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Boko Haram said to release more than 200 school-girls held captive

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An Iraqi refugee family shelters with nearly 500 people from the same village at an unfinished education center.

BP photo

MIDDLE EAST realities

Christian workers see advancement of gospel despite war, terror

By Erich Bridges
International Mission Board

Sometimes the tears, the tragedies, the sheer horror of it all overwhelm Christian workers trying to help refugees fleeing war and terror in Syria and Iraq.

Jayson Keath, a Christian strategy leader based in the Middle East, visited a Syrian refugee family now living in a country inundated with traumatized Syrians. One of the small children in the family was missing

a finger — severed by a slammed car door as they rushed to escape the violence in their homeland. The parents had to knock the child unconscious so pursuing Syrian soldiers wouldn't hear his screams of agony.

"It wasn't so much their pain that gutted me," Keath said. "It was the void of hope in every face. I don't think I've ever seen or felt darkness so strongly."

Can the situation on the ground in Syria and northern Iraq get any worse? Much worse — as illustrated by ISIS (Islamic State) militants and their genocidal campaign of conquest across the region. The rise of ISIS amid the rubble of two failing states offers evidence of something larger, according to one despairing Arab observer.

"Arab civilization such as we knew it is all but gone," wrote Hisham Melhem, a Lebanese jour-

nalist and Washington bureau chief of the Al-Arabiya satellite news network, in a commentary for Politico titled "The Barbarians Within our Gates."

Today's Arab world

"The Arab world today is more violent, unstable, fragmented and driven by extremism — the extremism of the rulers and those in opposition — than at any time since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire a century ago," Melhem asserted. "Every hope of modern Arab history has been betrayed. The promise of political empowerment, the return of politics, the restoration of human dignity heralded by the season of Arab uprisings in their early heydays — all has given way to civil wars, ethnic, sectarian and regional divisions and the reassertion of absolutism. ... Is it any surprise that, like the vermin that

take over a ruined city, the heirs to this self-destructed civilization should be the nihilistic thugs of the Islamic State?"

Melhem speaks for millions of disillusioned people across the Middle East and North Africa who feel caught between larger forces struggling for power. Is there any hope for them?

Yes, says Keath. And he wants Christians watching the struggle from outside the region to know the other side of the story. Hope that was hidden from many in earlier, quieter times is being introduced to people searching desperately for it now.

"The world is captivated by the crisis that has been generated by the movements of ISIS in northern Iraq, the plight of the Yazidis and other minorities," Keath said. "The world is watching, and all they're (See 'God,' page 4)

COMMENT

‘Pickers’ and ‘Growers’

It is reported as a true story. Only the names were changed to protect the guilty. Sadly the story typifies the worst about relationships between a pastor and a church.

In another part of the United States a young Ph.D. graduate from a Southern Baptist seminary went to a county-seat First Baptist Church. The church was widely known in its region. Many of the leading families of the area had been members there for generations. The pastor was well received. He was a good preacher, worked hard and made a positive impression on the community.

The church complex was impressive. It was obvious to all that no expense was spared in reflecting the congregation's love for God through the quality of the architecture, landscaping, lighting, furnishings, sound system, musical instruments, resources and all the other amenities associated with a place to worship.

Such love was not reflected in the church parsonage, however. It was a modest two-bedroom home. The furnishings and appliances were minimal but after living in seminary housing the young pastor, his wife and their 3-year-old son were glad to have it.

Pastor's request rejected

A few months after arriving in the community the pastor's family learned a second child was expected. Because the parsonage was already tight, the pastor asked if the church would build another bedroom onto the home that would serve first as a nursery and then a bedroom for the new child.

The new pastor expected quick approval. Things were going well. There was more than enough money in the bank to pay for the addition and the need was obvious. He was stunned when the deacons summarily rejected his request.

That is when the pastor's wife decided to go to the most influential man in the region to make the case for the addition to the parsonage. He was the biggest employer and wealthiest



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

member of the church and, in fact, the one who really “ran the church.” The man had always been encouraging so she was sure he would understand.

She went to his office and made her case — a small home already filled, a new baby on the way, resources available for the project and the prospect of a long ministry at the church.

Merely ‘hired hands’

The reply went something like this: “We really like you and your husband. You are doing good work. But there are two kinds of people in this world — pickers and growers. I am a ‘grower’ and in the end you and your husband are ‘pickers.’”

The pastor's wife was devastated. There would be no nursery. More importantly, she learned for the first time that she and her husband were “hired hands” as far as church leadership was concerned. They were not partners in ministry with other church members. They were not members of the “church family.” They were and always would be outsiders.

The pastor was not God's under-shepherd of the church in the minds of church leaders. He was a performer to make the members feel good about themselves and to conduct the rituals marking various seasons of life. All of this and more were reflected in the church's determination to provide the pastor with the bare

minimum of support necessary to keep someone in that position.

It is a crude story filled with ugly implications. Unfortunately some ministers can relate to it.

The pastor who has been at his church for 10 years and in all of that time has not received a single salary adjustment can relate. He can relate because a support staff member has seen her salary doubled during the same 10 years while he has received nothing. When he asked himself why, the only reason he comes up with is that the support staff member is related to a number of people in the church.

Like others, health care costs have skyrocketed for some pastors and their families. Paying higher premiums for medical insurance means fewer dollars for other necessities. This has caused more than one pastor to ask for health care adjustments in the church budget only to be rejected.

Like the man in the story, some churches seem bent on providing the pastor with as little as possible.

Thankfully these stories reflect a minority of churches. Most churches love their pastor and staff members and try to demonstrate their love and appreciation through financial support. Most churches understand the need for annual adjustments to salaries and expense items like insurance and retirement for their ministers. These are built-in costs just like utility costs.

Most churches incorporate the pastor and family into the fellowship of the church and become partners in ministry with them. Most churches accept their pastor as the under-shepherd of the congregation.

Consider your ministers' needs

But there is that occasional church that reflects its unhealthy and unbiblical attitudes and behaviors through the way it treats pastor and staff. Circumstances might be different but that kind of church practices a “grower and picker” mentality toward its pastor. It can happen in a church large or small, in a city or open country location. It is about mindset, not demographics.

Most Alabama Baptist churches are working on their budgets for 2015. Make sure the needs of the pastor and staff are considered in the process. That may mean personal interviews about salary and benefits but remember it is hard for most pastors to ask for increased compensation. More often it takes a champion — a committee or an individual — who will make sure their ministers are cared for financially in a way appropriate to the capacity of the church.

In God's family, there is no place for division based on “pickers and growers.” 🙏

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

LAW ENFORCEMENT

I was quite impressed with the Sept. 11 editorial “Law Enforcement Officials Deserve Support” by Bob Terry. I want to thank you for pointing out what a dangerous and difficult task they face. They put their lives on the line every day, and everyone should be more thankful for and respectful of them and show their appreciation.

As chairman of the Alabama Legislative Law Enforcement Medal of Honor Committee for several years, I

have read numerous reports of heroism and even loss of life. I wish everyone could read and hear about these cases of bravery and heroism.

Alabama Rep. Howard Sanderford
Huntsville, Ala.

THEOLOGICAL SECRETY BRINGS CONFLICT

I always respect the right of every Christian to interpret Scripture as they feel led. Whether it's belief in “speaking in tongues” or the three points of

Calvinism I cannot agree with, I still respect each person's beliefs. As with Calvinism, it's okay with me if a person believes we are so totally sinful we cannot repent or believe without God turning on the repentance and faith. Or their belief God unconditionally chooses people to save before they meet any
(See ‘Letters,’ page 9)





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

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Election preview

Messengers to decide between nominees in all 3 convention officer positions

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists are facing their first contested state convention president's election in 12 years. And for the first time in 16 years convention messengers will be deciding between nominees in all three convention officer positions.

The Alabama Baptist has confirmed the following pastors are being nominated for the next slate of Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC) officers. For president:

▶ Travis Coleman Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Prattville, and

▶ Craig Carlisle, pastor of Twelfth Street Baptist Church, Rainbow City, near Gadsden.

Being nominated for ABSC first vice president are:

▶ Jim Cooley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Birmingham, and

▶ John Thweatt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pell City.

Being nominated for ABSC second vice president are:

▶ Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, and

▶ Dusty McLemore, pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens.

Elections will take place Nov. 12 during the ABSC annual meeting, being held this year at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Nominees for president

Rick Marshall, pastor of Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, will nominate Coleman.

"I see Travis Coleman as biblically conservative, theologically sound and thoroughly prepared as a servant leader for our convention in these challenging and changing times," Marshall said. "I look at him as one of the most highly qualified pastors in our state convention. He has served at every state convention leadership position up to this point with distinction. He has served as part of the State Board of Missions, the executive committee, chairman of the executive committee, second vice president of the convention and most recently as first vice president."

Mat Alexander, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gadsden, will nominate Carlisle.

"I heard about the things the state convention is trying to emphasize right now, and Craig is doing all of those things in Etowah



COLEMAN



CARLISLE



COOLEY



THWEATT



COX



MCLEMORE

County — church revitalization, missions and church planting especially," Alexander said. "His church is investing in a rural church in the area and even moved their VBS to that church this year. Craig also is mentoring younger pastors and will do a great job as state convention president."

Nominees for 1st VP

Buddy Champion, pastor of First Baptist Church, Trussville, will nominate Cooley.

"Jim is a lifelong Alabama Baptist and a product of Samford University and two of our Southern Baptist seminaries," Champion said. "He has served multiple churches in Alabama in multiple positions, loves Alabama and our leadership and will lead in a way that is best for Alabama Baptists."

Buddy Gray, pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, will nominate Thweatt.

"I've known John for about 11 years, right after he came to Pell City. We've gone to China together twice and have spent a great deal of time together over the last decade," Gray said. "He is a loving pastor, a humble leader and is passionate about the gospel going forward in Alabama and around the world. His church gives 10 percent through the Cooperative Program and around another 10 percent to their own church missions efforts. He has a heart for missions and loves people."

mitted to reaching the world for the gospel and making disciples. He understands the heartbeat of Alabama Baptists and will unite us around the inerrancy of Scripture, the Great Commission and cooperative ministries."

All officer nominations are made from the convention floor, so other nominees could be added to the slate during the election time.

Resolutions

Along with electing new officers, Alabama Baptists will vote on a slate of proposed resolutions.

Roger Willmore, chairman of the state convention resolutions committee, said, "While close to 10 resolutions have already been submitted to the resolutions committee, the topic of resolutions won't be known with certainty before Tuesday at the annual meeting when the committee makes its first report.

"The events taking place around the world at this very moment give us all a sense of the shifting sands of culture, ethics and morals," he said. "Alabama Baptists have traditionally used the resolutions process as a means of expressing their concerns and convictions regarding these matters on the home front and around the world. I would anticipate a resolution affirming biblical marriage and opposing sanctions of any kind against Christians who faithfully proclaim and practice what the Bible teaches on these matters."

Willmore noted that the resolutions process gives Alabama Baptists the opportunity to express their biblical convictions on issues of this kind.

"It is my prayer that any resolution brought forward in the upcoming convention will be worded in a way that articulates the convictions and concerns of Alabama Baptists in a Christ-honoring way," he said.

All proposed resolutions must be submitted to the convention's recording secretary by the adjournment of the morning session of the ABSC annual meeting Nov. 11. ☞

Nominees for 2nd VP

Teman Knight, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery, will nominate Cox.

"I've watched him live the life of a godly leader in every area of his life. He has served in ministry for over 25 years," Knight said. "Since 1998 he has been at Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, and I've had the opportunity to preach for him and be with his people. He has outstanding pastoral leadership. But watching him walk through personal tragedy in his own life (death of his first wife) is where I've seen the depth of his character."

Daniel Wilson, pastor of West End Baptist Church, Clanton, will nominate McLemore.

"Dusty revitalized Lindsay Lane Baptist Church on New Testament principles, biblical preaching, Christ-exalted worship, personal evangelism and global missions all for the glory of God," Wilson said. "He's com-



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Staying behind



Syrian believers stay behind to help comfort those who are hurting.

BP photo

Many Syrian Christians choose to stay in beleaguered communities, continue reaching out in love to those in need

With food and jobs scarce and their savings depleted, Syrian Christians and their neighbors are struggling to provide for their families.

Despite their own trauma, many believers are choosing to stay in their beleaguered communities and reach out in love amid their neighbors' pain.

Christians in Syria have been able to distribute food with the help of Baptist Global Response (BGR), a Southern Baptist-related relief organization. Families also are receiving blankets and medical care. Children who have been out of school for years once again are being educated.

2 Corinthians 1:4

A relief worker quotes 2 Corinthians 1:4 to a room full of Syrian believers: "He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

"We must share in this comfort, not just

leave it to God," the worker said. "The Body needs to share in the comfort of those who are hurting."

As the war continues more and more Syrians are affected each day by the violence and economic struggle. Fighting in their hometowns has forced many people to relocate to other cities, leaving behind their homes and their work.

Without work, many IDPs (internally displaced person) struggle to provide for their families. With a lack of income and diminishing savings, financial issues loom leaving many people unable to provide for their family's basic needs — food, medicine, housing, electricity and gas for cooking and heat.

One Syrian Christian, Joy, said God called her to help the children she saw on the street outside her window.

Many Syrian children have been without education since the beginning of the war in

2011. Traveling to school is dangerous, and many school buildings have been destroyed, turned into hospitals or taken over by a militia. After three years, some students have forgotten basic knowledge learned in their schooling, such as reading, simple math or writing.

"The Body needs to share in the comfort of those who are hurting."

Christian worker

Joy is working to provide hope to these children, believing that her ministry presents the love of God in practical ways. She wants every person to know, "You are not alone. God has given you life."

"We want to show them that we are always available for them," Joy said. "We are standing with them."

Even though more and more refugees are fleeing the country, the majority of Syrians have chosen to stay within the country and face an unknown future.

Repeated bombings, however, force many families to flee to safer areas in the country,

resulting in an influx of desperate people looking for work and shelter.

Abed, a Syrian Christian, believes God's purpose for him is to stay in his hometown and share the love of Christ with those in need.

'Getting worse and worse'

"As the crisis continues, the situation of the IDPs is getting worse and worse," Abed said. In the beginning of the war, many people who needed money came with gold or items to sell. But now people who come have no belongings.

"They are ... entering into a real danger zone because they are spending everything they have and they are running out of money," Abed said. "The Lord has helped me so far to find resources ... but it is going beyond what I can manage."

Through resources provided by BGR, Abed helps people in need. With so many displaced people in town, work is hard to come by. Some are able to do small jobs but Abed encounters many families who have problems affording rent.

Like other Christians in Syria, Abed feels called to help his neighbors survive. The burden is at times difficult to bear.

"Daily I try to steel myself and be strong as a man when I am out helping people," Abed said. "But when I am alone, I cry like a baby. It's difficult."

"But my heart is strong," he added. "The Lord is righteous, and I know He has a way that we must walk in."

BGR asks for prayer for Christians in Syria that they will find comfort for their own hurts and that God will strengthen them to love their neighbors and point to His unfading hope.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons. (BP)

**"But my heart is strong.
The Lord is righteous,
and I know He has a way
that we must walk in."**

Abed
Syrian Christian

'God is moving; the nations are stirring,' Keath says

(continued from page 1)

seeing is the advance of evil — sheer, utter evil. But there are two realities at work. There is the advance of evil. There is an evil one who is not only lurking but is actively trying to kill and maim and destroy and keep eyes blinded to the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ.

"But there's also the advance of the gospel. Everywhere we see these things happening, we see the gospel advancing in ways that we did not imagine before."

As the visible Christian Church in the Mideast faces threats, attacks and persecution from many directions, a new Church is being born among Muslims deciding to follow Christ as Lord after seeing Him in dreams and visions, reading the Word of God and seeking out other believers.

Seeking shelter

And not just Muslims, Keath adds. Members of traditional Christian groups on the run from ISIS and other extremists in Syria are finding shelter, aid and friendship among evangelical believers in

the region — and hearing the whole gospel as they never have before.

"Now they're meeting in discipleship and growing," Keath said. "Maybe God is moving in a way to lead those in the ancient church back to Christ, because that is happening. There are others — Orthodox from Syria and in another country bordering Syria that have come to faith in Jesus for the first time. There are multiple people groups that we're talking about; there's Sunni, there's Shia, there's Alawite, there's Bedouin, there's Orthodox, there's Assyrians and Kurds. We can find believers now from all of these people groups that have come to faith as a result of the Syrian crisis. ... Yes the world needs to respond to the crisis, but there are enormous opportunities to confront people with the gospel of Christ who have never been confronted with it before. All these people groups that I just listed, we never had access to them before."

"The same thing is happening in Iraq right now. It's not just the Yazidis and Christian minorities and other minorities; it's the Sunni Muslims who are fleeing Mosul and other areas who are coming out by the hun-

dreds of thousands. We have had no engagement of Iraqi Sunnis — and now we have an opportunity to do that. It's not just the immediate response; it's 'Lord, what space are You creating for the gospel to go forth, and how do we steward that opportunity?'"

Continuing God's work

With new opportunities come new and increasing risks across the region. But risks won't stop the work God has begun.

"We will not accept that we cannot engage in these countries," Keath said. "It's just a matter of what is our presence and what does that strategy look like? How do we continue to see gospel penetration in these countries? Yes there will be strategic shifts. [But] the gospel is going to continue to advance."

"God is moving; the nations are stirring. It's going to happen. It may not involve us every time, but it's going to happen. It is happening."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons. (BP)

'Islamic spectrum'

from radical to moderate

A look at competing streams, ideologies within religion of Islam today

All Muslims believe in God and the prophet Muhammad, and they advocate such practices as fasting during the month of Ramadan and giving to the needy. But beyond that, various groups of Muslims hold divergent theological and ethical systems — and they all find passages in the Quran that reflect their approach.

On the violent end of the Muslim spectrum, ISIS militants in Syria and Iraq released a video Oct. 3 showing the beheading of British aid worker Alan Henning. He was the fourth westerner beheaded by the Islamist group on video.

On the other hand, news stories in the United States related to nonviolent Muslims may center around a group bringing the first mosque into a community or the election of a Muslim to congressional seat.

An evangelical scholar on Islam who asked to remain anonymous because of his work in Muslim countries said the difference between moderate or liberal Islam and radical Islam lies in Muslims' approach to Islamic texts, though all regard the Quran as their ultimate source of authority.

However, the Quran is not the only source of authority for Muslims. There also are the biographies of Muhammad known as Sira; collections of traditions and sayings, known as Hadith, attributed to the Muslim prophet; and a large body of scholarship that developed over the centuries that many Muslims consider authoritative. Included in this scholarship are works containing legal decisions by Muslim jurists reflecting on the Quran and Hadith that came to be known collectively as Sharia law. In some Muslim majority nations, the dictates of Sharia are codified into law.

"There is a fundamentally different hermeneutical approach between the two ends of the Islamic spectrum. For radicals, the words of the Quran, Hadith and legal texts are to be taken literally. They believe that Allah gave them those texts for all time with universal and timeless relevance. So when the Quran says to slay the pagans wherever you find them — or for that matter, says a man can take four wives — then quite simply Allah means that Muslims can follow those injunctions for all time. Hence the ISIS phenomenon," the scholar said.

"In contrast, more liberal Muslims, or moderate Muslims, if we want to use that term, take a more rationalistic approach to

reading their texts and following Islamic law," he said. "They believe that some of that textual material, whether in the Quran, Hadith or legal texts, was relevant at a particular point in past history, but Islamic societies have moved on and so they are no longer relevant today. So many liberal Muslims are genuinely horrified by the ISIS atrocities in Iraqi in Syria. Similarly they argue that polygamy is not relevant to the 21st century and so the relevant verses or legal paragraphs represent historical artifacts as it were."

Another important distinction between moderate and radical Muslims is the way they view Muhammad, Islam's founder, the scholar said. "Both radicals and liberals look to Muhammad for their model," but liberals emphasize his early work in Mecca as a "peaceful protestor" while radicals focus on

his later years in Medina as a "warrior statesman," where he developed the practice of physically waging holy war, or "jihad," against non-Muslims.

"Today's jihadis look at non-jihadi Muslim moderates as having sold out the prophet," the scholar said. "For radicals, where Muhammad ended up is what's important. For moderates, taking a holistic approach to his life and

relegating some of the more uncomfortable events of his later years to policies that suited the eighth century but are not relevant today is the way to go."

The famous division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims is "not tied at all" to the issue of radical versus moderate Islam. Sunnis and Shiites differ over who should be Muhammad's successor as the "caliph," or ruler, of the Islamic community. Both Sunnis and Shiites include radical and moderate elements.

Diversity within Islam

A 2012 Pew Research study of 38,000 Muslims worldwide appeared to confirm claims of diversity within Islam. Muslims "have widely differing views" about "how important religion is to their lives, who counts as a Muslim and what practices are acceptable in Islam," according to the Pew study.

In surveys of Muslims in 39 countries, a median of 27 percent per country said Islam is open to more than one interpretation. A majority of U.S. Muslims (57 percent) said Islam can be interpreted in multiple ways.

Mike Edens, professor of theology and Islamic studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said he believes only about 10 percent of Muslims have some inclina-

tion to use violence to advance Islam. But he noted that in most communities where Muslims gain a majority, personal freedoms begin to erode.

Shifting of standards

"When we see a British community or an American community such as Dearborn (Mich.) moving toward a Muslim majority, we begin to see shifting of standards of behavior in the street and in the families," Edens said.

Among Muslims of all stripes, even those who reject violence, religious coercion is

a "broadly applied reality," Edens said, because Islam is a religion focused on external behavior rather than heart transformation. There is a passage in the Quran forbidding coercion in religion, Edens said, but "that verse is abrogated by many other verses that talk about enforcement of external codes."

In the end, preventing Islam from eroding personal liberty in the western world will require a combination of evangelism by Christians and discerning action by governments whenever Islamic practices begin to undermine democratic ideals of religious liberty and expression, Edens said. (BP)

"Today's jihadis look at non-jihadi Muslim moderates as having sold out the prophet."

evangelical scholar

REFLECTIONS

"IF THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST GETS ANY WORSE, WE MAY HAVE TO GO TO PRAYING."





Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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BALDWIN

► **Magnolia Springs Church** will celebrate homecoming Nov. 9. The service will begin at 11 a.m. and lunch will follow. The church will recognize Bill and Jessie Jackson for 60 years of service. Gary Patrick is pastor.

BESSEMER

► **Canaan Church, Bessemer**, will have a Hallelujah Carnival and Gospel Hayride on Oct. 31, 6:30-8:30 p.m. There will be games, a hayride, a cake walk and a Trunk-N-Treat. Morgan Bailey is pastor.

BETHEL

► **Pine Hill Church** will have a gospel singing featuring the Steeles on Oct. 28, 7 p.m. A love offering will be received. Chris Kynard is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Robinwood Church, Birmingham**, will host New Ground in concert Oct. 25, 6 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend. Dale Creel is pastor.

CALHOUN

► **Stan Albright** is the new pastor of **First Church, Oxford**. He previously served as the national director of associations for



ALBRIGHT

the North American Mission Board. He also has served at Greenbrier Road Church, Anniston; Parker Memorial Church, Anniston; and First Church, Meridianville. He holds a bachelor's degree in education from Auburn University; a master's degree in education from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville; a master of divinity from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; and a doctor in practical ministries from Trinity Seminary in Newburgh, Ind. He and his wife, Joanie, have two children. ► **First Church, White Plains**, in Anniston, re-joined Calhoun Association on Oct. 14 following a vote by associational annual meeting messengers. Calhoun Association now has 89 churches and one mission congregation. Sid Nichols is director of missions.

CHEROKEE

► **Friendship Church, Centre**, will hold a tour of the adjoining cemetery Nov. 1 from 1-4 p.m. There will be presentations, antiques to view and re-

freshments also will be available. Adam Cochran is pastor.

COFFEE

► **Dewey Emfinger** is the new pastor of **Mount Gil-ead Church, Elba**. He previously served at Faith Community Church, Enterprise. He and his wife, Theresa, have 4 children.



EMFINGER

ETOWAH

► **Thom Harrison** is the new pastor of **North Glencoe Church**. A Gadsden native, Harrison graduated from Samford



HARRISON

University in Birmingham and Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. He previously served as pastor of two North Carolina churches. Most recently he served as a church planter in Central Asia with the International Mission Board. He and his wife, Anne, have five children.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will honor Pastor Tim Anderson and his wife Sherry's 20th anniversary with the church Oct. 26. Worship will begin at 9:30 a.m. Child care will be provided. For information call the church office at 256-729-1328.

MARSHALL

► **Clint Landry** is the new pastor of **First Church, Arab**.



LANDRY

He previously served at First Church, Bayou La Batre. He also has served at First Church, Wetumpka. He holds a bachelor's degree in religion from the University of Mobile; a master of divinity and a doctorate from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Suzanne, have three children.

MONTGOMERY

► **Andy Hepburn** is the new pastor of **Hayneville Church**. He holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Troy University and a master's degree in religion from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He previously served as pastor of Taylor Road Church, Montgomery. He also has served at First Church, Tillman's Corner, in Mobile. He and his wife, Belinda, have two children.

MORGAN

► **Shoal Creek Church, Decatur**, will celebrate 170 years of ministry Oct. 26. The worship service will start at 10:10 a.m. David Hopkins, CG Redding and Chuck Bass will assist in the celebration. Gary Linville is pastor.

MUSCLE SHOALS

► **Hugh Bohlin** is the new pastor of **Donald Church, Town Creek**. He previously served as pastor of Cedar Ridge Church, Decatur, and also has served at New Bethel Church, Tuscumbia. He holds a



BOHLIN

bachelor's degree in sociology and social work from Auburn University at Montgomery; a master's degree in psychology from the University of Central Florida in Orlando; and a master of divinity from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He and his wife, Dianne, have two children.

SHELBY

► **Riverchase Church, Birmingham**, will host Don Piper, author of "90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life" on Nov. 9 at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. For information call 205-985-4495 or visit www.riverchasebaptist.org. Jeffrey Greer is pastor.

TENNESSEE RIVER

► **Mount Carmel Missionary Church, Bridgeport**, will have a special singing Oct. 25, 6 p.m. and Oct. 26, 11 a.m. Wade Spencer of The Spencer Family will sing. Josh Myers is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Winston Association** will hold an evangelism celebration Nov. 2, 5 p.m. The celebration will take place at First Church, Haleyville. Robert Smith will speak and Mike Facciani will provide special music. Al Hood is director of missions. ☞



St. Clair Springs marks 75 years of ministry

More than 70 people gathered at St. Clair Springs Baptist Church, Springville, Aug. 17 to celebrate the church's 75 years of ministry.

At the 10:30 a.m. service, musical guests Ernie Dawson & Heirline, a southern gospel group from Jasper, Tenn., kicked off the festivities. Johnnie Sentell, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, and Ben Chandler, director of missions for St. Clair Baptist Association, presented commemorative certificates to the church.

Bryan Robinson, who was pastor at the time but has since resigned, brought the sermon, referenced 2 Timothy 4 and encouraged the congregation to fight for the church and for the cause of Christ.

Among those in the congregation was Gary Leopard, a former pastor of St. Clair Springs Baptist who led the church for more than 30 years.

A covered dish lunch on the grounds followed the service, re-energizing participants for the afternoon singing and concert.

Vernon Stidham, anniversary committee member, said, "It was good to see old friends." (Maggie Walsh)

Happy Hill in Boaz celebrates centennial

Happy Hill Baptist Church, Boaz, celebrated its centennial Sept. 14 with more than 45 family and friends.

The Marshall Baptist Association church held a regular morning service at 10 and met for lunch in the fellowship hall afterward. Following lunch, a recognition service was held where the youth choir performed and former pastor Donny Lanier spoke. Wendell Dutton, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, presented the church with a commemorative certificate.

Cindy Tolleson, Angie Humphrey and Delinda Young worked on the anniversary committee and Tolleson said, "We enjoyed the day."

Pastor Stephen Young said he is "looking forward to still growing" after three people were saved at the church's last revival.

"We also have several teenagers in the church and I'm looking forward to them bringing more into the church and seeing them grow closer to the Lord." (Neisha Fuson)

Alabama Baptist GIVING



Year to Date through September 30, 2014

SEPTEMBER

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,475,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$3,527,036
Over Goal for Month.....	\$52,036

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$31,275,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$30,012,461
Under Goal for Year.....	\$1,262,539

The monthly and year-to-date totals include CP base, CP state causes and SBC causes.

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Related meetings

Other groups meet in conjunction with pstate convention annual meeting

Every year during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting several groups gather for their own meeting.

This year's convention meeting, held Nov. 10–11 at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, is no different.

Other meetings taking place are:

► **Alabama Church Planter Network** — The Alabama Church Planter Network will host a dinner Nov. 9, 6 p.m. at the Pete Hanna Center of Samford University in Birmingham. Special guest speaker will be Bob Logan, author of "The Church Planter's Toolkit" and "Coaching 101." Worship will be led by the Chelsea Westover Church worship team and registration will open at 5:30 p.m. To register, visit www.alsbom.org/churchplanterdinner

► **Education Music Association (EMA)** — EMA will hold its final annual meeting before disbanding Nov. 10 at First Baptist Church, Birmingham. There will be an evening meal and the Paul Stewart Music Ministry Award and the Christian Educator of the Year award will be presented. "Three on a String" will perform and there will be a fellowship meal. For registration information, contact Greg Hollis at 205-446-9965.

► **Alabama Network of Christian Community Ministers (ANCCM)** — ANCCM will meet Nov. 10, 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Fam-

ily Ministries office in Birmingham. The event is open to anyone "who ministers in the community through a formal Christian ministry or any Christian who is concerned about your community." Registration and membership fees are due by Nov. 1. Guest speaker will be Andrew Trezona of Challenge Literature Fellowship.

► **Volunteers in Missions** — The fellowship meal of Volunteers in Missions will take place Nov. 11, 5 p.m. at Lakeside Baptist. All missionaries present will be recognized as well as the nominees for the 2014 Volunteer of the Year. The winner of the award also will be announced. The North American Mission Board, the International Mission Board and the State Board of Missions' office of global missions will make presentations. To register, visit www.alsbom.org/vimbancquet by Oct. 24.

► **Director of Missions (DOM)** — DOMs will meet Nov. 10, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Liberty Park Baptist Church, Birmingham. Andrew Westmoreland, president of Samford University in Birmingham, will be the guest speaker and a meal will be served. Retired DOMs will be recognized and the Alabama Baptist Mission Belles will attend. To register, call Elmore Baptist Association at 334-567-7321.

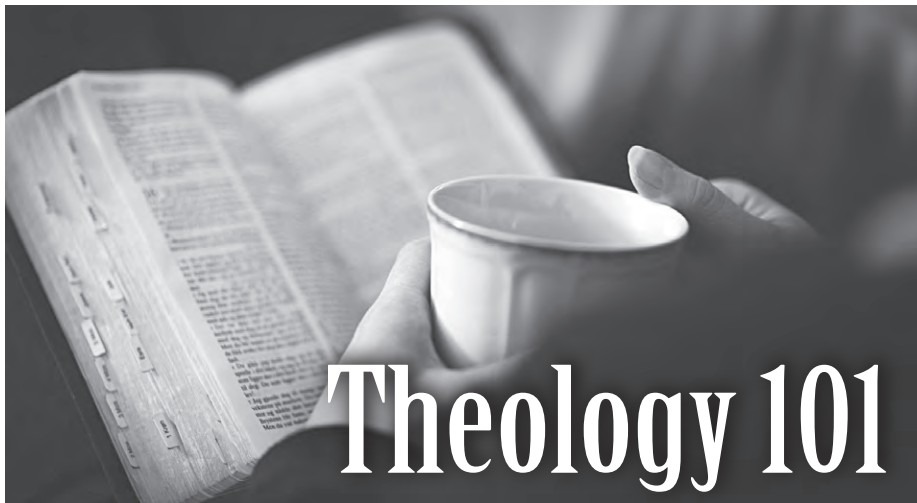
► **Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference** — Visit alpastorsconference.com and look for the full story in next week's issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. (TAB)

Decatur church hosts 'Firefighter Appreciation Sunday'



Photo courtesy of Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Decatur

Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Decatur, hosts Firefighter Appreciation Sunday on Oct. 5. The Morgan Baptist Association church honored the Priceville Volunteer Fire Department for its servant leadership. Fire Chief Charles Black said it was 'great to see the church honor and support firefighters and emergency medical responders.' Pastor Gary Linville (left) is pictured here with several firefighters who participated.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Holy Spirit and Holy Living

Walking As Light (Part 1 of 2)

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

In recent weeks a theology of Christian living we have explored includes walking worthily, walking differently and walking in love. This week we begin looking in Ephesians 5:7–14 at walking as light. Light is one of the rich theological images in the Bible. God is light. Christians are children of light. Jesus is the Light of the world. Light speaks of knowledge in place of ignorance, of truth instead of error, of holiness as opposed to sinfulness.

While the Bible does speak about walking in the light (1 John 1:7), this week's passage goes deeper than saying that Christians walk in light; it says that we are light. "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." The same verse informs our theology of Christian living by calling us to "walk as children of light" (5:8).

Walking as light

Walking as light calls for what believers often have described as living a separated life. Referring to people described in last week's passage as sexually immoral in behavior and crude in speech, this week's passage has the direct command, "Do not associate with them" (5:7). Lest we miss it the first time, the command is repeated in different words toward the end of the passage, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (5:11). The context of these commands suggests reasons for leading a morally separated life or walking as light. For one thing the nature of God's kingdom demands it. What is immoral or impure has no inheritance in the kingdom (5:5). Also the fact of God's wrath against the works of darkness calls for walking as children of light (5:6). In addition our new natures as those born again should cause us to live differently than children of darkness.

God matches His expectations of us with His provisions for us. In making

us His children of light, He provides the enablement for us to walk as light. One provision mentioned in this week's passage is that of our spiritual union with the Lord, who is Himself the Light of the world. Our passage puts it directly, "You are light in the Lord" (5:8).

Luminaries of Christ

The common phrase in the New Testament for this union is that of being "in Christ." We are not light apart from being spiritually united with the Lord. We look upon the sun as the source of earth's light. In the night we look at the moon and call what we see moonlight. However, we do better to think of the moon as a luminary instead of a light source. The moon reflects light that has its source in the sun. As Christians, we are luminaries of Christ. He is the light. As such He is the source of the light that we are to reflect each day by virtue of being joined in union with Him.

Since we are light in the Lord, we are to walk as what we are. Our passage goes on to tell us. "The fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (5:9). Thus walking as light entails thinking and doing what is good and right as well as speaking what is true.

What we are

As our Christian walk continues let us remember that once we were not only in the darkness — we were darkness. Now we not only live in the light — we are light in the Lord. Let's walk daily in keeping with what we are. ☩

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.



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‘Sold-out VBSer’

State, national VBS leaders celebrate Blakeney’s devotion

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

How else would you celebrate the nation’s best-known Vacation Bible School (VBS) promoter? A VBS to blow out all VBSes of course.

James Blakeney, an associate focused on preschool and children’s ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) since 1997, will retire from his position Jan. 31.

While he plans to move immediately into a part-time role focused primarily on promoting VBS, the state VBS leadership team would not settle for a traditional retirement routine. These are sold-out VBSers, after all. Whatever they did, it had to be over the top. And they achieved their goal with a surprise retirement celebration Oct. 11.

Seventy-five friends and family members from across the state and nation drove to the event in Tallahassee, which featured 17 themed booths for each VBS Blakeney has promoted for Alabama Baptists.

The energy apparent behind the planning and execution of the surprise for Blakeney falls in line with the passion put into planning each year’s VBS training for the leading evangelistic event in Southern Baptist life.

Jerry Wooley, VBS ministry specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources, attended the event to help celebrate Blakeney’s passion and heart for VBS.

‘Passionate about VBS’

“He understands that a successful VBS is where the workers are trained,” Wooley said. “Alabama provides one-eighth to one-tenth of everyone trained in the nation. There’s a phenomenal number of people who gets trained in the state.”

Jeff Slaughter, Nashville-area VBS songwriter who wrote 16 programs for LifeWay, said, “Alabama Baptists are always the forerunner in everything related to VBS because James Blakeney is so passionate about VBS.”

Prepping now for what will be his 20th VBS training tour in the state, Blakeney leads a team that makes five stops across the state in one week in February 2015 to train associational VBS leaders who will then train church VBS leaders.

Daniel Edmonds, director of the SBOM office of Sunday School and discipleship in which Blakeney serves as an associate, added

that not only does Blakeney train VBS leaders, he also attends their events and teaches VBS in churches himself. “He visits in virtually every association, which means he is in 75 or more churches during their VBS week,” Edmonds said.

“VBS is a year-round endeavor for James ... kicking off in November and wrapping up in August just in time to start recruiting and promoting in September and October for the next November kick off.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

‘Mr. VBS’ James Blakeney (center, left) is surprised to see LifeWay’s Jerry Wooley (center, right) and 74 others who came to celebrate his longtime service to VBS on Oct. 11 in Tallahassee. He moves to a part-time role Feb. 1.

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“Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily; my deep concern for all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:28

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The First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, helps launch the worldwide social media push to spread awareness of the Nigerian girls' kidnapping with the #BringBackOurGirls hash tag.

'Huge expectations'

Boko Haram to release more than 200 schoolgirls held captive for 6 months

After more than six months in captivity, the more than 200 kidnapped schoolgirls will soon be released, according to a Nigerian presidential spokesman Oct. 17.

A ceasefire agreement including the release of the girls was

reached between the Nigerian army and the Islamist militant group Boko Haram after a month of negotiations, according to news reports.

Hassan Tukur, principal secretary to Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, said the release should be finalized in late October after the next meeting with



en.wikipedia.org

Boko Haram's representatives in N'Djamena, Chad.

About 276 girls were taken in mid-April from a boarding school in Chibok in northeastern Nigeria. Several girls escaped (see "Christian schoolgirl recounts escape from Boko Haram militants" in the Oct. 9 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*) but more than 200 were still missing.

At a news conference in Nigeria, Boko Haram representatives assured the government "that the schoolgirls and all other people in their captivity are all alive and well." Some reports said the militant group was holding the girls in a remote Sambisa forest along Nigeria and Cameroon's border.

The girls' captivity has sparked international outrage as

well as support for their release.

The Bring Back Our Girls campaign leaders said in a tweet Oct. 17, "We are monitoring the news with huge expectations."

Tukur said, "[Boko Haram] has shown willingness to abide by the agreement which it demonstrated with the release of the Chinese and Cameroonian hostages a few days ago."

Possible prisoner swap

At press time it was unclear if the recent agreement includes a prisoner swap, something the

"[Boko Haram] has shown willingness to abide by the agreement which it demonstrated ... a few days ago."

Hassan Tukur
Nigerian president's principal secretary

Nigerian government and the International Committee of the Red Cross discussed with Boko Haram in September, according to news reports.

Once released the girls will be handed over to Chadian officials before being transferred to Nigerian officials and, eventually, "home."

Boko Haram, founded 12 years ago, has intensified attacks in recent years — bombing schools, churches and mosques; kidnapping women and children; and assassinating politicians and religious leaders. (TAB)

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LETTERS



(continued from page 2)
condition of repentance or faith. Or the Calvinistic view that once God chooses a person to be saved, they cannot resist or decline that salvation. These beliefs are not consistent with my theology.

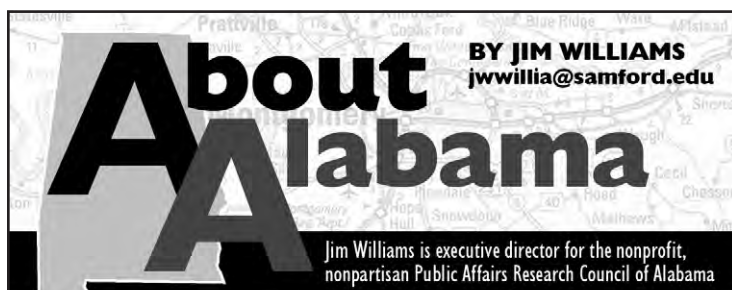
My main concern is that some who believe these things will be secretive about what they believe when being considered for a ministry position. I have heard some even say, "If they don't ask, I don't tell." I think it is unethical to hide what you believe simply because you think it will jeopardize a call to a new church. I believe we should be transparent about everything we believe, especially if the church considering me does not fit my belief system. I don't think secretly planning to

change the church is ethical or honest.

I would rather start a church with people who believe the way I believe rather than try to change one to fit my beliefs, like a wife feeling she can change her new husband. That only brings conflict and dissonance. We all know of churches where this has brought confusion, division and pain for the minister and his family.

Church search committees need to ask the right theological questions but when they don't the honest minister should share his beliefs.

Jerry Wilkins
Director of Missions Emeritus
Tuscaloosa Baptist Association



Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

Overcoming Alabama's Prison Problems

The Alabama Department of Corrections has jurisdiction over more than 32,000 individuals who have been convicted of a crime and are serving sentences in state prisons, work release centers and related programs. This is almost twice the number of inmates state prisons were designed to accommodate and the highest level of prison overcrowding in the United States.

Corrections officials estimate they'd need a minimum of \$420 million to add 6,000 new prison beds and \$92 million more annually to operate the added space.

Financing the current corrections budget requires \$394 million, or 22 percent, of the state's General Fund. State officials expect a shortfall of \$200 million in this fund for 2016, yet cutting prison costs under existing circumstances seems unlikely. Only Louisiana and Mississippi spend less per prisoner than Alabama. Our prisons are staffed at 58 percent of authorized levels. A federal investigation of conditions at the women's prison found that

they violated the U.S. Constitution's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

In part, Alabama's prison overcrowding stems from a high incarceration rate, which ranks fourth among all states. Sentencing reforms have been underway, aimed at reserving prison space for violent criminals and providing effective community supervision for other offenders. The state's probation and parole officers supervise more than 64,000 offenders but they carry an average caseload of 192.

The normal assumption is that money can be saved by reducing the prison population and then shifted to pay for improved practices in community supervision. This will be difficult in Alabama, considering the current level of overcrowding and understaffing in the prison system.

Nevertheless it is critical to invest in improvements to probation and parole supervision. In 2013, 40 percent of all admissions to prison-system custody had violated the terms of probation or parole. ☞

Tailgate Sunday

McElwain creates tailgate for worship

Football season in the South — it's hard to get much bigger than that.

But McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, leaders hoped to capitalize on football fever with their Fall Classic: Tailgate Sunday. The idea was to generate the same kind of enthusiasm and preparation for worship that thousands across the state invest in football on Saturdays.

"What if we put this same enthusiasm in our preparation for Sunday worship as we do preparing for the big game?" asked Jody Baker, minister of education and administration.

So on Oct. 12, rather than attending their traditional Sunday School at 9:30 a.m., the congregation met on the church's ballfield for a huge tailgate ex-

perience followed by worship. Church leaders recreated the atmosphere of a giant tailgate party — church members wore casual clothes, brought their own lawn chairs and dined on tailgate food

to gear up for worship just as they would their favorite team.

The day's speaker was Josh Niblett, head football coach of the Hoover High School Buccaneers.

Baker said, "The ultimate goal of the Christian is to be a player for Christ, totally committed, sacrificing all."

The event "was a super day for the

church and community," she said. "Many neighbors joined us as we celebrated the Lord's day with food, fun and great worship music. ... Tailgate Sunday may become an annual event at McElwain." (Partners by Design)



Photo courtesy of McElwain Baptist Church

McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, recreates the atmosphere of a giant tailgate party for its worship service Oct. 12.

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Joey Aderholt
Westlawn Baptist Church, Madison

Throughout my ministry I've asked people what they believe is essential for a person to get to heaven. Two threads run through the answers I've received, the first being that one must be a good and moral person and the second that one must accomplish humanitarian works. People have pointed to significant examples of others whom they considered moral and admirable and in whose footsteps they've aspired to follow. Others have made allusions to people who had accomplished great works for the sake of humanity — as measured by earthly standards — such as Mother Teresa or Gandhi.

The Bible tells us that neither answer is correct. First of all, Ephesians 2:1 makes it clear that not only can no one perform a good act, but that in fact we are all dead in sin. Our moral codes and works are not pleasing to God because they are representative of a world that serves Satan, not Him (2:2). Verse 3 further delineates that sin makes people an object deserving of God's wrath. So people ask, "What hope do we have to escape the wrath of God?" The only answer to that question is Jesus

Christ. Jesus is the only one who can redeem sinful people and create in them new life. Even when we were dead in sin and disobedient to His will God's love for us, His creation, made sinful people alive again. How was this accomplished? Verse 5 makes it clear: God made us alive through Jesus Christ.

It is not through our striving to live a moral life or the doing of good deeds but only through Jesus that we become children of God. It is through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that people are made alive (2:6). God, through the writer of Ephesians, defines the work of Jesus as grace. We are saved by grace through faith and we know that faith is a gift from God. We cannot boast therefore (2:8-9) about any good thing that is a product of grace because grace is made possible exclusively through Jesus Christ. ☞

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Rehobeth Baptist Church is accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. Submit resumés electronically to: dfoster@gmail.com or by mail to: 4444 South State Hwy 605, Rehobeth, AL 36301.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP & MUSIC: First Baptist Church, Childersburg, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister to lead worship music and develop youth and children's programs. Please forward resumés with a cover letter to: FBC Childersburg, 200 8th Avenue SW, Childersburg, AL 35044, or email to: jferg23881@bellsouth.net. Resumés should be received by Oct. 31.

MUSIC MINISTER: Fairfield Highlands Baptist Church is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumés to: FFHBC, ATTN: Guy Sellers, 910 Ninth Street, Midfield, AL 35228, or email: alsel2206@gmail.com.

MUSIC MINISTER: Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumés to: RABC, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 309 Raleigh Avenue, Homewood, AL 35209, or jeantowry@rabc.org.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: Eldridge Baptist Church in Eldridge, Ala.,

is seeking a worship leader to lead our choir and congregation in a traditional/contemporary worship service. Respond to: eldridgebaptistchurch@yahoo.com.

INTERIM MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER: Resumés should be sent to: Greensboro Baptist Church, ATTN: Music/Youth Search Committee, 908 Main Street, Greensboro, AL 36744, or email to: greensboro@bellsouth.net.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR/MINISTER OF YOUTH: Calvary Baptist Church of Jesup, Ga., is currently receiving resumés for the position of full-time associate pastor/minister of youth. Please send resumés to: secretary@cbcjesup.org.

STUDENT MINISTER: Concord Baptist, Anderson, S.C., is seeking a student minister (grades 6-12). Degree required from an accredited seminary and minimum of three years church/ministry experience. Submit resumés via email to: jjames@concordbaptist.com or to Concord Baptist, 1012 Concord Road, Anderson, SC 29621, ATTN: Dr. Don Cox. Church website: concordbaptist.com. Email: jjames@concordbaptist.com.

YOUTH PASTOR: Autaugaville Baptist Church is currently seeking a part-time youth pastor to lead our youth ministry program, primarily grades 7-12. Please

submit resumés to: Dr. Garner Clark, 245 First Street, Prattville, AL 36067. Website: www.autaugavillebaptist.org.

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

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: The DeKalb Baptist Association in NE Alabama is currently accepting resumés for the position of director of missions. Acceptable candidates must have a history of involvement in associational missions and support for the Southern Baptist Convention. Resumés can be sent to: DOM Search Committee, 218 Parker Avenue SE, Rainsville, AL 35986, or email to: dbasecretary@farmerstel.com.

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MISCELLANEOUS

JUDGEMENT DAY: Evangelistic drama, Cottage Hill Baptist, Pleasant Grove, AL 35127. Oct. 25: 6-10 p.m.; Oct. 26: 6-9 p.m.; Oct. 27 and 28: no presentation; Oct. 29-31: 6-9 p.m. Reservations: 205-744-8521.

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

New Orleans Seminary receives anonymous \$7.5M

NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary trustees accepted an anonymous gift to broaden the Caskey Center for Church Excellence scholarship program during a meeting Oct. 6.

In April \$1.5 million was given anonymously to launch the Caskey Center at the seminary and offer 100 full-tuition scholarships to bivocational and smaller membership church ministers from congregations that cooperate with the Louisiana Baptist Convention. The seminary interviewed more than 130 Louisiana ministers who met the scholarship qualifications and the donor agreed to fund the entire group for the 2014–2015 school year.

As of October, the donor had given a total of \$7.5 million to the Caskey Center and decided to offer scholarships for up to 50 Mississippi ministers.

Seminary President Chuck Kelley announced that the gift will enable Mississippi bivocational and smaller membership church ministers to be able to apply for full-tuition scholarships at New Orleans Seminary.

The scholarships, up to \$6,000 per year, are available for certificate, associate, undergraduate or master's degree study at the seminary and study in any of its delivery systems including the main campus, Louisiana and Mississippi extension centers, hybrid courses, workshops, conference-based courses and online programs.

To qualify for the new program in Mississippi, students must be serving as paid staff at a smaller membership church (up to 150 in worship) in cooperation with the Mississippi Baptist Convention or as a bivocational minister at a Mississippi Baptist church. In addition, scholarship recipients are required to affirm the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, available at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood website (www.cbmw.org).

The Caskey Center is receiving applications for the Louisiana and Mississippi scholarships at www.nobts.edu/CaskeyCenter.

Wisconsin campus gifted to Southern Seminary

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary unanimously accepted the gift of a Christian university campus in Wisconsin as a new extension campus of the seminary and its undergraduate Boyce College during their Oct. 13–14 fall meeting in Louisville, Ky.

The gifting of Northland International University, an evangelical school in Dunbar, Wis., to Southern Seminary has been approved by Northland's trustees effective Aug. 1, 2015.

Daniel Patz, president of Northland since 2013, attended the meeting and told trustees that the campus is not just a gift to Southern Seminary.

"It is a gift to us in order for this legacy and this mission to continue; it is the greatest mission in the world, to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth," Patz said.

In addition to the academic expansion for Southern and Boyce, the Northland campus will provide a location for youth camps, church planting training, faculty retreats and other events on its 660-acre campus about 90 minutes north of Green Bay, Wis., officials said. ☐

Subpoenaed sermons

Texas AG fights for First Amendment rights of 5 pastors

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott called on Houston city attorney Dave Feldman on Oct. 16 to withdraw subpoenas requiring five pastors to submit their sermons to his office in regard to litigation against a new Houston Equal Rights Ordinance's protections based on sexual orientation.

The pastors are part of a petition effort to repeal the ordinance, known as HERO among its supporters.

"Your aggressive and invasive subpoenas show no regard for the very serious First Amendment considerations at stake," Abbott wrote in the letter addressed to Feldman.

In a news conference Oct. 15, Houston Mayor Annise Parker and Feldman admitted the wording of the subpoenas was "overly broad" but claimed they had no knowledge of the documents before Oct. 14 because the subpoenas had been issued in September by a law firm assisting in the litigation.

But that statement does not ring true for Erik Stanley, an Alliance Defending Freedom attorney representing the five pastors. It is disconcerting that attorneys for three of Houston's most powerful law firms did not consider the First Amendment implications of the subpoenas, Stanley noted.

Stanley filed a brief with the Harris County District Court on Oct. 10 asking that the subpoenas be quashed. The request would give the pastors a reprieve from the threat of fines or imprisonment for contempt of court for noncompliance.

Critics nationwide called the subpoenas a "fishing expedition" that will have a chilling effect on anyone seeking redress with city hall. And the move illustrates a key objection members of the No UNequal Rights Coalition have with HERO — government intrusion into the life and work of the local church.

The ordinance, passed in May, gives protected status to individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. It requires public accommodations be made for individuals based on their gender identity, not biology. Although churches are exempt from the law, critics charge it would force parachurch organizations, businesses and individuals to violate their religious convictions in accommodating the law. Parker, a lesbian, championed the ordinance saying its passage was deeply personal.

Requested material

Included among the 17 categories of requested material in the subpoenas is "all speeches, presentations or sermons related to HERO, the petition, Mayor Annise Parker, homosexuality or gender identity prepared by, delivered by, revised by or approved by you or in your possession."

The subpoenaed pastors — Dave Welch, executive director of the Houston Area Pastor Council; Steve Riggie of Grace Community Church; Khanh Huynh of Vietnamese Baptist Church; Magda Hermida of Magda Hermida Ministries and Hernan Castano of

Baptists join forces in opposition to subpoenas

Baptists set aside differences in an Oct. 15 letter opposing subpoenas ordering five Houston pastors to turn over sermons as evidence in a lawsuit seeking repeal of the city's nondiscrimination ordinance.

Top leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) and Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) signed a letter to city officials terming the issuing of subpoenas of sermons as "improper and unwarranted" and asking Mayor Annise Parker to acknowledge it was a mistake.

According to a press release, the coalition was organized by Russell Moore, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious

Liberty Commission, working with Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

It marked a rare show of unity among diverse groups typically defined by their differences.

Individuals signing the letter, in addition to Moore and Walker, include Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, and CBF Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter.

Both David Hardage, executive director of the BGCT, and Jim Richards, executive director of the SBTC, added their signatures.

Robert Sloan, president of Houston Baptist University, and Gus Reyes, director of the BGCT Christian Life Commission, also signed. (BNG)

Rios de Aceite — are not plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the city but have been outspoken in their opposition to the ordinance as members of the No UNequal Rights Coalition.

'Sermons are fair game'

Although Parker claimed ignorance about the subpoenas, a day earlier she posted on her Twitter feed, "If the five pastors used pulpits for politics, their sermons are fair game. Were instructions given on filling out anti-HERO petition?"

At the news conference, Feldman said the court order for sermons has been "construed" as an effort to infringe on religious liberties.

"All of this hysteria about how we're trying to infringe — all because of the use of the word 'sermon' — is really ridiculous."

The pastors targeted by the subpoenas are part of a racially diverse association of pastors united in their effort to repeal the ordinance. Unable to stop its passage by city council in May, the No UNequal Rights Coalition was formed to organize a referendum to put the ordinance to a vote by the city.

More than 50,000 signatures were gathered in the petition drive — far more than the 17,269 needed to put the issue on the November ballot. The requisite number of signatures was certified by City Secretary Anna Russell. But three days later, with only hours left in the city's deadline for certifying the petitions, Feldman summarily disqualified thousands of signatures alleging they did not meet city charter standards.

The coalition sued the city demanding Russell's certification protocol be followed. The case goes to trial in January. The subpoenaed sermons and pastor-church member communications are part of the city's discovery proceedings. (BP)



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This Christmas season, they want to open up their home to you at our Christmas Open House events. They're excited for you to tour their home, show off how they've decorated their rooms, and maybe share with you a delicious Christmas cookie they've personally iced!

They also want to share with you the impact you've made just by saying 'yes' to help care for them or for how you may help care for them in the future.

"We thought ABCH was going to be a hotel-like atmosphere," the Jerrells shared at the Christmas Open House last year. "But we came and saw that it's just like a home. The children's rooms reflect their personalities. It's a very intimate setting, like home. Open House was like visiting our family's home during the holidays."

More details will be made available at alabamachild.org/openhouse.

Times, Dates, and Locations to visit this December!

Dothan

Friday, December 5, 6-8 PM
368 County Line Road, Dothan, AL 36305
334-677-7856 / dothan@abchome.org

Decatur

Sunday, December 7, 2-5 PM
1404 16th Avenue SE, Decatur, AL 35601
256-355-6893 / decatur@abchome.org

Mobile

Sunday, December 7, 2-5 PM
6512 Grelot Road, Mobile, AL 36695
251-639-1022 / mobile@abchome.org

Oxford

Sunday, December 7, 2-5 PM
1931 Donna Drive, Oxford, AL 36203
256-831-4081 / oxford@abchome.org

So whether as a family, an individual, or a church group, save the date for Christmas Open House 2014, and tour one of your Alabama Baptist Children's Homes!



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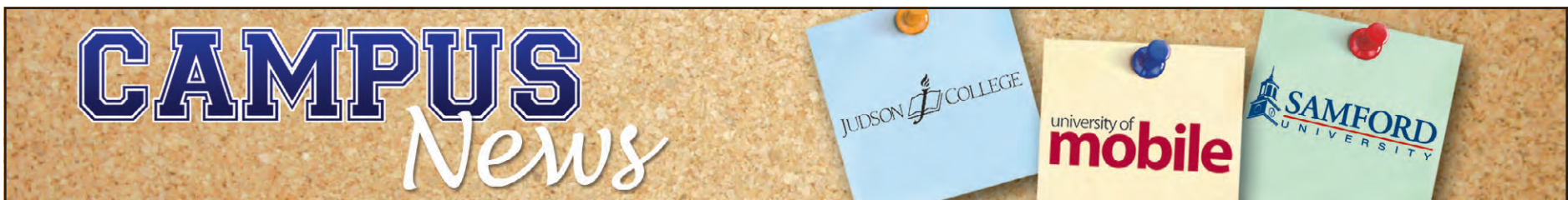
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All Open House events are FREE. If you'd like to help provide for a child at Christmas or help support children in foster care throughout the coming year, gifts will be accepted at each site and receipts can be provided for gifts received by check.





UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile Professor Featured at National Archives Symposium:** Matthew Downs, assistant professor of history at the University of Mobile

(UMobile), was a featured speaker at the National Archives third annual scholarly symposium in Atlanta.

The Sept. 20 symposium, "The Valley of the Dams: The Impact and Legacy of the Tennessee Valley Authority," completed the National Archive's yearlong effort

to promote the facility's records on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

Downs, who specializes in modern American and southern history, gave a presentation titled "A Democratic Labor: The Tennessee Valley Authority and Economic Development, 1933-1953."

"The agency, a New Deal organization designed to manage the resources of the Tennessee River watershed and best known for hydroelectric dams, became an important force in encouraging industrial and commercial growth in the region," Downs said.

Downs' research focused on the modernization of the South in the 20th century. His most recent work, "Transforming the South," will be published by LSU Press in December.

► **University of Mobile to Host Visit Day:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) will welcome prospective students and their parents to campus for UMobile Visit Day on Oct. 24. Students who attend a visit day and later enroll may earn a \$2,000 scholarship.

UMobile Visit Days offers students who are searching for a college an opportunity for a close-up look at college life at a university named in "America's Best Christian Colleges" and "America's 100 Best College Buys."

Visit Day includes a campus tour, academic meetings with professors, information about admission and financial aid, a visit with current students and special performances by Center for Performing Arts ensembles.

Additional UMobile Visit Days are scheduled throughout the 2014-2015 academic year.

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Former Judson Eagles Softball Players Hold Rematch with Current Players:** Former Judson Eagles softball players battled the current Judson Eagles team in two games but were defeated in both games. The matches were played in Judson's Dunkin Athletic Complex on Sept. 27.

Stephanie Alford, 2009 alumna who has organized the event for the past two years, said, "These homecoming games for alumnae are a way to reconnect with old softball buddies, share stories from their time at Judson and reconnect them to their alma mater."

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Event at Samford to Consider 'North Korea Beyond the Nuclear Crisis':** Samford University in Birmingham will host noted Korea scholar David C. Kang for a public lecture Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. in the university's Brock Recital Hall. Kang is professor of international relations and business and director of the Korean Studies Institute at the University of Southern California.

Kang's lecture — "North Korea Beyond the Nuclear Crisis" — is sponsored by Samford's global studies program and history majors with generous support from the Distinguished Speakers Bureau of the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, the Korean Foundation and Howard College of Arts and Sciences.

Kang will address North Korea as a complex whole and provide a new lens through which to understand its nuclear program, its depressing lack of progress on human rights, its changing economy and how the people of North Korea are changing. For more information, call 205-726-4197.

VOICE YOUR OPINION

SPEAK UP on issues in the Baptist world by writing a letter to the editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Remember to:

- Include your name and address
- Focus on issues, not people
- Be as concise as possible



Photo by Debbie Campbell

Sand Mountain Association focuses on DR at annual meeting

Several of the 71 Disaster Relief (DR) volunteers from Sand Mountain Baptist Association, plus volunteers from nearby associations, prepared and served a meal at the association's Oct. 13 annual meeting at Happy Home Baptist Church, Henagar, using the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' feeding unit. Because of inclement weather the meal line was set up in the fellowship hall. David Patty is director of missions.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 26

Explore the Bible By Dr. Jay T. Robertson Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

ONLY JESUS TRANSFORMS Hebrews 8:1-13

The New Covenant Needed (1-6)

Our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. The idea that Christ was seated comes from Psalm 110:1. The act of sitting down suggested that Jesus' task was done. By contrast, the priests of Aaron's line always stood in God's presence without sitting (Heb. 10:11). Their work was never completed. Jesus had assumed a position of power and excellence at the Father's right hand as a result of His faithful work.

Aaron's priests could only go through the motions of pursuing a symbolic ministry in an earthly tabernacle. They presented pictures and symbols of the forgiveness of sin. The work of Christ, however, actually accomplished the job. He obtained forgiveness by offering Himself in God's presence.

Earthly priests kept on having to offer sacrifices for sins. Jesus, our High Priest, offered a single sacrifice that never needed to be repeated. According to the Mosaic Law, Jesus was not descended from the proper tribe for serving as a priest on earth. Jesus' heavenly High Priesthood depended on the offering of a perfect earthly sacrifice followed by His ascension to the right hand of the Father in heaven. In heaven Jesus carried on a far greater priestly ministry than any earthly priest enjoyed.

The priestly ministry on earth represented only a shadow of the truly effective priestly ministry Jesus performed in heaven. The work of the Levitical priests only served as a preview of the atoning work of Christ. The priestly activity on earth pointed not to a physical temple in heaven but to the cross of Christ. It was on the cross that Jesus accomplished the real activity which affected our relationship with God. Jesus' ministry was more effective in its service than the work of the descendants of Aaron because God

had established Jesus' ministry on better promises.

The New Covenant Promised (7-9)

The failure of the first covenant at Sinai demanded the institution of a second covenant. This did not suggest that the law itself had flaws but that the experience of human beings under the law was faulty. The law had not met the needs of sinful human beings. The law could reveal sin but it could not remove it. So God introduced a new covenant.

The new covenant promises moral power, personal knowledge and forgiveness of sin. Verse 8 begins a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. It explicitly identifies Jeremiah's words as God's Word to establish that divine authority lay behind his quote. Jeremiah had spoken these words as God was restoring the Jews after the Babylonian Captivity. Centuries passed after Jeremiah's words before God inaugurated the new covenant with the coming of the Messiah.

Verse 9 contrasts the old covenant with the new by describing the historical circumstances in which God had begun the old. God had taken the initiative to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt and care for His people, but they turned their backs on Him. In judgment God then turned away from them.

The New Covenant Described (10-13)

In verse 10 three features stand out. First the covenant applied to "the house of Israel." This expression included the entire people of God. This statement is in line with Paul's observations in Galatians 3:29 that all believers are "Abraham's seed." Second the covenant would be inward. God would write its content in the minds and hearts of His people. Third the covenant would produce intimacy, creating a relationship in which Israel's God would become the God of His followers, and they would become His people.

Fellowship with God would be direct and immediate. God will be merciful to His people's deeds of unrighteousness. He will forgive His people of all of their sins. ☞

Bible Studies for Life By Dr. James Barnette, Ph.D. Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church

OVERCOME TEMPTATION Genesis 39:3-12

The Lord Was With Joseph and Blessed Him. (3-6)

That the Lord was with Joseph is evident in how, out of being sold into enslavement, he prospered in Potiphar's house. Not only did Joseph recognize that Yahweh was the source of his success, Potiphar recognized it as well. "Now his master saw that the Lord was with him" (verse 3). Joseph was a hard-working young man and the outworking of his faith was evident to his supervisor. Joseph's labors reflect Proverbs 22:29 which praises the skilled laborer who will serve before kings rather than obscure men.

Because of Joseph's diligence, Potiphar increases his responsibilities and his authority. Ultimately the captain of the guard puts Joseph in charge of his own household. Put another way, he put all that he possessed under Joseph's jurisdiction. The Hebrew reads literally, "All that came to him he put in his charge." In a short time Joseph has been elevated from common slave — probably one among a host of slaves in Potiphar's house — to running the household of a top military man in Egypt. The trust that the captain has for Joseph is underscored with the statement that Potiphar did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Overcoming Temptation Begins by Having Standards and Convictions Already in Place. (7-10)

The temptation carried out by Potiphar's wife was brazen and shamelessly aggressive. One must keep in mind that Joseph is not immune to temptation. He is a red-blooded young man in his late 20s. He is in a private chamber, safe with the master's wife who had set up the entire seductive scenario. Potiphar's wife refuses to take no for an answer. She tempts the young bachelor day after day.

How was Joseph able to withstand the temptress? First he was loyal to his earthly master. He did not want to violate his

master's trust. Second Joseph was loyal to his God. Even if no one else ever found out about it, Joseph knew his Lord would know.

Joseph also had the clear theological perspective of temptation James addressed centuries later: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." God is not responsible for sin; Satan is. And when we give in to temptation — sexual or otherwise — we are responsible for it.

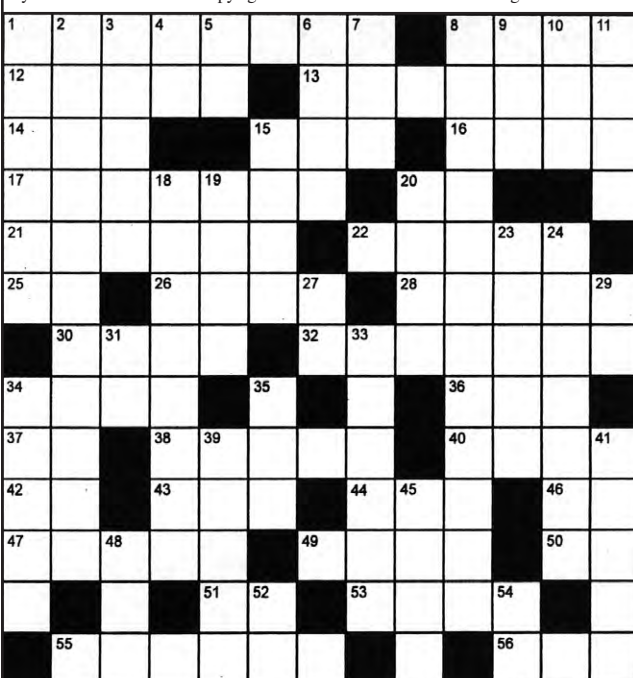
When Temptation Comes, Run! (11-12)

Joseph's righteous rebuffs lead to a dramatic scene. The garment he had to leave in the woman's hands was likely the undergarment, a long shirt tied around the hips. It was probably not the coat-like cape, which was not worn indoors. Some suggest therefore that Joseph fled completely undressed. Though it could appear a disgraceful exit, in reality it was an honorable, righteous one. "Out of the house" likely does not mean that Joseph ran out onto the street; rather the living quarters of this type of near-eastern house would be surrounded by a courtyard.

Despite the temptation and the resulting imprisonment, Joseph trusts the Lord is with him. That affirmation is threaded four times through this part of his story. It is worth noting two familiar passages that echo this theme in different ways. In Psalm 23, a song of trust, the promise of the Lord's presence is stated by David, "You are with me" (v. 4). And in the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:20, Jesus prepares the disciples for His imminent departure with His ultimate promise to the church: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." All of us face temptation, betrayal, false accusation and injustice at some point in our lives. But we must remain faithful like Joseph and trust that our Lord will work it for good. ☞

Christian Crossword

By Pamela Jensen Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc



Across

- Your sins are _____. (1 John 2:12)
- Ye shall be _____ indeed. (John 8:36)
- _____ to pray. (Matt. 14:23)
- I have _____ by experience. (Gen. 30:27)
- Turnpike. (abbr.)
- South-southwest. (abbr.)
- River in Switzerland.
- Thin cornmeal cake.
- Tennessee. (abbr.)
- A weasel.
- And _____ with her suburbs. (1 Chron. 6:75)
- Right. (abbr.)
- The children of _____. (Jer. 2:16)
- In the _____ of Jordan. (Mark 1:5)
- Bone from the elbow to the wrist.
- Set up our _____. (Ps. 20:5)
- One _____, a prophetess. (Luke 2:36)
- Cable News Network.

Down

- Sixteenth letter in Greek alphabet. (abbr.)
- They did eat _____. (Ex. 16:35)
- The name of the well _____. (Gen. 26:20)
- Symbol for element Platinum.
- Abraham and Sarah were _____. (Gen. 18:11)
- The desert of _____. (Num. 27:14)
- Symbol for element Lithium.
- From _____ lips. (Ps. 120:2)
- King of the _____. (Matt. 2:2)
- Symbol for element Tin.
- _____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:28)
- There was a continual _____ given him of the king of Babylon. (Jer. 52:34)
- With hands on the hips and elbows bowed outward.
- Greek island.
- Peace from God the _____. (2 John 3)
- We have therefore _____. (Gal. 6:10)
- His sons were Ulam and _____. (1 Chron. 7:16)
- Greece. (abbr.)
- _____ came to pass. (Josh. 1:1)
- There is none _____. (Isa. 45:18)
- He is a _____ creature. (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Gold and _____. (Matt. 2:11)
- Ribonucleic acid. (abbr.)
- Poetic: ever.
- Garden of _____. (Gen. 2:15)
- A straw beehive.
- And of sweet _____. (Ex. 30:23)
- A small buffalo of Celebes and the Philippines.
- _____ not to the right. (Prov. 4:27)
- Frogs ... into thine _____. (Ex. 8:3)

- From the _____ even to the husk. (Num. 6:4)
- Hemoglobin. (abbr.)
- Royal Society. (abbr.)
- Lane. (abbr.)
- They were _____. (Job 32:15)
- The _____ of his eye. (Deut. 32:10)
- Abraham was old, _____ well stricken. (Gen. 24:1)
- _____ trees and precious stones. (2 Chron. 9:10)
- Before rulers and _____. (Mark 13:9)
- Archaic: certainly, assuredly.
- I wrote them with _____. (Jer. 36:18)
- Symbol for element Rubidium.
- Truck. (abbr.)





Photo courtesy of Savvy Media Solutions

Compelling message

Newworldson's music aims to 'inspire'

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

By combining an energetic blend of pop, soul and gospel music the Canadian-based band Newworldson is impacting audiences around the world with an innovative sound and compelling message.

"I hope that people are uplifted at our concerts," frontman Joel Parisien said. "Our songs are often inspired by our own life experiences. I think there's a lot of power in using personal testimonies and converting them into songs."

Over the past few years the group has performed concerts in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Songs that minister

"If people are attending a concert or listening to our albums, I hope it inspires them to draw closer to God and the songs are able to minister to them," Parisien said. "Even though what we're doing artistically is very eclectic, it's centered around celebrating

God and praising Him. We want our lives to reflect the gospel message and the power of Christ's example displayed to those around us, that city on a hill that cannot be hidden."

Wherever the group performs they hope to connect audiences with the truth of the gospel.

Challenges of life

"We're definitely living in a time when people are being challenged financially and those burdens end up leaking over into their marriages and jobs," Parisien said. "We want to provide a message of hope through our music by pointing people to Christ. We want to give people more than just entertainment. In Job 14:6 Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

"At our concerts, when people are searching for truth and looking for an answer, we want to be really clear with our response and provide a strong beacon of hope." ❧

"We want to provide a message of hope through our music by pointing people to Christ. We want to give people more than just entertainment."

**Joel Parisien
Newworldson**



Photo courtesy of Jonathan Dorriety

Actor Harry Anderson, who plays the professor in 'A Matter of Faith,' teaches about evolution in the film.

'Matter of Faith'

Christian film focus on evolution, creation

By Jonathan Dorriety
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

This is part of the plot from the new movie by filmmaker Rich Christiano in "A Matter of Faith" that opened at Cobb Hollywood Cinema 16 in Tuscaloosa, Premier Cinema 14 in Bessemer and several other theaters across the United States on Oct. 17.

The story is about a Christian teenager who goes off to college for her freshman year and is influenced by her popular biology professor who teaches that evolution is the answer to the origins of life.

When the teen's father senses something changing with his daughter, he begins to examine the situation and what he discovers catches him completely off-guard. Concerned about his daughter drifting away from her Christian faith he tries to do something about it.

The film features Jordan Trovillion ("Jack Reacher"), Jay Pickett ("General Hospital"), three-time Emmy nominee Harry Anderson ("Night Court," "Dave's World") and Clarence Gilyard ("Matlock," "Walker Texas Ranger").

'Fair to both sides'

"We wanted to make a film that brought the issue of creation versus evolution to the forefront," Christiano said.

"A film that would be fair to both sides and allow the viewer to make a choice," he said. "What bothers me is that the idea of evolution is taught in our schools and universities across this great land of ours basically as a matter of fact.

"But no one can prove evolution since no one was present in the beginning to witness it, just as no person was there at the beginning to witness creation. Therefore both of these teachings become a matter of faith, not fact. One of the purposes of the film is to create some intelligent conversation about this issue."

Many Christian leaders who have previewed the film are praising its biblical message. Both Ray

Comfort, author and founder of The Way of the Master, and Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum describe "A Matter of Faith" as a must-see.

Pickett, who plays the role of the caring father Stephen Whitaker in the film, could relate because his own daughter is in college right now.

"As a father with the daughter in college you're always concerned about their well-being and what they are learning," he said.

Christiano said, "The response from pastors and viewers across the country has been very encouraging. I think viewers will be entertained and inspired, especially with the film's ending."

If you would like to see "A Matter of Faith" brought to your local theater, then contact Dorriety at 205-861-0405 or email jkdorriety@gmail.com.

For more information or to view the trailer, visit www.AMatterofFaithMovie.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jonathan Dorriety is a local sponsor of the movie and chairman of the deacons at Bethel Baptist Church, Ralph. He said, "A good Christian film can inspire you, offer solutions to everyday problems people face and is safe viewing for all ages. We believe 'A Matter of Faith' will do all of the above and more."





BNG photo

Following God's will

Sisters handle death of their husbands in opposite ways

It was one tragic event involving two siblings and two different reactions of grief, spirituality and faith.

Sisters Heather Gilion and Holly Snell recently shared with Baptists in Missouri how the deaths of their husbands in a 2000 canoeing accident changed the direction of their lives — and callings — in radical ways.

They wrote the 2010 book “Dancing On My Ashes” which recounts the experience.

It was back in 2000 when Holly and her husband, Scott, had opened a Christian camp in Vermont as a means of reaching out to young people. Heather traveled to Vermont to assist them as camp counselors.

On Aug. 1, Scott Nesbitt and James Brill, Heather's husband, left to find a daylong canoe course safe enough for teen campers. But they didn't return for dinner as planned and an all-out search began by the next morning into the nearby woods and along the streams.

On Aug. 2 word came that the bodies of the two men had been found. Scott had a gash on his head, prompting authorities to conclude that he had slipped on wet rocks at river's edge and struck his head. James, they believed, had died trying to rescue Scott.

Both were found floating in the river in life jackets.

‘On my knees’

When news reached Holly and Heather that their husbands had died, each reacted in her own way, the women told the Missouri Baptist Foundation Annual Conference in September.

“I ran one direction and Heather ran in another,” Holly said, describing their immediate reactions.

“I was on my knees in the wet grass; I don't know how long,” she said. “Something supernatural happened in my life; I started proclaiming who He is. I knew God is good. He's proven it over and over again.”

Heather, on the other hand, said she ran in the opposite direction — literally and spiritually. She recalled the unexpected loss of her and Holly's fa-

ther, a Baptist pastor, just eight months earlier.

“I became so bitter so quickly,” Heather said. “It affected me in every area of my life. I was so mad at God.”

“Holly was kneeling in the grass worshipping Him, and I was ready to have it out with him,” Heather said. “I was ready to be done with Him. ... I said, ‘No, You can't comfort me.’”

‘I may never understand’

Still on that hillside Heather said she could feel God's attention on her and realized He loved her.

“I had to humble myself and say, ‘God, I don't understand. I may never understand.’”

Her initial reaction gave way to prayer of a more supplicatory nature.

“I prayed, ‘Lord, I need You.’ And He has been more than enough,” she said. Holly acknowledged God cares for His children in every circumstance.

Both of the women have since remarried.

Holly, the mother of 2-year-old Emma when her husband, Scott, died said God brought someone into her life and her daughter's sooner than she had anticipated.

She met Aaron Snell and less than a year-and-a-half after the fatal accident she became Heather Snell. They have had two children together.

Today Heather Brill is married to Dallas Gilion. She had known him for a couple of years before she realized he had an interest in her.

In late 2004, Heather and Dallas married and they have two sons.

Today Aaron and Holly are planting a church in the Dallas suburb of McKinney, Texas. Heather and Dallas are part of a team that planted LifePoint Church, Ozark, Mo. Dallas serves as an elder.

The release of their book has opened up other ministry opportunities for the two women to share their story. They help lead worship at retreats and they often are accompanied by their husbands.

The women believe they are following God's will for their lives as they tell their story. (BNG)

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Seattle megachurch pastor Driscoll resigns

SEATTLE — Mark Driscoll, the larger-than-life megachurch pastor who has been accused of plagiarism, bullying and an unhealthy ego that alienated his most devoted followers, resigned from his Seattle church Oct. 14.

The divisive Seattle pastor had announced his plan to step aside for at least six weeks in August while his church investigated the charges against him. Driscoll's resignation came shortly after the church concluded its investigation.

“Recent months have proven unhealthy for our family — even physically unsafe at times — and we believe the time has now come for the elders to choose new pastoral leadership for Mars Hill,” Driscoll wrote in his resignation letter.

At the height of his influence and popularity, Driscoll admitted that he harbored grand ambitions, both for himself and the church he built from scratch.

Driscoll was not asked to resign from the church he started 18 years ago, according to a letter from the church's board of overseers. “Indeed we were surprised to receive his resignation letter,” they wrote.

Seven elders and one member of the board of overseers conducted an investigation.

In his resignation letter, Driscoll said he was not being disqualified from future ministry but hinted that his continued presence would be a distraction.

Driscoll's boisterous personality seemed to dominate Mars Hill, a congregation he built up to an estimated 14,000 people at 15 locations across five states. Weekly attendance is now reportedly about 7,600.

Mars Hill shuttered its Downtown Seattle and University of Washington District churches because of financial challenges.

‘Openly Secular’ movement launches

DECATUR, Ga. — A new coalition of atheists, humanists and other nonreligious groups is taking a page from the gay rights movement and encouraging people to admit they are “openly secular.”

“We wanted to rise above who is an atheist, who is an agnostic, who is a humanist, who is a secular Jew,” said Todd Stiefel, founder of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation and a main force behind the coalition.

The campaign, “Openly Secular: Opening Minds, Changing Hearts,” was unveiled at the 65th annual gathering of the Religion Newswriters Association on Sept. 20. It includes a website, resources for families, employers and clergy and a YouTube channel featuring both prominent and rank-and-file nonbelievers announcing their names followed by the declaration, “I am openly secular.”

To raise awareness of discrimination against nonbelievers, Openly Secular looked to the “It Gets Better” project launched several years ago by gay rights activists. In that campaign, openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people sat down in front of a video camera and told their stories of discrimination and bullying and encouraged closeted LGBT people to do the same. Many sociologists credit the “It Gets Better” project with the growing acceptance of same-sex relationships. ☞

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