
The Alabama Baptist

Shortly after taking the stage at the 2014 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference, Harper Shannon admitted to the audience that a particular sermon message had been on his heart for many months beforehand.

And at the conference, held at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, on May 5, Shannon delivered that message to the approximately 600 participants.

A former director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) from 1985 to 1997, author

and current supply preacher for Shorterville Baptist Church in Judson Baptist Association, Shannon guided the audience through three key passages in Scripture when Jesus said, "It is."

### Quoting Scripture

In the first key passage, Shannon shared from Matthew 4 when Jesus was severely tempted by Satan in the wilderness three times after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. In these particular instances, Jesus always responded to the temptation with Scripture, Shannon said.

"Our Lord is quoting the written Word. He, being the Living Word, is pointing us that

don't hear the Word and obey the Word to pay attention," Shannon said.

Shannon noted that for the 68 years of his own ministry, the core of his preaching philosophy is that "the preacher and the teacher is responsible" for studying God's Word and addressing the meaning and significance of what God's Word is. "And our task first and foremost is to preach the Word of God ... which always reveals the Living Word of God," he said.

The second key passage Shannon introduced was Matthew 14:27, where Jesus said to His disciples, "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."

In this passage, while Jesus was on a mountain praying, His disciples were on a boat as a storm began brewing. "His disciples were awakened by this storm ... and thought surely they were going to perish until they spotted a figure in the midst of the storm coming toward them, walking on the sea," Shannon noted. "It was Jesus saying ... 'Don't be afraid. It is I.'"

He added, "When the storms of life are raging look ... to the Lord, look to the Master of the sea, the One who calms the waters and calms the waves. The written Word reveals the Living Word of God."

The third key passage of Scripture that Shannon highlighted was when Jesus was hanging in near death on the cross.

"He received the sponge of a little liquid, water and a touch of vinegar, giving His parched tongue and dry lips ... human strength to say these words from the cross of Calvary ... 'It is finished.' ... The work of redemption, the work of providing personal salvation to all ... who will believe ... it is finished," Shannon said.

Anyone can repent and be saved, he added, noting Jesus rose from the grave and ascended back to the right hand of the Father. "He now intercedes for us ... and your work and my work is not yet done," Shannon said.

And the vital work of serving as fishers of men is something believers need to be intentional about, said Jay Wolf, speaking from Matthew 4:19 when Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

"Did you know that in the last three years ... our Southern Baptist family has been significantly declining?" asked Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery. "Did you know that in 2013, we baptized the same number of people that we baptized in 1948; a 60-year low?"

With many more people and churches in existence today, Wolf said he thinks it's legitimate to ask the question, "Why?" "Could it be that we have either lost our passion for fishing or just become keepers of the aquarium?" he asked.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Singer/songwriter Squire Parsons sings several crowd favorites such as 'Sweet Beulah Land' at the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference.



Photo by Neisha Fuson

Frank Jones, of Frank Jones Ministries and who serves as the accompanist for the Alabama Singing Men, plays solo pieces and accompanies the worship leader during the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference.

## SENIOR ADULT EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

***“Folks, you’ve got more time than any generation to share Jesus. ... Wherever you are, witness for Jesus ... Jesus said the fields are white unto harvest but the laborers are few.”***

**Pastor emeritus Ray Newcomb  
FBC Millington, Tenn.**

Dressed in outdoor clothing and holding a fishing rod to emphasize his message, Wolf noted fishermen have two common characteristics: they are consistent and they are creative.

He then shared a story about an unbeliever he had consistently “chipped away” at for three years. “I’m not fancy but at least I can be faithful. ... 80 percent of success is just showing up. ... I could keep on loving on my brother,” he said.

Then one day, Wolf happened to notice a change in the man and sure enough the man told Wolf he was ready to receive Jesus as his Savior. “There are people out there who want to be caught, but we have to go fishing for them. We can’t give up on them,” Wolf noted.

And a fisherman is not only consistent but he’s also creative, he said. “A fisherman ... will do whatever is necessary” to get a fish.

He explained, “If your personality is winsome, you’ll win some. ... If you will be creative in connecting with people and see people through the eyes of Jesus, well you can’t help but win some because if your faith is real it is inherently contagious.”

And churches can either be of a fort or a factory mentality, Wolf added. “A fort simply protects, a factory produces. ... If we enter the posture of defense and we’re just trying to protect, we become a holy huddle; we’re ... no longer producing people who look like Jesus and are making a difference in the world like Christ commanded.”

He added, “We are called to connect people and do what it takes to connect those people who are lost. Why? Because there is so much on the line.”

### Sharing with loved ones

Wolf then pointed to the motivator: heaven and hell are real. “Do you want to stand before the Lord and your family be missing? It’s incumbent upon you for you to use your influence, your resource(s) to see your loved one come to Christ,” he explained.

Another motivator is obedience, he added. “Jesus said, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’ — that’s an imperative ... that’s not a suggestion.”

And senior adults have more time to win souls than they ever have before, said Ray Newcomb, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Millington, Tenn., and a former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

“Folks, you’ve got more time than any generation to share Jesus. ... Wherever you are, witness for Jesus ... Jesus said the fields are white unto harvest but the laborers are few.”

Newcomb spoke from Philippians 3:9–14, where Paul writes of three things we need.

First forget the past of guilt, Newcomb said. “The older we get we look back and we see things in our life that we don’t like, things that we did that we’re not proud of. And the devil ... keeps us looking back.”

Some adults are living in the past of their guilt, he added. “Is your past guilt keeping you from looking forward?”

And not only is there past guilt, there also is past grief. “Let me tell you something folks, you’re not finished yet,” he encouraged, advising not to let it consume you so you aren’t serving God now.

Second focus on the present, Newcomb said, sharing the story of Florence Chadwick, a swimmer who accomplished a tremendous feat in 1950 by swimming the English Channel in 13 hours and 20 minutes, breaking the record. Then in 1952, Chadwick was inspired to swim from Catalina Island to the coast of California, Newcomb said.

“She ... swam 15 hours before (the) fog set in,” he said, adding that she eventually quit. When they lifted her into the boat, she was less than a quarter-mile from shore, he said, noting it disappointed her so

much that she tried it again later and, when the fog set in again, she made it because she had readjusted her focus.

Newcomb noted, “Fog sets in when we get older sometimes — the fog of disappointment, (the) fog of discouragement. ... But where’s your focus? ... The Bible says look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.”

Third, Paul said there is a future prize. “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14).

“The world’s not calling me, God is calling me,” Newcomb said. “I’m not just going to a place, I’m going to a Person. I’m going to Jesus Christ.”

In addition to the messages by the three speakers, the conference — organized by the SBOM’s office of evangelism and made possible by gifts through the Cooperative Program — was further accentuated by special music from pianist Frank Jones and southern gospel singer/songwriter Squire Parsons.

Parsons, accompanied by his son, Samuel, sang in both the morning and afternoon session, singing several crowd favorites that spurred the audience to sing and clap along. A particular favorite they sang was “Sweet Beulah Land.”

The 2015 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference will be held May 4 at First Baptist Church, Prattville. ☞



Photo by Neisha Fuson

**Samuel Parsons, son of singer/songwriter Squire Parsons, sings with his father during the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference.**



Photo by Neisha Fuson

**Ray Newcomb, pastor emeritus of FBC Millington, Tenn., and a former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, shares from Philippians 3 at the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference on May 5.**



Photo by Neisha Fuson

**Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, takes the stage as the first speaker at the Senior Adult Evangelism Conference using a fishing pole to illustrate his message about being a ‘fisher of men.’**



Photo by Neisha Fuson

**Chris Diffey, minister of music and worship for Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, leads the congregation in worship at the 2014 Senior Adult Evangelism Conference held May 5 in Lakeside Baptist’s sanctuary.**

## Continued Cleanup efforts

Dwight Wells (left), Denton Dozier (center) and Donnie Foster remove a waterlogged mattress from a home in Summerdale. The men served on a mudout team from Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan.



Photo by Doug Rogers

## Alabama Baptist DR teams serve across state

Soaked with water and debris, a mattress from a home in Summerdale was removed by members of a disaster relief team from Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, on May 8, as they worked in Baldwin Baptist Association.

Some areas are still recovering from nearly 15 inches of rain that fell April 29.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams from across the state have continued to work in multiple areas after the tornadic events of April 28 and flooding of April 29, according to Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Johnson said mudout, chainsaw, heavy equipment, child care and chaplaincy teams from multiple associations are serving across the state. Work should be complete by mid-May, he said.

Damage stretched across the state from Pickens County to Lee County and from Limestone County to the coast as well as many other areas.

Alabama Baptist associations involved in disaster relief include: Colbert-Lauderdale, Muscle Shoals, East Cullman, West Cullman, Morgan, Limestone, Tennessee River, Madison, Etowah, Marshall, DeKalb, Sand Mountain, Calhoun, Cleburne, Tuskegee-Lee, Tallapoosa, East Liberty, Elmore, Baldwin, Columbia, Escambia, Birmingham, Fayette, Walker, Lamar, Pickens, Tuscaloosa, Bessemer, North Jefferson and Salem-Troy.

Crawford Baptist Church, Phenix City, in Russell Baptist Association became one of the hubs for collecting donations for storm survivors and served as a feeding site for the community, Johnson said, with Pastor Steve Williamson "leading his church to minister to the community." (TAB)

## Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, *The Alabama Baptist*

### James Dendy



DENDY

First Baptist Church, Pell City  
St. Clair Baptist Association

**FAVORITE VERSE:** Philippians 4:19

**FAVORITE HYMN:** "In Christ Alone"

**HOBBY:** Working in workshop

**FAMILY STATUS:** Married to wife Ann for 10 years; late wife, Blanch Bain Dendy (married for 48 years until her death); late children,

Freida Ennett and Chris Dendy; five step-children, Tom Mann, Jim Mann, Susie McClanahan, Cindy Alarid and Judy Shockey; three grandchildren; nine step-grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; one step-great-grandchild

James Dendy, 83, is a chaplain for the Pell City Police Department and St. Clair Baptist Association Disaster Relief, serving in such areas as Staten Island after Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and Athens, Ala., after the recent April 28 tornado. He attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has served as pastor of East Centre Baptist Church, Centre, in Cherokee Baptist Association; Clay Baptist Church, in North Jefferson Baptist Association and First Baptist Church, Odenville, in St. Clair Baptist Association. Dendy has served on missions teams and has worked with Habitat for Humanity. He and his wife, Ann, have a ministry of visiting people in nursing homes. In addition to ministry service, Dendy — who was a Marine during the Korean Conflict — worked in secular jobs through the years, retiring fully only 10 years ago.

A: It demands total commitment.

**Q: What do you get from the ministry?**

A: A sense of fulfillment and purpose.

**Q: How do family members support you?**

A: Wholeheartedly. Ann goes with me as a partner in our ministry in the nursing home. She's supportive of my missions trips.

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

A: I'll continue as best I can to serve as chaplain with the police department and supply preaching. I also do a monthly chapel program at the Village at Cook Springs (nursing home and assisted living facility). I'll continue to do chaplaincy with disaster relief.

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

A: I trust that it will maintain a sense of fulfillment and purpose, knowing that I am doing God's will. One of the blessings of foreign missions trips and disaster relief is seeing people come to faith in Jesus Christ in a much more open way than every day in the United States.

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

A: Peace of mind, contentment, purpose and a sure hope, joy. 🙏

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

A: An uncle who was a minister. I was raised in a Christian home. That had a big influence. That was the largest influence — the influence of my mother, my father and my uncle.

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

A: Edgewood Baptist Church in Gadsden in '48 or '49.

**Q: What does the ministry demand?**

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.



### BETHLEHEM

► Poplar Springs Church, Uriah, will celebrate homecoming May 25. The Randy Silcox family will sing at 10 a.m., and the morning worship will begin at 11 a.m. John Marks, director of missions for Bethlehem Association, will speak. A covered dish lunch will follow the morning worship service. Walter Sheffield is pastor.

### BIBB

► Schultz Creek Church, Centreville, will hold a singing with The Waylighters Quartet on May 31, 6–8 p.m. Ben Corley is pastor. ► Six Mile Church, Brierfield, will celebrate homecoming June 1. The worship service will be at 11 a.m. and dinner on the grounds will be at noon. There also will be a singing at 1 p.m. with The Royal Masters Quartet from Bessemer. For information call Daniel Parsons at 205-225-0234.

### BLOUNT

► Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond, will hold a

third Sunday night singing with Canaan's Crossing from Arab on May 19, 6 p.m. For information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

### LAMAR

► Randy Tolleson Jr. is the new pastor of First Church,



TOLLESON

Vernon. He previously served at several churches in Mississippi as music pastor and student pastor for almost 20 years. He is a graduate of Mississippi State University and Liberty Seminary in Lynchburg, Va. He and his wife, Shannon, have two children.

### MADISON

► Gospel singer Ivan Parker will be in concert at Hillwood Church, Huntsville, on May 31, 6 p.m. Doors will open at 5 p.m. For information call 256-883-

0485. Charles Freeman is pastor.

### SIPSEY

► New Hope Church, Berry, will celebrate its 125th anniversary along with homecoming/decoration June 1, 10 a.m. Ed Steelman is pastor.

### ST. CLAIR

► Cook Springs Church will celebrate homecoming June 1, 10:30 a.m.–noon with singing and music. Guest group Jordan River Trio will sing. Lunch will follow. Bring a covered dish. Jimmy Hopkins is pastor.

### TUSCALOOSA

► Flatwoods Church, Northport, will hold a Vacation Bible School kickoff June 8, 5:30 p.m. with inflatables and food. For information call 205-339-3111. Cecil Smith is pastor.

### TUSKEGEE LEE

► Salem Macon Church, Notasulga, will hold revival May 18–May 21, 7 nightly. Evangelist Perry Neal will speak and Crystal Morris will lead music. Mike Stephens is pastor. 🙏

# State Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament winners

The 2014 State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament were held May 3 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. The winners of each division are listed below.



Photo by Doug Rogers

**YOUTH BIBLE DRILL**  
(L to r) second place, Emily Urquhart, Rock Springs Baptist Church, Tallassee; first place, Sarah Last, Harmony Baptist Church, Hillsboro; third place, Michael Hopkins, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville



Photo by Doug Rogers

**HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE DRILL**  
(L to r) second place, Ellie Morris, Leatherwood Baptist Church, Wellington; first place, Michael Last, Harmony Baptist Church, Hillsboro



Photo by Doug Rogers

**SPEAKERS TOURNAMENT**  
(L to r) second place, Abby Lawrence, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; first place, Kathryn Gosselin, Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery; tied for third place, Rebecca Smith and Jordan Ross, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile

## Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

### From Easter to Pentecost

## Ascension Significance (Part 3 of 5)

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

As we continue thinking about the significance of Christ's ascension, the Book of Hebrews draws our attention to another aspect, His return to heaven to be enthroned at the Father's right hand. In several passages we learn that the ascension marked the inauguration of Christ's high priestly ministry.

In Hebrews 4:14-16 the ascension is expressed as passing through the heavens, when we read, "We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." That the ascended Christ is our great High Priest is part of our encouragement to "hold fast our confession" (v. 14).

Furthermore since He assumed a full human nature and lived in our kind of world, Jesus experienced temptation, just as we do. The grand difference, of course, is that He never yielded to His temptations. He was "without sin." Nonetheless having faced temptation, our heavenly High Priest is able "to sympathize with our weaknesses" (v. 15). The sympathizing Savior knows our frailties, and that moves Him to help us in our times of weakness and need.

### Confidence in prayer

A further result of Christ's ascension to begin His priestly ministry in our behalf is confidence in prayer. The practical truth for Christian living in this passage exhorts, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16). Thus the ascension of Christ connects with us at the point of prayer.

Hebrews 6:19-20 refers to the ascen-

sion as Jesus going as a forerunner into the heavenly sanctuary. In so doing, this passage also references Christ's priestly ministry, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a High Priest forever." When Jesus ascended, in language descriptive of the ministry of Israel's earthly high priests, we are told that He entered "the inner place behind the curtain," which we are to understand as the very presence of God Himself. This was just as He said from the cross, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

### Christian hope

Just as is true of His resurrection, Christ's ascension is part of our Christian hope. As He is, so we will be. Joined by faith to Him, we also look forward with certain hope of going where He has gone. However turbulent life may become, our hope is a sure anchor.

If we continue reading in Hebrews we will come to chapter 7, where verses 25-26 elaborate further about our ascended and enthroned High Priest. Now permanently in the presence of God, He makes intercession for us. His intercessory ministry enables us to "draw near to God" and assures us of our never-failing acceptance before God. The passage calls this being saved "to the uttermost" (v. 25).

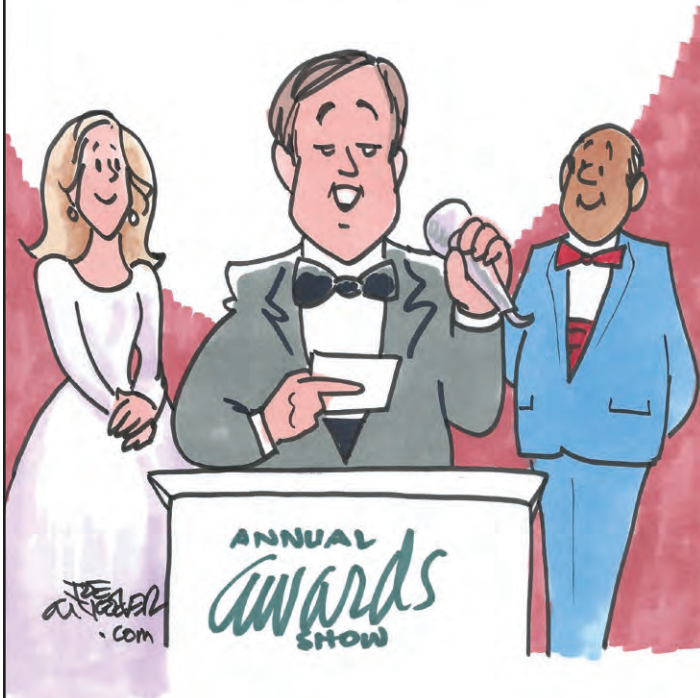
Hebrews 9:24 emphasizes again the fact that in His ascension "Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself." Having returned to heaven, our High Priest appears "in the presence of God on our behalf." The imagery enlarges slightly to suggest a High Priest who becomes our heavenly defense attorney, who represents us before God. With such representation, no charge can be brought against us that can stand up in God's court. As it were, the scars in His hands and feet become eloquent testimony that He has already borne our judgment, and we go free for all eternity. ☩

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.



## REFLECTIONS

"AND FOR BEST SUPPORTING PLAYER IN A MAJOR PRODUCTION, THE AWARD GOES TO OUR STATE BAPTIST PAPER!"



Follow us on Twitter  
@AlabamaBaptist



YOUR PRIORITY IS MINISTRY...  
OURS IS GETTING YOU THERE

### TheBusCenter.com

Just a few clicks  
and you'll find the right  
bus for your needs AND  
your budget!

- Huge Selection - New & Used
- Special Financing Offers
- Dedicated Warranty Personnel
- Full Inventory of Replacement Parts
- Exceptional Service Facilities

800-367-9463

TRANSPORTATION SOUTH-BIRMINGHAM

TheBusCenter.com

ogurt our way

CALL US FOR YOUR  
NEXT LIGHTED SIGN!



1-800-729-6844

205-664-0955

www.reliablesigns.com

# Award-winning

For the 18th consecutive year, *The Alabama Baptist* has been named among the top regional Christian newspapers in the nation. Below is a list of awards won by *The Alabama Baptist* and other state Baptist entities based on work published in 2013.

### The Alabama Baptist

- ▶ **Overall newspaper** — award of excellence (RCC and EPA); best in class — award of merit (ACP); redesign award of excellence (ACP); most improved — award of merit (EPA); publication redesign by Lauren C. Grim and *The Alabama Baptist* staff — fifth place (EPA)
- ▶ **"Today I am Grieving"** by Bob Terry — personal experience award of excellence (ACP)
- ▶ **"Thinking of going?"** by Grace Thornton — personally useful article award of excellence (ACP)
- ▶ **"Human Trafficking"** by Kristen Padilla — theme section award of excellence (ACP) and in-depth coverage award of merit (ACP)
- ▶ **January Bible Study** by Fisher Humphreys — Bible reference award of excellence (ACP)
- ▶ **"Unimaginable tragedy" (Coverage of Shahan murder)** by Jennifer Davis Rash and Neisha Fuson — news writing award of excellence (RCC)
- ▶ **"The Healing Continues"** by Grace Thornton — general article first place (EPA) and personality article fourth place (EPA)
- ▶ **"A Threat to Religious Liberty"** editorial by Bob Terry — award of merit (ACP)
- ▶ **"Reputation Is Everything"** editorial by Bob Terry — second place (BCA)
- ▶ **"50 Years after 'The Movement'"** by John L. Cantelow III — personal experience award of merit (ACP)
- ▶ **"Rashional Thoughts" (Rashionalthoughts.com)** by Jennifer Davis Rash — award of merit (RCC); honorable mention (ACP)
- ▶ **"Faith and Family"** by *The Alabama Baptist* staff — department award of merit (ACP)
- ▶ **"Health Care in America"** by Jennifer Davis Rash and Sondra Washington — article series third place (EPA)
- ▶ **"How to deal with a shooter"** by Grace Thornton — professional resource honorable mention (ACP)
- ▶ **"How to cope with grief"** by Lauren C. Grim — spread design honorable mention (ACP)

### Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

- ▶ **Firewood Giveaway Ministry** by Bethany Rogers — video editorial feature more than 5 minutes first place (BCA) and video editorial feature less than 5 minutes second place (BCA)
- ▶ **Sing Your Song T-shirt** by Jesse Conte — advertising, specialty item first place (BCA)
- ▶ **"Changing Lives Through Campus Ministries"** by Doug Rogers — scripts second place (BCA)
- ▶ **One Mission Students luggage tag** by Jesse Conte — advertising, specialty item second place (BCA)
- ▶ **Church Planting** by Jesse Conte — print collateral, brochure second place (BCA)
- ▶ **Praying Across Alabama** by Communications Services — public relations, special events third place (BCA)
- ▶ **One Mission Students Prayer Walk** by Jesse Conte — special display design third place (BCA)
- ▶ **Church Revitalization** by Jesse Conte — print collateral, brochure third place (BCA)
- ▶ **Be the One T-shirt** by Jesse Conte — advertising, specialty item third place (BCA)

### University of Mobile

- ▶ **"In the Center of Worship"** by Kathy Dean — feature writing first place (BCA)
- ▶ **2013 Leadership Banquet** by UMobile Marketing & Public Relations — public relation, special events second place (BCA)
- ▶ **Connections logo** by Jay Adcock — logo design second place (BCA)
- ▶ **Ram Country billboard** by Jay Adcock and Lesa Moore — billboard design second place (BCA)
- ▶ **UMobile Magazine website** by Trey Taulbee — website third place (BCA)
- ▶ **"Sweet Dreams"** by Will Drake — feature writing third place (BCA)
- ▶ **Charitable Giving newsletter** by Jay Adcock and Lesa Moore — newsletter design third place (BCA)
- ▶ **University of Mobile Magazine** by UMobile Marketing & Public Relations — magazine design third place (BCA)

### Samford University

- ▶ **"Bobby Bowden, Samford University"** by Philip Poole and Brad Radice — television commercial award of excellence (RCC)

Associated Church Press (ACP)  
Baptist Communicators Association (BCA)  
Evangelical Press Association (EPA)  
Religion Communicators Council (RCC)

# 'Call to missions'

## Couple focuses on evangelism, church planting

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

Cameron Armstrong spends most of his days in parks. Most mornings he runs 5 or 6 miles through a string of city parks in the university area of Bucharest where he lives. But the important time he spends in parks is later in the day when he attempts to start spiritual conversations with students and others who come to the park to relax or pass the time of day.

On the day I visited the park with Armstrong, he took me to a specific bench. We sat for a few moments as dozens of people young and old leisurely meandered by. Few seemed in a hurry. The park with its green space, small lakes and unhurried pace provides a break from the hustle and bustle of a city with more than 3 million people.

Armstrong points across the way to a grassy area under a large tree. "Right over there I had a Bible study with a man for several weeks. We sat on a blanket and I taught him the Bible. I thought he would become a Christian but then he just stopped coming," he said. "There are a lot of experiences like that here."

Armstrong's assignment through the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board (IMB) Journeyman program is evangelism and church planting. He worships weekly in Agape Church, a church plant that recently became an official church. In Romania, a church must have at least 21 members to be considered an official church. Many of the members of Agape Church are young and are attracted by the church's upbeat worship style.

"I try and get some of the church members to come to the park with me, so we can talk with others about Jesus," Armstrong said. "My job is not only to talk to people about Jesus but to disciple others so they can do it when I am not around."

Armstrong shared that he was hesitant to initiate spiritual conversations with total strangers when he first arrived in Bucharest almost two years ago. "But you learn to read their faces," he said. "You can almost tell which ones are open to a conversation."

"That is what I want to help teach the people in my church," he emphasized.

"They can learn to share the gospel just like I do."

Armstrong and other IMB workers use a series of five questions to initiate and guide their conversations.

Richard Clark, leader of the IMB Bucharest missions team, said inevitably there will be a time when a spiritual element surfaces and the conversation can be turned toward spiritual topics.

"We never emphasize we are Baptists. Our goal is to introduce them to the Lord Jesus, not to Baptists," Clark said. "If we can get them into a Bible study, then we have a chance to tell them about how Jesus died for their sins."

Generally the name Baptist is a put-off to Romanians. Clark said to be Roman-

ian is to be Eastern Orthodox in the minds of many. The Orthodox Church is seen as the door to heaven, so many identify with the Orthodox even if they never participate in the church.

"That's why we ask people to read the Bible and see what the Bible says. We don't debate them about denominations, just what the Bible says," Clark added.

Still IMB workers report numerous ongoing conversations that may last for weeks. Armstrong

explained that after the first conversation it is customary to ask if the individual is open to a second meeting. If so, the two will meet again, usually on the same bench in the park.

"Coming to the park is a regular part of the day for many of these people," he said. "They have a set routine, so you will see the same people sitting on the same bench at the same time day after day."

### Personal witnessing

Clark said one of the important roles IMB workers play is helping national Christians learn to share their faith personally in a natural manner. "If we can help Romanian Christians learn how to do personal witnessing we will have made a contribution to the kingdom of God here," he said.

Armstrong and his wife, Jessica, have nearly completed their two-year Journeyman tour. They will return to the United States this summer and are on a fast track to be reappointed as career workers.

"The Lord used this time in Romania to confirm our call to missions," he said. "We look forward to investing our lives to help reach Romania for Christ." ☞



Photo courtesy of Cameron Armstrong  
**Jessica & Cameron Armstrong**



Dwayne Brown, a Southern Baptist representative to Romania, stands by the house that was purchased in hopes of starting a new church plant. In the background stands the unfinished building to start a new chapel in the village of Florica.

Photo by Bob Terry

# 'These people need the gospel'

## Southern Baptist reps concentrate on Buzăń County

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

Buzăń County is only a few miles from Bucharest, but it might as well be on the other side of the world. Bucharest is a cosmopolitan city and has been since it was a trading center along the old Silk Road connecting Europe with China. Buzăń County is primarily agricultural. Dark rich dirt grows grains, vegetables and other products that make it part of the breadbasket of Romania.

Bucharest is dotted with international companies, manufacturing centers, transportation hubs and universities. Buzăń County is dotted with greenhouses and farm sheds.

Bucharest is a city of 3 million people with architecture that earned it the title of "Paris of Eastern Europe" before World War II as well as now showcasing the latest steel and glass high-rise skyscrapers. Buzăń County is filled with small villages spread between flat fields broken only by lines of trees marking the roads that crisscross the county.

In Bucharest a little more than 0.5 percent of the population is evangelical Christians. In Buzăń County the percent is 0.19.

For Dwayne and Donna Brown, the situation is even more challenging. Currently this couple concentrates on a 1,000-square-mile area of Buzăń County with a population of about 30,000 and only one church — Hope Baptist Church in the village of Pitulicea that averages about 30 people in its worship service.

There these Southern Baptist representatives found a ministry partner in Marian Jipa, who shared their vision of reaching the nearby villages with the gospel (see story, page 1). The Browns cannot be in the area all the time but Jipa is a permanent presence.

The Browns — along with other United States donors — helped fund expansions at the Hope Baptist building. The additions include a kitchen, bathroom and small

apartment where the Browns and volunteers often stay.

Last summer Brown worked with two volunteers from the Baptist seminary in Bucharest in evangelism and ministry projects in the various villages. Volunteer teams from the U.S. also have helped him in ministry.

Within 15 minutes by car in various directions are at least 20 villages. But most people in the area do not have cars or other forms of public transportation. Most walk, ride bicycles or ride in horse-drawn wagons. If residents have to go to town for some emergency, most hitchhike.

### Opening homes

In villages like Casota, population about 2,000 in a series of connected villages, and Margineanu, population about 1,000, families from Hope Baptist have opened their homes as outreach centers. The "JESUS" film has been shown to outdoor audiences and ongoing Bible studies have been started. The Browns hope these Bible studies will someday grow into churches.

Walking the village lanes and talking to people along the way has been the primary outreach strategy. Most of the conversations are pleasant, the Browns said. Some turn to spiritual matters. A few have resulted in individual Bible studies.

But sometimes situations can turn tense, they noted. Baptist Christians have been verbally abused and physically threatened in some places.

In Florica a home has been purchased in hopes of starting a new church plant. A Romanian pastor would live in the house and the church would meet in a building being constructed on the lot. At present the structure is only partially built. Brown said it will take about \$5,000 to finish the project.

"Working in the villages is not for everybody," Brown reflected. "But this is where God has called me. These people need the gospel like those in Bucharest and every other place. Maybe God will lay it on someone else's heart to help us reach these rural villages with the gospel." ☞

Pastor Gary Fenton (standing, right) of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, addresses a class at Romania's Baptist Theological Institute of Bucharest (BTIB) while BTIB President Daniel Maris interprets. BTIB is the primary source for trained ministers for the nation's 1,800 Baptist churches.



# Training pastors

Photo by Bob Terry

## Baptist Theological Institute of Bucharest prepares pastors to serve in Romania

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

For Romania's Baptist Theological Institute of Bucharest (BTIB), its 93-year history has been turbulent. Begun in the aftermath of the "War to End all Wars" — World War I — when Baptists were first recognized as an official religion by the government, the school had to endure opposition from nationalistic governments, a second world war, confiscation of its property, persecution by communist governments and resistance from a society that considered Baptists a dangerous and heretical sect.

Today despite continuing challenges, BTIB is a respected and fully accredited part of the educational establishment of Romania and, more importantly, the primary source for trained ministers for the nation's 1,800 Baptist churches.

As graduation nears for the current class, most men already know where they will serve. Should a graduate not be called by the time he finishes, the school will use its network of influence to find the new minister a place to serve.

### Four-year program

BTIB's primary function is to prepare pastors. Young men, most coming out of high school, enroll in a four-year program leading to a bachelor of theology degree. With that in hand, they are eligible to receive a license from the Baptist Union of Romania making them eligible to serve as pastor of a Baptist church in the country. The Romanian government requires church pastors be approved by their respective unions.

The young men study under the BTIB faculty, which also forms the theological faculty of the Baptist College located at the University of Bucharest. The academic credentials of the

faculty reveal advanced degrees from top theological schools across the continent as well as Southern Baptist Convention seminaries in the United States.

Faculty members are more than professors. They serve as pastors of churches in Bucharest and beyond, enabling them to help young men make the connection between their classroom work and their call to ministry. For example, BTIB President Daniel Maris serves as pastor of Golgotha Baptist Church, Bucharest. New Testament professor Otniel Bunaciu, who currently serves as president of the Baptist Union of Romania and as president of the European Baptist Federation, serves as pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Bucharest. Bunaciu's father served as pastor of Providence Baptist before him and they served together for a few years as the role was handed off to Bunaciu. With their years combined, the Bunacius have served Providence for 58 years.

Students follow a similar pattern of mixing academic studies with practical ministries. Each student must spend six weeks working under the supervision of a local pastor. Each Christmas and spring, the young men spend one week working in the churches. In the summer, each spends a month working in a ministry project.

The supervising pastor evaluates the student and BTIB faculty reviews the evaluation with the student to increase the learning experience.

The would-be pastors study the Old and New Testaments, Christian theology, apologetics, missiology, evangelism, leadership and more. When they receive their degree they are ready for pastoral work or to pursue advanced degrees anywhere in Europe or the U.S.

Many of the young men enroll at the Baptist College for master's work, and some continue on into the doctor of philosophy degree in theology program. Currently more than 40 students are pursuing the master's degree there.

The Baptist College also provides an educational tract for other evangelicals in Romania including Pentecostals and Brethren students. Again it is the BTIB faculty teaching in the Baptist College, though this time accredited by the University of Bucharest.

In addition to its resident students, BTIB has about 50 students enrolled in online classes. The school is approved for 25 students in each of its four years of residential study and 50 students each year in the online program.

Southern Baptists initially helped underwrite construction and operating costs of BTIB but that stopped long ago. However,

Richard Clark, a current Southern Baptist representative in Romania, teaches part-time at the school. Today funds come from Romanian churches, student fees and money raised outside the country.

Students pay the equivalent of about \$900 in tuition for a year's study. Room and board comes to about \$300 for the nine-month school term. Maris said the room and board charge covers about 30 percent of the actual cost. But because of the depressed economy in Romania, it is difficult to charge students higher prices.

### Decrease in financial support

Churches in Romania, like churches in the U.S., are using a growing percentage of their offerings on local ministries resulting in less money given to the Baptist Union of Romania. In turn, money supporting seminary education is dwindling.

Through its trustees the school is encouraging churches to support the seminary financially. Efforts also are underway to enlist support of the business community. To date officials have rejected funds offered them by the Romanian government like the government support given students in seminaries of Eastern Orthodox and other religious groups. Officials cite concern about church-state relations as the reason for declining the funds.

Maris, who is in his first term as principal of the school, said fundraising and student recruitment are the two largest challenges facing the historic institute.

"God has guided this school through more difficult times than we have now," Maris said. "God helped us outlast the Communists, and I am confident God will continue to make training for pastors of Romanian Baptist churches available to the young men He calls to ministry."

For more information, visit [www.itb.ro](http://www.itb.ro).

*"God helped us outlast the Communists, and I am confident God will continue to make training for pastors of Romanian Baptist churches available to the young men He calls to ministry."*

President Daniel Maris  
Baptist Theological  
Institute of Bucharest

## Baptist work in Romania

**Main photo:** Roma families live under rugs and blankets thrown across huge pipes. The pipes carry steam heat from a central heating plant to all the nearby buildings in the poorest area in Bucharest. **Small photo:** A young boy says a prayer before a meal at Ruth School. The school offers a free hot meal, dental care and medical check-ups.

# Project Ruth

## Ruth School offers gypsy children education, hot meals, Bible study classes in poorest area of Bucharest

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

The chill in the air deepens as the sun begins to set in what is called the poorest area in Bucharest. Nearby fortunate Roma families live in crowded concrete apart-

ment buildings several stories high. From utility poles dangle nests of electrical wires, a clear indication that someone (or a lot of someones) has tapped into the power supply, probably illegally.

Some not-so-fortunate Roma families live under rugs and blankets thrown across huge pipes that carry steam heat from a central heating plant to all the nearby buildings. The Roma peel away the insulation from these huge pipes and let the radiating heat protect them from the cold Romanian winters.

This is a hard neighborhood. Crime is high and drugs are rampant. On the street corner six teenagers hang out. At least four of them stand in the street forcing passing cars to carefully navigate the already narrow street. They are Roma, also known as gypsies.

Life for gypsies is hard in Romania. Cen-

turies of discrimination continue officially and unofficially. Often the reputation of the group is well earned. That is why the group of teens on the street corner cause visitors to the area to feel uncomfortable.

Providence Baptist Church in Bucharest, the Ruth School and Roma have become synonymous in this community during the more than 20 years the church has targeted gypsies for special ministry. Prior to 1989 when the Communist government was overthrown, Providence was one of six Baptist churches in Bucharest and drew members from across the city. But after the fall of Communism new churches were started. Now there are 22 and most churches became more regional or neighborhood-oriented.

About the same time the new government started placing Roma in Providence Baptist's neighborhood. Now about 30 percent of the population in the area is Roma.



Photo courtesy of Brittany Garton

A young girl participates in class at Ruth School, which offers free education for grades one through eight.



Photo by Bob Terry

Inspired by a sermon from a Southern Baptist representative to minister to their neighborhood, the young people of Providence decided to hold a Sunday activity for Roma children. Leaders were surprised when 13 children showed up from a group known to be standoffish and closed to outsiders.

That was just the beginning. Soon the outreach transformed from Sunday activities to a school. A two-story building was constructed on church property offering gypsy children free education for grades one through four in the morning and grades five through eight in the afternoon.

In Romania, compulsory education goes through the eighth grade after which children may choose to go to high school. For many Roma, however, the fees associated with compulsory education are often a barrier, to say nothing of the overt discrimination.

### Continued growth

From that small beginning the Ruth School has grown. Today the church owns a separate school building located a few blocks away. The building provides classrooms for grades one through eight complete with playgrounds, cafeteria and computer labs.

Currently the school enrolls 200 Roma children in grades K-8 and another 20 children in the preschool program.

Brittany Garton, an American volunteer serving at the Ruth School, said education is not generally valued by gypsies but parents send their children to the Ruth School because the school offers a free hot meal, dental care and medical check-ups. For students needing extra help with academics, tutors are provided. Students participate in chapel each week as well as have the option of Bible study classes.

Even though education is not valued among gypsies and mandatory education stops at the eighth grade, 95 percent of the Roma children who complete the Ruth School program go on to high school. Of that number about 65 percent complete their high school degrees, Garton said. For those who want to go to college, the Ruth School assists with scholarships.

Funds for the Ruth School come from scholarships provided by donors primarily in the United States and the United Kingdom. The school matches each student with a donor who, for \$30 a month, can provide a scholarship for a particular student and receive periodic reports on the progress that student is making in school. For more information, visit [www.ProjectRuth.org](http://www.ProjectRuth.org).

Otniel Bunaciu, pastor of Providence, said



Photo courtesy of Brittany Garton

the scholarship does not cover all the education, administrative, meal and medical costs associated with the school so fundraising through gifts and grants is an ongoing activity.

The school now has its own governing board, but Providence continues actively working in the chapel programs, offering summer programs and a number of members work at the school.

And the Ruth School project is expanding. Two years ago efforts were made to minister to Roma women through sewing classes and life skills classes.

Garton said Providence offered a sign of hope to the Roma community. "People at Providence were willing to love those who were different than them," she said. "The church was open to building the kingdom of God to include gypsies, and the community understood the church was here for them."

A good sign is that crime has dropped in the community but the area is still a "hard neighborhood." Now the church is broken into only about once a year, Bunaciu said.

### Accepting Jesus

More importantly, some of the students at the Ruth School have accepted Christ as Savior. Some have entered the Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest (see story, page 10) and are serving as pastors of a growing number of gypsy churches. A number also have trained to do social work among their own people.

And about the six teenage boys standing on the street corner blocking traffic? A few minutes after our car went by, all six were sitting in the balcony of Providence as the Sunday night worship service began. They were just one bit of proof that the Ruth School is changing the community generation by generation. ☞



Photo courtesy of Brittany Garton

A young boy shows off his new book bag on the first day at the Ruth School. Currently the school enrolls 200 Roma children in grades K-8 and another 20 children in the preschool program.

## Baptist work in Romania



# Romania



Graphic by Lauren C. Grim

## Still serving in Romania – first European country entered by Southern Baptists

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

**L**ike everything in Romania, Southern Baptist work there is impacted by history — specifically by the historic London Conference held in 1920. George W. Truett, the famous pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, and J.F. Lowe represented the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board).

For a week the two men hammered out an agreement with leaders of Northern (now American) Baptists, Canadian Baptists and British Baptists. The goal was to find a way to cooperate in spreading the gospel in Europe after the devastation of World War I rather than duplicate one another's efforts.

As a result of the conference the SBC was assigned responsibilities for Spain, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and Ukraine. Each of the other missions-sending agencies accepted responsibility elsewhere.

That is why three years later (1923) it was Southern Baptists who opened missions work in Romania.

But Baptist work was well established

in Romania by the time SBC workers got there. Everett Gill, who directed SBC work in Eastern Europe at the time, reported to the 1923 SBC annual meeting that more than 17,000 Baptist believers from Hungarian, German and Romanian backgrounds were working together in the Baptist Union of Romania.

### Baptist seminary

One of the first official acts by the union after Baptists were recognized as an official religion by the new government had been to start a Baptist seminary in Bucharest, the nation's capital.

**One of the first official acts by the union after Baptists were recognized as an official religion by the new government had been to start a Baptist seminary in Bucharest.**

Gill told the convention, "There are with few exceptions no foreign missionaries in these fields (including Romania) and it is not yet clear that any considerable number should ever be sent" (see 1923 SBC Annual).

In the 1920s the number of Romanian Baptists doubled to more than 38,000. Southern Baptists' primary contribution was supplement-

ing support for national pastors. But the SBC did send workers to concentrate on theological education, do church planting and to head a Woman's Missionary Union Training School.

All of that came to a violent halt as World War II neared. In the late 1930s foreign religious workers were forced out. All Baptist churches were closed and seminary property seized. Only the training school was permitted to operate and then for only a short time.

For the next 50 years Southern Baptists watched from outside the country as Romanian Baptists found ways to survive first the Nazis and then the Communists. During these years Baptists had few pastors although the seminary in Bucharest was allowed to reopen after World War II. Pastors served multiple churches and lay pastors served three or four churches. One current leader observed that lay leaders in the churches realized the work depended on them and they responded. And during those difficult years, the number of Baptists grew.

### Almost pulled out of Romania

Shortly after the fall of Communism in Romania in 1989, Southern Baptists again sent religious workers into the country. Theological education was a focal point as was discipleship and church planting. But the strength of the Baptist Union of Romania caused Southern Baptists to consider pulling out of the country a few years later. The International Mission Board (IMB) strategy was to withdraw from a country with 5 percent or more evangeli-

cal population and Romania's evangelical population topped that percentage.

Romanians and IMB personnel objected. True, they said, the western part of the country had more than 5 percent evangelical population. The great majority of the more than 130,000 Baptists live in the western part of the country. But in the eastern counties, the evangelical population was minimal. In Bucharest with its almost 3 million people, evangelicals make up 0.5 percent of the population. In the surrounding five counties, mostly rural, the evangelical population is 0.2 percent, statistics indicated.

In an area of more than 6 million people, there are about 7,500 Baptists.

The IMB ultimately agreed to leave a team in Romania — the Bucharest Team concentrating on church planting, discipleship and theological education. Today six families including career workers, journeymen and master's program workers serve in the area.

And Baptists are growing. At the time Communism fell, there were six Baptist churches in Bucharest and about 50 churches and missions in the entire Bucharest Baptist Association. Today the Bucharest Baptist Association reports 131 churches and missions — 75 churches and 56 missions. ☞

**In an area of more than 6 million people, there are about 7,500 Baptists.**

**Baptists are growing. At the time Communism fell, there were six Baptist churches in Bucharest and about 50 churches and missions in the entire Bucharest Baptist Association. Today the Bucharest Baptist Association reports 131 churches and missions — 75 churches and 56 missions.**

## Want to know God?

**Pastor Matt McGukin**  
Concord Baptist Church, Bessemer

The other day I decided it might be a good idea to wash my truck. The white paint had turned a shade of pale yellow thanks to falling pollen. As I began to apply the water and soap it became abundantly clear how dirty my truck really was. I wondered, "How had I driven this filthy truck around for this long and not even noticed?" I just had to laugh, "No wonder my kids always wanted to take Mom's car." I had thought for quite some time that I needed to wash my truck, but there wasn't time or there was always something better to do. The water and soap exposed the filth I had ignored. I was embarrassed but motivated to get it clean.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World who shines in the darkness. When the light of Jesus shines it exposes our lives, and what had looked OK compared to everyone else is now dirty and broken.

God does not expose the sin and failure of our lives to bring shame or embarrassment but to show us our need. Like my filthy truck I had ignored for too long, our lives have been stained and damaged by our bad choices and rejection of God. We are in desperate need to be forgiven and made clean. Unfortunately there is no body wash that can remove the stain and filth of sin.

The Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). That is why the death and resurrection of Jesus is necessary for salvation.

Jesus died on the cross shedding His blood to wash away our sin. Jesus took the punishment for all who will believe and trust in Him; He made it possible for us to be forgiven. But it is just so easy to ignore the problem, to always find something better to do. When the light of Jesus exposes the darkness of your heart don't run away in shame; don't become bitter and angry.

Stop, acknowledge your need and surrender your life to Jesus.

He is the only One who can make you clean and whole.

# CAMPUS News



## SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

### ► Brock School of Business Students Win Honorable Mention in International Social Entrepreneurship Competition

Students from Samford University's Brock School of Business won fourth place (Honorable Mention) and a \$2,500 prize in an international social entrepreneurship competition sponsored by Texas Christian University's (TCU) Neeley School of Business April 11-13.

Teams from 28 universities around the world competed in TCU's annual Richards Barrentine Ventures and Values Business Plan Competition in Fort Worth, Texas.

Daniel Denning, Olivia Dunn, Drew Fahrion, Ben Goolsby and Madison Kerns wrote a business plan for Work of Worth (WoW) under the supervision of Samford associate professor of economics Jeremy Thornton, who also is social entrepreneurship program coordinator at the Brock School.

Their business plan provided a road map for the organization and details about how to employ women in northeast India to recycle silk saris into thread and spin the thread into luxury silk yarn.

The Brock School students placed first in their division and later competed in the finals.

### ► Crouch Named Dean of Samford's McWhorter School of Pharmacy

Michael A. Crouch has been named dean of Samford University's McWhorter School of Pharmacy effective July 1.



**CROUCH**

Crouch, an accomplished educator, clinician and researcher, currently serves as executive associate dean and professor at East Tennessee State University's Gatton College of Pharmacy, Johnson City.

The selection follows a national

search to replace Charlie Sands III who resigned in May 2013 to pursue medical missions opportunities. Michael D. Hogue has served as interim dean since Sands' resignation, and he will return to his role as chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice.

Crouch joined the Gatton College of Pharmacy in 2010 as professor and associate dean for professional education and academic affairs. He accepted his current leadership position in 2012.

He is a board-certified pharmacotherapy specialist who also holds added qualifications in cardiology.

## UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile History Professor Interviewed for 'C-SPAN Cities Tour':** University of Mobile (UMobile) history professor Lonnie Burnett will be featured in an upcoming C-SPAN special highlighting the city of Mobile.

Burnett was interviewed at the

History Museum of Mobile on April 21 for C-SPAN's "Mobile Weekend." The program is set to air May 17 and 18 on C-SPAN2 and C-SPAN3. The show also will be online at [cspan.org](http://cspan.org).

Burnett wrote "Henry Hotze, Confederate Propagandist," and also is assistant vice president for planning and evaluation at UMobile.

### ► University of Mobile Mu Delta Inducts New Members:

The University of Mobile's Kappa Zeta chapter of the Delta Mu Delta International Honor Society inducted new students April 9. The society recognizes superior scholastic achievement by majors in accounting, business administration, computer information systems and master of business administration programs. Inducted members are: Cayce May, Chrystal McDill, Justin Myers, Courtney Payne, Cody Scott, Lindsay Taylor, Ruby Maharjan, Marcio Dal Pont, James Allen, Sara Buster, Jared Darby, Zach Gaines, James Hayley, Harrison McGregor, Jared Brannon, Chase Jordan and Emily Vickrey.

## MARKET PLACE

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

### CHURCH POSITIONS

**PASTOR:** South Roebuck Baptist Church is seeking a permanent pastor to serve an aging traditional congregation in a changing neighborhood. Please send resumés to: [jmac1776@bellsouth.net](mailto:jmac1776@bellsouth.net) or call Jim McLendon at 205-836-1776.

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

**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 to: [meekbaptist@att.net](mailto:meekbaptist@att.net). [www.meekbaptist.com](http://www.meekbaptist.com).

**MINISTER OF MUSIC & SENIOR ADULTS:** First Baptist Church of Piedmont is accepting resumés for full-time position of minister of music and senior adults. Blended service. Please email resumé to: [sandra5131950@yahoo.com](mailto:sandra5131950@yahoo.com).

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF STUDENTS & FAMILY MINISTRIES:** First Baptist Church of Mt. Olive, Mt. Olive, Ala., is now accepting resumés for a full-time associate pastor of students and family ministries. Please submit resumés or questions by email to: [Sheila@fbcmo.org](mailto:Sheila@fbcmo.org).

**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](mailto:info@EBCBirmingham.org).

**YOUTH/CHILDREN'S PASTOR:** Bethany Baptist Church is seeking a full-time youth/children's pastor. Interested applicants please send resumés to: Bethany Baptist Church, ATTN: Youth Pastor Search Commit-

tee, P.O. Box 7, Horton, AL 35980.

**CHILDREN'S PASTOR:** First Baptist Church of the Islands in Savannah, Ga., is seeking a full-time children's pastor. This person will lead the children's ministry (kindergarten-5th grade) in a growing, contemporary church setting, which averages 575 people in overall worship attendance. The ideal candidate has a sense of God's specific call to reach and minister to grade school-aged children. Strong personal skills in relating to children and families will be expected. Desire to invest life and time in the lives of children is also expected. Ability to oversee a variety of facets of children's ministry is a must. The current children's ministry impacts over 150 children weekly in a variety of ministry settings (Sunday School, worship, AWANA) and utilizes 75 volunteer leaders with potential for incredible growth. Please send resumés with cover letter and references to: [kidlife@fbcislands.com](mailto:kidlife@fbcislands.com) or to: Search Team, FBC Islands, 6613 Johnny Mercer Boulevard, Savannah, GA 31410.

### OTHER POSITIONS

**RELIEF HOUSE PARENTS:** Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. Seeking committed Christian couple to care for children at the Decatur campus. Schedule is 6 days on, 3 days off. Full-time with benefits. High school diploma or beyond, valid driver's license, background check required. Contact Dr. Michael Smith, 256-355-6893.

**PART-TIME ACCOUNTANT:** 16-20 hours per week position at Harvest Baptist Church located in Harvest, Ala. Accounting experience and proficiency with Quickbooks required. Email resumé to: [jobs@harvest-baptist.org](mailto:jobs@harvest-baptist.org).

**PART-TIME SECRETARY:** Northside Baptist, Calera, 16 hours a week. Duties include computer, telephone, financial responsibilities and being a people per-

son. Email resumé to: [northsidecalera@yahoo.net](mailto:northsidecalera@yahoo.net).

**COUNSELORS:** Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes, has openings for full-time counselors in these locations: Birmingham, Dothan/Andalusia and Muscle Shoals/Athens/Decatur. Travel between offices is required for all openings. Must have a master's degree (CACREP accredited/equivalent program) or higher, be a LPC or have an equivalent in allied mental health field. ALCs or the ability to be licensed in Alabama will be considered. Contact Ross Hickman, 205-945-0037 or [rhickman@abchome.org](mailto:rhickman@abchome.org). Visit our website: [www.pathwaysprofessional.org](http://www.pathwaysprofessional.org).

**SALES:** Murphy Robes seeks a part-time, commissioned-only sales professional. Perfect salary augmentation for choir directors with networking skills. No limit on how much you can make. Fax resumé to 727-873-0873.

### BUSINESS

**TIME TO REPLACE THAT OLD CHURCH SIGN?:** Reliable Sign Services, a Christian-operated, full-service sign company for two decades, is ready to assist you as you expand your church sign ministry. From electronic message boards to traditional signs, Reliable will fabricate and install statewide or ship anywhere. [www.reliablesigns.com](http://www.reliablesigns.com). 1-800-729-6844, 205-664-0955.

**MOVING? LOCAL, STATEWIDE OR LONG DISTANCE:** Coleman American/Allied Van Lines. Special rate and programs for Alabama Baptist ministers, staff and church members. Contact Gary Washington at 205-540-7470 or [gary.washington@covan.com](mailto:gary.washington@covan.com).

**CHRISTIAN VALUES BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY:** Christian Values Technology Company seeks mature business professionals for high-

income opportunity. Home-based office. Hands-on support and apprenticeship-style training. For complete information, call Paul at 888-710-6994.

**FOR SALE NEW & USED STAIRLIFTS:** Lift chairs, power wheelchairs, car lifts, scooters and walk-in tubs. We service Alabama. 1-800-682-0658.

### CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

**CHURCH BUILDING PROJECTS:** Let Webb Builders help your church expand its facilities. Large or small projects. Your plans or use our custom-design building services. State licensed with 25+ years experience. Call Webb Builders Inc., 334-285-9302. Millbrook, Ala. Numerous church references available.

### TRAVEL/VACATION

**AFFORDABLE BEACHSIDE VACATION CONDOS:** Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Ala. Rent direct. Christian family owners. Lowest prices on the beach. Call 205-556-0368, 205-752-1231, 251-752-2366 or [www.gulfshorescondos.com](http://www.gulfshorescondos.com).

**NORTH CAROLINA COTTAGE:** Hayesville, western North Carolina. Lovely, like new mountain cottage for rent, April-November. 2 BRs 2 BAs. All conveniences. Weekly/monthly. On beautiful Hiawassee River. Low price \$500+tax weekly. Sleeps five. Children welcome. No pets. 828-389-3302.

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

### FOR SALE

**SANCTUARY CHAIRS:** 320 interlocking tan cushioned chairs with metal black legs and back pockets. Excellent condition. Three years old. \$30 each. Pick up Decatur. Information call Melissa, 256-686-2626.





Photos courtesy of the University of Mobile

A video crew from 'The American Bible Challenge' gets footage on the University of Mobile campus.

## Viral video gains UMobile students spot on 'American Bible Challenge' game show

**A** music video poking gentle fun at self-righteous Christians has landed three University of Mobile (UMobile) students on "The American Bible Challenge" game show.

Worship leadership majors Seth Brasher, Harrison Hughes and Kory Van Matre made a video for fun in February 2013. Titled "Thrift Shop — Christian Remix," the YouTube video is a redone version of the popular rap song "Thrift Shop" by artists Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. But instead of the original raunchy lyrics, the UMobile trio used the catchy beat to make a point that strikes a chord with Christian youth groups across the country.

"We're making fun of Christians who boast about their good deeds instead of living out a life of faith," explained Hughes, whose academic concentration in film was key to producing the video. With the tag line, "I'm an awesome Christian," the video takes a tongue-in-cheek look at some of the more pretentiously pious ways people spotlight their good deeds.

### More than 860,000 views

Fast forward a year later and the video has had more than 860,000 views at press time, including one by a casting agent for comedian Jeff Foxworthy's Game Show Network hit "The American Bible Challenge." The Los Angeles-based agent tracked Brasher down through Facebook and called his cellphone.

"I was a little skeptical," Brasher said. When he received an email with the show's logo and detailed information, he told Hughes and Van Matre, "Oh wow, this is legit."

The students were asked to audition in Atlanta for season three of the show, but

their classwork and busy touring schedules as members of several of the school's Center for Performing Arts music and worship ensembles made a personal appearance impossible.

Instead the casting agent arranged a three-hour Skype interview, complete with Bible trivia questions. The best friends were asked to joke around, show their personalities and share their testimonies of faith. Hughes taped the interview, which was sent to the TV show's producers and edited into a highlights tape used to promote the show.

The producers took a pass on Brasher's idea for a group name — Boaz and the Kinsman Redeemers — and chose instead Rhymz with Grace. The name played off the group's rap video, Harrison said, meaning that the students were able to make compelling rhymes by God's grace.

As one of 18 teams competing this season, Rhymz with Grace would be playing to win money for a charity. They chose Home of Grace for Women, a Christ-centered alcohol and drug recovery program in Eight Mile. Harrison and Van Matre are members of the brass and percussion ensemble RamCorps that volunteered the past two years at Home of Grace, working on landscaping and cleaning as part of Project Serve, UMobile's annual day of service.

A video crew for the game show arrived on campus in early 2014, taping the team during a RamCorps outdoor concert, plus

taping in-depth personal interviews. During the next few weeks the team added to their already significant biblical knowledge, studying with Doug Wilson, dean of the School of Christian Ministries at UMobile. Soon they were in Los Angeles for a week-long experience that pitted them against other teams, most of which included pastors or other older, learned members.

With Foxworthy as host of the one-hour game show, contestants compete based on their knowledge of the Bible. Season three premieres with two back-to-back original episodes May 22 at 7 p.m. (CDT) and will air new episodes every Thursday. Grammy winner and multi-

platinum-selling musician and producer Kirk Franklin is musical co-host.

"The American Bible Challenge" has added new games that put the contestants' spiritual and physical talents to the test with new categories that include "Christ or Klingon" in which contestants have to guess whether words are from the Bible or "Star Trek's" Klingon language.

The UMobile team is scheduled to make an appearance in the June 5 episode. By contract, they can't discuss the results of the competition until the season ends.

Their biggest concern was in knowing that "we were representing the school, and we were going to do our best not to look like idiots," Brasher said.

Their most stressful moment came their

first day when they were to perform an original rap song — they hoped it wouldn't bomb. That moment turned from nerve-racking to magical when Franklin was their beat boxer.

### Broader platform

The team said the unusual opportunity gives them a broader platform to share not only their musical talents but something much more important.

"For me, it's God showing us through the smallest things that He can make the biggest thing come out of it," Hughes said.

The video they hoped would reach 10,000 views has prompted online dialogue between Christians and atheists and launched discussions in youth groups about what it means to live a life of faith and not simply brag about good deeds.

Van Matre said some Christians took them to task for the video, taking it as an attack on Christians instead of a commentary on false piety.

"We want people to laugh at it and not take offense," Van Matre said. "God has used it. We've heard that the video is being preached on in youth services. A church in Texas asked if they could use it and (also) a college in Idaho."

The impact goes beyond appearing as contestants on a game show, they said.

Brasher said, "We don't see this as a game. It's an opportunity, first and foremost, to share the gospel, and secondly to provide for those ladies at the Home of Grace in a way we never could if not for the show. We have a mission, and it's nothing to do with the game show and everything to do with Jesus Christ."

To watch their video, search for "Thrift Shop — Christian Remix" on YouTube. (UMobile)





**Main photo:** Brian Pennington (left), IMB representative in the Peruvian Andes, and his son, Trevor (second from left), try to talk and build relationships with local Quechua-speaking people, a challenge because of the language barrier. **Small photo:** While eating breakfast at home in Chavin de Huantar, Peru, brothers Trevor (left) and Jordan (right) Pennington begin their schoolwork for the day with the aid of their mom, IMB representative Jennifer Pennington.

# Christ's heart, hands, voice

## Family trusts in adventure of God's calling to serve people of Andes Mountains in Peru

**B**rian and Jennifer Pennington knew God was calling them to missions — and that was pretty much the extent of their plan.

So when the couple from Fort Worth, Texas, and their two young sons arrived at the International Mission Board's (IMB) candidate conference for new representatives, they didn't have much to go on.

"We were in Richmond, and everyone there already had their assignment before they got there," Brian remembered. "We were the only ones there who didn't know where we were going. Everybody's researching their people groups, and we're still trying to figure out, 'OK, God, where do you want us to work?'"

Brian first felt called to full-time missions in Peru while on a short-term missions trip in the Peruvian jungle. So when God called his family, he felt sure they would accept an open position in the jungle.

### Starting point

"Our starting point was Peru," he said. "All I had ever been to was the jungle. But when we found out more about the position, it just wasn't a good fit for our family."

The only other position available in Peru was a church-planting position in the Andes Mountains.

"We weren't thinking mountains," Brian said. "But God showed us Isaiah 52:7, which says, 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.'"

With a long-term plan in place, the Penningtons moved to San Jose, Costa Rica, for

a year of language training. But the curveballs didn't stop.

"We thought we were going to Huaraz, a city of 50,000," Brian said. "And we're from a city, so we thought well, we can do 50,000 people. That's still city-ish."

Just one week before moving from Costa Rica to Peru, the Penningtons were surprised again. Their future supervisor, who had originally written the job request, lived in Huaraz. But the Penningtons would actually be working three hours outside the city in a rural town of less than 3,000. To top things off, they also were told their future supervisor had just resigned.

Although nothing seemed to be going according to plan, the Penningtons still felt confident in their call. Not knowing what to expect, they switched gears and moved to the tiny mountain town of Chavin de Huantar.

Two weeks after arriving in Chavin, they met Patricia de Loarte, a Chavin native who had been living in the Peruvian capital of Lima. Patricia, a Baptist believer, had recently moved back to Chavin and had been looking for a church.

With Patricia's help, the Penningtons began a small Bible study where Peruvian believers study Scripture and learn to share the gospel with others in their community.

Patricia said, "The presence of [the Pennington family] is something that attracts attention of the people here, because they are foreigners. It is a blessing to have brothers here where we live, to be able to talk with them, to discuss the Word. The people here accept them, but they are curious as to why they are here."

As the group grew, Brian began teaching oral Bible storying as a way of sharing the gospel with those who can't read. Many Peruvians living in rural areas outside Chavin only speak Quechua — a difficult, indigenous language. Teaching bilingual believers in Chavin to tell Bible stories helps spread the gospel to other Peruvian villages.

### Reaching the whole community

Patricia, a passionate evangelist and promoter of Bible storying, also invited members of her former church in Lima to make missions trips to villages around Chavin.

"My prayer request is to reach the whole community," she said.

Despite the initial challenges and uncertainties, the Penningtons believe that moving to Chavin and meeting Patricia was

part of God's larger plan for reaching the lost in the Peruvian mountains.

Jennifer said of their ministry in Chavin, "In the end, we definitely could see that it was God's plan all along."

Brian said, "We've always taken comfort in the fact that God knew the whole time how it was going to be. It wasn't a surprise to Him, and we learned to trust Him in that."

*EDITOR'S NOTE — After three and a half years of service in Chavin de Huantar, the Penningtons felt the Lord leading them to a new assignment. Working with local Peruvian believers and U.S. "partner" churches, the couple now helps with training, logistical support and strategy in an effort to plant churches in more than 100 communities across Peru. (IMB)*

IMB representative Brian Pennington (right) visits with Patricia de Loarte, a local believer strategic to the Penningtons' ministry in the Peruvian Andes.

