



INSIDE



Hillcrest Baptist creates Ethiopian village for RA/GA campout

◆ Page 3



Alabama Baptists collect, deliver Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes

◆ Page 4



FBC Montgomery high school senior named Missions Volunteer of the Year

◆ Page 5

# PROTECT your church at Christmas



## Churches should take precautions against break-ins, thefts at Christmas

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In the weeks leading up to Christmas 2013 at least six churches in the Decatur area were robbed. One church, Round Island Baptist Church, Athens, in Limestone Baptist Association was burglarized on Christmas Eve. The thieves might have broken into more churches or escaped punishment had it not been for a surveillance video installed at Trinity Baptist Church, Decatur, in Morgan Baptist Association.

One of the thieves' faces was caught on video as he tried to rip the security camera off the wall, according to Trinity Baptist pastor Richie Thompson. A photo from the video released by Decatur police was shared on Facebook, where someone recognized the 19-year-old robber. He and two others were later arrested for the break-ins.

As the spirit of generosity increases in the weeks leading up to Christmas, so do break-ins and thefts. Churches are not immune from the threat. In

fact they may be easy targets during the holidays. For example, increased offerings may mean more cash on hand, whether in the offering plate or in the church office. In addition holiday programs often bring more visitors to the church campus, presenting a danger when rooms and buildings are left open and unsecured.

### Increasing threats

Because of the increasing threat of acts of violence, vandalism, theft and other crimes at churches, safety and security have become critical needs that many churches are not addressing, according to Jerry Turpen, president of Covenant Security Concepts in Hoover.

"The major problem with a lot of churches is not that they do not recognize the need for security," Turpen said. "They either procrastinate or they develop the attitude of 'this won't happen at our church.' Churches must decide if it's worth the risk not to take the threat seriously."

Turpen and other security experts suggest that churches should

evaluate their security protocols and implement the necessary practices to protect their money, their facilities and their people from would-be thieves and attackers.

First, all churches should have strong internal controls in place year round to guard against theft and misappropriation of church offerings, according to Bobby DuBois, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). Churches should have written policies about how church money will be handled and should assign responsibility for counting and depositing church funds to multiple individu-

als. Another step recommended by Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company is to eliminate signs in the building that advertise cash, such as "Finance Office" or "Donation Receipts."

### Be proactive

Second, churches can be proactive in securing their facilities to guard against break-ins, said Carol Dodgen, owner of Dodgen Security Consulting in Birmingham.

"We like to think that we are secure in our places of worship but then something happens," Dodgen said. "It makes sense to be vigilant (See 'Have a plan,' page 11)

**"The major problem with a lot of churches is not that they do not recognize the need for security. They either procrastinate or they develop the attitude of 'this won't happen at our church.'"**

Jerry Turpen  
president, Covenant Security Concepts

BCM BAPTIST CAMPUS MINISTRIES

Coming next week:  
BCM groups minister to international students

# COMMENT

## December — A Time for Christian Stewardship

For churches and nonprofit ministries December is a vital time. Many nonprofits report receiving between 25 to 35 percent of their annual budget during the final month of the year. One local nonprofit with which I am familiar anticipates almost half of its budget in the last two months of the year.

Many churches report similar patterns though the percentages are not as dramatic. If all members gave in a regular, systematic pattern then each month's receipts would provide one-twelfth of the annual budget or 8.33 percent. But church giving is not that smooth. Giving is impacted by everything from the weather to the season of the year.

December giving for many churches accounts for 15 to 20 percent of the total year's income.

December is a time for some members to catch up their tithes and offerings for any shortages caused by absence or other circumstances. In December some decide they are able to give extra offerings. Others routinely examine their year-end financial situation in December. This frequently results in decisions to increase charitable giving. Christians reason they can support causes in which they believe in as well as reduce their tax liability for state and national income taxes. That is a win-win situation for all involved.

### Year-end giving

Churches recognize the importance of year-end giving and frequently facilitate this year-end push by providing members with updates about their giving. That way members can determine if their actions reflected their intentions. Nonprofit ministries often make year-end appeals as well, praying for special donations.

Obviously December is an important time of Christian stewardship for individuals, for churches and for nonprofit ministries.

Increasingly church members use the year-end review of their financial condition as a time to plan for the future — not just what their annual giving will be but plans for how their resources will be used at the time of their death.

It was shocking to learn that only about 1 in 40 active church members included Christian causes in their estate plans. It seems most Christians leave everything to their children, even when their children are already well established and financially secure. Obviously much work must be done to reinforce the biblical teaching



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

that how resources are used at the time of one's death is an important expression of Christian stewardship.

Certainly concern about the welfare of one's family is appropriate (1 Tim. 5:8), but that does not lessen the responsibility of Christian stewardship. Nor does it mean the Christian should facilitate conduct and lifestyles contrary to the values and faith of the believer. Stewardship is not just about the tithe nor just about the tithe and offerings. Stewardship is about how one uses all of one's resources because all we have comes from God.

Stewardship begins with faithful giving through the church. It continues with how all we have is used to reflect the values of the Christian faith. That includes during our lifetime and beyond.

*The Alabama Baptist* regularly teaches biblical tithing directed through the local church. The publication promotes supporting all Baptists do together by channeling support for missions and ministries through the Cooperative Program. We encourage giving to the special missions offerings. The paper supports endowment campaigns by various Baptist entities.

### Consider giving

For the first time in the 19 years I have been editor, we are asking readers to consider a gift to undergird the vital ministry of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Baptists only participate with their person, pocketbook and prayers in those causes which they care about. But before one can care about something, one must know about it. *The Alabama Baptist* has the privilege of being the Baptist ministry charged with keeping Alabama Baptists informed about what God is doing among and through Baptists at home and around the world.

As proof of this principle, study after study

has demonstrated that churches that provide the state Baptist paper for active resident families give more to missions causes than churches that do not provide the paper. Churches that provide the paper also participate more in Baptist life beyond the local church than churches that do not provide the paper.

The findings simply document that every volunteer organization — even the church — needs a reliable, trustworthy source of ongoing information to help cast a common vision which in turn facilitates cooperation. The writer of Proverbs said the same thing long ago when he wrote in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained" (NASV).

Where this common source of trustworthy and reliable information is no longer available for active resident church families, the first step toward a breakdown of cooperation has taken place. It may take a while for the process to

work itself out but the wider vision of the kingdom of God expressed through cooperative efforts of like-minded Baptists will give way to a hyper-local vision of a single congregation.

The importance of disseminating Baptist news and information as widely as possible resulted in an operating principle adopted in 1950 and is still in place — that subscription costs should be as low as possible in order to be affordable by Alabama Baptist churches. Today's subscription cost of 28 cents

a week or \$13.75 annually covers only the cost of printing and mailing the paper. All other costs must be generated from other sources including special gifts.

*The Alabama Baptist* is making a difference in the lives of countless readers. It is making a difference in the lives of churches and certainly in the corporate life of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. If this ministry did not exist, Alabama Baptists would have to invent it anew. It is worthy of support. That is why I have included *The Alabama Baptist* in my estate plan.

The ministry's goal is to inform Alabama Baptists for understanding, to inspire for Christian growth and to connect for missions and ministries. That requires subscriptions so people can access the information. It also takes resources such as special gifts that undergird the ongoing work of the ministry. When you are reflecting on your total Christian stewardship this December please pray about including *The Alabama Baptist* among the ministries you support. 🙏

**"It was shocking to learn that only about 1 in 40 active church members included Christian causes in their estate plans."**

Follow Bob Terry  
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@drbobterry





## THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

"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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Photo courtesy of Annette Whitton

Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, in Coffee Baptist Association creates a portion of an Ethiopian village for its RA/GA campout. The children learned about international missions during their stay Nov. 14-15.

# Learning through experience

## Enterprise's Hillcrest Baptist creates Ethiopian village for RA/GA campout

By Anna Keller  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**H**illcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise, is a missions-focused congregation that sends several members on international trips each year. They go to places like Costa Rica, Belize and Ethiopia to minister, share God's love, offer medical assistance and more.

Those who participate in these trips come back invigorated to do missions work and are more aware of how much Americans have in comparison to people in other countries, church leaders explained.

A group that recently traveled to Ethiopia started brainstorming some unconventional ways to share their trip with the younger members of their church family.

### Understanding Ethiopian life

Annette Whitton, director of children's ministries at Hillcrest Baptist, has been to Ethiopia several times and always comes home changed.

"We've done talks and slide presentations and it's all been good, but we started wondering if there was something else we could do to make them understand what life is like there and how blessed we are in America," Whitton said. "We started thinking that maybe we could build a village right there at our church."

A Royal Ambassador (RA) teacher who went on the Ethiopia trip also is an accomplished craftsman, and he offered to build the

actual village structure. The idea was that the team would keep this endeavor a secret and only reveal it to the kids when they arrived to the church for a special event. The church always hosts a campout event for their Girls in Action (GAs) and RAs, and so this melded nicely into that annual tradition.

Though initially the event was going to take place in September or October, there were some conflicts that pushed it back to November and the event actually occurred Nov. 14-15.

Despite it being extremely cold that night, requiring the group to sleep indoors because temperatures were below freezing, GA director Jennifer Amlong said the timing worked out really well.

"It's kind of better because it was just before Thanksgiving so we were able to remind the kids how blessed we are," she said. "We could remind them that there are people in the world who don't have the things we take for granted."

The children showed up to the church — overnight bags in hand — not knowing what to expect. They were led into a side courtyard area of the church where the village had been set up.

The church's "village" consisted of four huts, a campfire, a trash area and an outhouse. For those who had actually traveled to Ethiopia, everything felt very familiar and authentic.

They separated the kids into four "families" and each family had a hut. Because about 23

first- to sixth-graders were at the event the huts became cozy quickly and the leaders explained that in Ethiopia families had to share these small spaces.

When it came time for dinner the children were served a meal much like one people in Ethiopia would eat including a version of "injera" (a bread-like food Ethiopians use in place of flatware while eating) and meat flavored with an Ethiopian spice called "berbere."

### Digging through trash

Whitton said, "Some kids complained about not having enough at dinner, so we told those kids that in Ethiopia when people want extra food, they go through the trash to find some. We'd hidden hot dogs in plastic bags in our 'dump' area of the village, and so the children had to dig through the trash to find hot dogs to grill if they wanted extra food."

After dinner the leaders took some time to talk to the children about Ethiopia and about missions work in general.

Amlong said, "It really made them think. In GAs we talk about missions every Wednesday night, but this way they got to experience it. You can talk about a child having to go to a dump to find food but when they experience that on their own it really sticks."

Hillcrest has left its Ethiopian village intact and plans to offer it as a resource to other churches that want to come by and see it and learn more about the lives of people in that country. ☪



Photo courtesy of Myra Abston

Gilberttown Baptist Church in Choctaw Baptist Association collects 59 shoeboxes.

# Shoebox ministry

## Samaritan's Purse hopes to share gospel with 10 million children through gift-filled shoeboxes

It happens every year. Items are collected, boxes are filled, labels are placed. But what makes Operation Christmas Child (OCC) merit repetition?

Samaritan's Purse, an international relief and Christian evangelism organization, believes a shoebox can "teach a child about the love of God, lead him or her to faith in Christ, inspire pastors and plant new churches," according to its website.

Samaritan's Purse has been collecting gift-filled shoeboxes through OCC since 1993, delivering more than 113 million shoeboxes to children in more than 150 countries since its inception. At more than 4,000 collection sites in the United States, 100,000-plus volunteers sort, pack, transport and pray over the OCC shoeboxes that will be delivered to children across six continents.

Part of the OCC program is The Greatest Journey, a 12-lesson discipleship program offered to children who receive the shoeboxes. The Greatest Journey seeks to help children "learn what it means to devote their lives to sharing the Good News of eternal grace through Jesus Christ" and is one of the largest discipleship programs in the world.

In 2013 the Southeast region, which includes Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, sorted and processed 842,899 shoeboxes at the Atlanta processing center, one of nine processing centers in the U.S.

Alabama Baptists across the state once again packed, wrapped and delivered shoeboxes to Atlanta to do their part to reach Samaritan's Purse's goal this year of 10 million children. See how a few of Alabama's churches came together during National Collection Week, Nov. 17-24 (see sidebars). (Maggie Walsh)

"If you were asked to define the word shoebox, it would be simple. It is even self-explanatory. A shoebox is a box made for the purpose of holding shoes. But it can be so much more than that. Did you know a shoebox can contain a miracle? It can contain a message of hope for a child who has no hope, a hint that there is someone, somewhere who cares. It might even be a child's first introduction to a loving God."

**Jo Layne Chapman**  
Center Hill Baptist Church, Jemison

[My husband, Jon, and I] were both volunteering with OCC at Lakewood Baptist Church in 2008 when we met. We both loved working with OCC and talked about how we look forward to it every year, knowing how much the shoeboxes mean to the children who receive them. On June 14,

2014 (five and a half years after we met) we were married. We have continued to volunteer at Lakewood every year. We always knew God changed lives through the ministry of OCC, but we never would have guessed how He would use OCC to change our lives by bringing us together."

**Kasey Keown**  
Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City

"The past several years our church has been going to Atlanta to help with Samaritan's Purse shoebox processing center. ... Many times during processing (the shoeboxes) we stop to pray over the boxes. The whole experience is very uplifting and rewarding. I encourage everyone to go. It really helps to get into the 'Christmas spirit.'"

**Lisa Martin, WMU director**  
First Baptist Church, Trafford

## Glimpse at Alabama Baptists' support of OCC (many others also participated)

### ▶ Alabama-Crenshaw Association

• 1,137 were collected in a combined effort between Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association and Crenshaw County churches and individuals. Included in that total, Rutledge Baptist Church collected 125 and South Luverne Baptist Church, Luverne, collected 114.

### ▶ Barbour Association

• Parkview Baptist Church, Eufala, collected 163.

### ▶ Bethlehem Association

• Bethlehem Baptist Association collected 315.

### ▶ Bigbee Association

• Siloam Baptist Church, York, collected 33.  
• Ward Baptist Church collected 15.

### ▶ Bullock-Centennial Association

• First Baptist Church, Union Springs, collected 196 as a church and 595 as Bullock County's collection center.

### ▶ Cahaba Association

• Churches in Cahaba Baptist Association gathered 1,096 shoeboxes collectively. Included in that total, the congregation of approximately 20 people at Pisgah Baptist Church, Selma, collected 400.

### ▶ Carey Association

• Carey Baptist Association served as a relay center for its area, collecting more than 836. Within that total, Millerville Baptist Church collected more than 175.  
• Five-year-old Jillian May Chevalier, granddaughter of Carey Association director of missions Bruce Willis, teamed up with her mother, Julie, to prepare 20 boxes.

### ▶ Central Association

• Rockford Baptist Church collected 119 and served as a relay center, gathering 769 in total for Central Baptist Association.

### ▶ Chilton Association

• Center Hill Baptist Church, Jemison, collected 421.

### ▶ Choctaw Association

• Gilberttown Baptist Church collected 59.

### ▶ Conecuh Association

• Bower Memorial Baptist Church, Evergreen, collected 77.  
• Evergreen Baptist Church collected 58.

### ▶ East Liberty Association

• Victory Baptist Church, Lanett, collected 112.

• First Baptist Church, Lanett, collected 123 along with postage costs.  
• County Line Baptist Church, Camp Hill, collected 52 along with postage.

### ▶ Escambia Association

• First Baptist Church, Brewton, served as a collection point for its area, gathering 642.

### ▶ Geneva Association

• Geneva Baptist Association churches contributed to the Geneva County Relay Center, which collected 805.

### ▶ Hale Association

• Community Baptist Church, Moundville, collected 230 as a church and 606 as a relay center.

### ▶ Lamar Association

• First Baptist Church, Sulligent, collected 170.

### ▶ Marion Association

• More than 1,400 were collected by Hines Memorial Baptist Church, Bear Creek, and Fulton Bridge Baptist Church, Hamilton.

### ▶ Montgomery Association

• Vaughn Forest Baptist Church, Montgomery, RAs and GAs collected 47.

### ▶ North Jefferson Association

• First Baptist Church, Trafford, collected 50.

### ▶ Pleasant Grove Association

• Evergreen Baptist Church, Vance, collected 715 as a church and 1,662 as a relay center.

### ▶ Russell Association

• Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, served as the collection center for Chattahoochee Valley area and received 19,617 shoeboxes from area churches, organizations and individuals.

### ▶ Selma Association

• A relay center in Marion for the surrounding area collected 1,731, a project several Selma Baptist Association churches contributed to.

### ▶ Tennessee River Association

• Center Point Baptist Church, Scottsboro, collected 190.

### ▶ Tuscaloosa Association

• Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, collected 3,164.  
• Indian Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, collected 30,963 as the collection center for West Alabama. ☞



Five-year-old Jillian May Chevalier teamed up with her mother, Julie, to make 20 boxes.

Photo by Julie Willis Chevalier

## How OCC shoeboxes get to children

- ▶ **Relay Center** — Area location where shoeboxes are collected from individuals, churches and other groups and delivered to a Collection Center.
- ▶ **Collection Center** — Regional location where shoeboxes are collected and picked up by a Samaritan's Purse truck.
- ▶ **Processing Center** — Nine U.S. locations where shoeboxes are processed and shipped to children. Alabama collections are processed in the center in Atlanta.



Beth Birchfield (left), a homeschooled high school senior and a member of FBC Montgomery, lends a hand during a missions trip to Haiti. She has been to Haiti 15 times since 2010, serving in medical missions, outreach and orphan care.



Photos courtesy of Tanya Birchfield, Bethany Rogers

**Top photo:** Beth Birchfield helps with orphan care during her first trip to Haiti. The Birchfields were instrumental in founding Children's Hope Orphanage in Jacmel, Haiti, which began to serve children orphaned after an earthquake devastated the island nation in January 2010.

# Volunteer of the year

## FBC Montgomery high school senior recognized for outstanding missions home, abroad

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**T**hough she is still in high school, missions has been a priority in Beth Birchfield's young life, and her work at home and abroad has earned her the recognition of 2014 Outstanding Alabama Baptist Missions Volunteer of the Year.

Beth, a homeschooled high school senior and a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, in Montgomery Baptist Association, said her parents, Andy and Tanya Birchfield, have had a tremendous influence on her faith and missions service.

"My passion for missions is a direct result of their sacrificial obedience to the Lord," Beth said. "Through their love for serving God I have seen the power of obedience and the joy in missions."

### Serving orphaned children

The Birchfields were instrumental in founding Children's Hope Orphanage in Jacmel, Haiti, which began to serve children orphaned after an earthquake devastated the island nation in January 2010.

Tanya Birchfield said it has been a blessing to see how God is shaping Beth and using her to influence the lives of others. Beth truly understands that missions work is an opportunity and an act of obedience.

"In our family we have tried to exemplify that being involved in missions is

simply accepting the privilege that God gives us to be part of His work. If we truly believe that Christ redeemed us from our hopelessness then our response will not

only be to get involved in serving but to live a missions-minded lifestyle. Beth gets this concept," Tanya said.

Beth, who plans to attend college and then medical school, felt God calling her to medical missions after a missions trip to Haiti.

"I fell in love with being a part of God's healing ministry by meeting spiritual and physical needs," she said. "Ultimately my goal is to become a doctor and serve full time in Haiti."

For now, however, Beth is learning on the job. She has been to Haiti 15 times since 2010, serving in medical missions, outreach and orphan care. One of her short-term goals

is to become fluent in the Haitian Creole language. She was most recently in Haiti in November.

In addition to her work in Haiti, Beth's missions work also has taken her abroad to Moldova and Zimbabwe as well as to Colorado and New York. In June she spoke at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Baltimore about her work in Haiti.



Photo courtesy of Tanya Birchfield

"Having Beth here, I know I can depend on her to do whatever is needed and to be a good Christian influence on the children," Children's Hope director says.

bodies the gospel-sharing strategy outlined in Acts 1:8," Colee said.

Beth's pastor, Jay Wolf, said her com-

mitment to missions sets an example for other young people.

"Beth authentically personifies a Christ-follower who does the Great Commandment and the Great Commission," Wolf said. "She is a living portrait of a student who fully follows Christ in every way."

Joy Schwindling, one of the directors for the Children's Hope mission house, said Beth works tirelessly with the children, teaching them English, leading Bible studies and playing with them.

### 'Good Christian influence'

"Having Beth here, I know I can depend on her to do whatever is needed and to be a good Christian influence on the children and teenagers," Schwindling said.

One important truth Beth has learned is that missions cannot be confined to a certain place or time. Instead it's a passion and a way of life she embraces.

"There is no greater way to show people who God is than by loving people. Specifically in missions, the Lord has given me a heart for children and the people of Haiti.

"I have discovered that there is no greater joy than worshipping God through obedience to Him by giving myself as a living sacrifice for the gospel to be heard," Beth said. "I am constantly amazed that the Lord allows us to be a part of His plan of making His name known throughout the nations. I am in love with our great God, and the only appropriate response is obedience in missions." ❧



# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org) or call 205-870-4720, ext. 100, at least three weeks prior to the event.

## BESSEMER

► The adult choir of The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla, will present "Joy Joy Joy" on Dec. 13, 6 p.m. and Dec. 14, 11 a.m. Child care will be provided. Bill McCall is pastor. ► **Joshua Cook** is the new pastor of **Pleasant Ridge Church, Hueytown**. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Reeltown, Notasulga. He also has served at Bridgeview Church, Montgomery; Holtville Riverside Church, Wetumpka; and New Hope Church, Deatsville. He holds an associate degree of biblical studies, a bachelor of theology and a doctor of theology from Andersonville Seminary in Camilla, Ga., and is pursuing a master's degree from Luther Rice Seminary in Lithonia, Ga., with plans to graduate in December. He and his wife, Bridget, have three children.

## BETHLEHEM

► **First Church, Frisco City; Oak Grove Church, Frisco City**, and other area churches and civic groups will present the fifth annual drive-through live nativity "Christmas Comes Alive in Frisco City" on Dec. 12-13, 6-8 p.m., at the Frisco City High School practice field. There will be 10 stations complete with live animals, biblical characters and background scenes depicting the story of the birth of Jesus. A hayride also will be available. A prayer tent will be staffed by area pastors, a puppet

tent will have puppets telling the Christmas story and a hospitality tent will be available with refreshments provided by area churches. Mark McCullough is pastor of First, Frisco City. Billy Hodges is pastor of Oak Grove.

## BIBB

► **Community Church, Briarfield**, will host Kenny Hatcher in concert Dec. 12, 7 p.m. For more information call Elmer Edwards at 205-665-1558 or Jesse Smitherman at 205-665-5291. Robert Franks is pastor.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **Mike Johnson** is the new pastor of **Eastside Church, Birmingham**. He previously served as pastor of Parkview Church, Tuscumbia. He also has served at Boones Chapel Church, Prattville; First Church, Albertville; New Hope Church, Pell City; and Central Church, Albertville. He holds a bachelor's degree in human relations from Samford University in Birmingham and a master's degree in pastoral ministry and a doctor of ministries from Atlan-



JOHNSON

tic Coast Seminary in Daytona Beach, Fla. He and his wife Cyndi have two children. **Brandon Knight** is the new youth pastor of Eastside, Birmingham. He previously served as minister of New Zion Bible Way Church, Birmingham. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in history from Samford University in Birmingham with plans to graduate in December.



KNIGHT

## CHEROKEE

► **Pine Grove Church, Centre**, will hold its 17th annual "Christ Child to the Judgement" on Dec. 6-7, 2:30 and 6:30 p.m. daily. Doors open one hour before each performance. For more information call 256-927-3214 or visit [www.pinegrovebc.org](http://www.pinegrovebc.org). Ricky Polard is pastor.

## FRIENDSHIP

► **Union Hill Church, Oneonta**, will hold "Christmas in the Country" on Dec. 12-13. There will be lights, hayrides, hot chocolate, a live nativity with animals and a musical. A chili and soup supper will start at 5:30 p.m. "Christmas Around the World" will follow. Bill Barnett is pastor.

## GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood) nondenominational luncheon Dec. 9, 11 a.m. Bradley Chamblee, pastor of Westside United Methodist Church, Geneva, will speak. For reservations call 334-684-9617. Mike Shirah is pastor.

## TUSCALOOSA

► **Steven Stamps** is the new bivocational pastor of **Piney Grove Church, Tuscaloosa**. He previously served as interim director of missions for Sipse Association. He and his wife, Lora, have three children.



STAMPS

## SAND MOUNTAIN

► **New Home Church, Pisgah**, will host New Ground in concert Dec. 14, 6 p.m. David Smith is pastor. ☪

# ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

## Alabama Baptist teachers awarded state scholarship

The Jenice Riley Memorial Scholarship of the Alabama Humanities Foundation was awarded to three Alabama Baptist teachers at a ceremony in October.

Lucy Bloodworth, a kindergarten teacher at McElwain Christian Academy and a member of McElwain Baptist Church, Birmingham, was a recipient of the \$1,000 award.

She plans to use the money to purchase iPads, iBooks and other materials to enhance her students' understanding of her project "STATE the Facts," an innovative way to help students recognize and understand the importance of voting.

Bloodworth is married to Jim and they have two children.

Brandy Russell, a first grade teacher at Weaver Elementary School and a member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, also received the award. She plans to

use the money to begin a drama team at Weaver Elementary.

She and her husband, Kevin, have four children.

Lindsey Irvin, a gifted education teacher at Calera Intermediate School in Montevallo, and a member of Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster, plans to use the scholarship money for building a structure and patio to display a historic bell for the community. She has three children. (TAB)



BLOODWORTH



RUSSELL



IRVIN

## East McFarland honors Reeves for 50 years of ministry

East McFarland Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, recently honored Pastor Doug Reeves for his 50 years in the ministry with a celebration worship service.

The celebration service included guest speakers Donnell Brown, director of missions for Morgan Baptist Association; Herman Pair, pastor of Sandusky First Baptist Church, Birmingham; Benny Jackson, evangelist, Alabaster; Billy Wooten, retired pastor, Cullman; and former East McFarland Baptist music ministers Tim Kirchner and Ronnie Philpot. A church-wide luncheon and reception was held following the service.

Reeves surrendered to the call to preach in March 1964 and has since served as pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Cullman; Katherwood Baptist Church, Birmingham; Austinville First Baptist Church, Decatur; and Gilgal Baptist Church, Duncanville. He has served as pastor of East McFarland for 27 years.

Prior to serving as a pastor, Reeves was actively involved in the Brother Bryan and Jimmie Hale Missions as well as prison ministries in Birmingham, Bessemer and Jefferson County.

East McFarland also celebrated the 50th anniversary of Reeves and his wife, Judy, during the service. (Hannah Muñoz)



REEVES

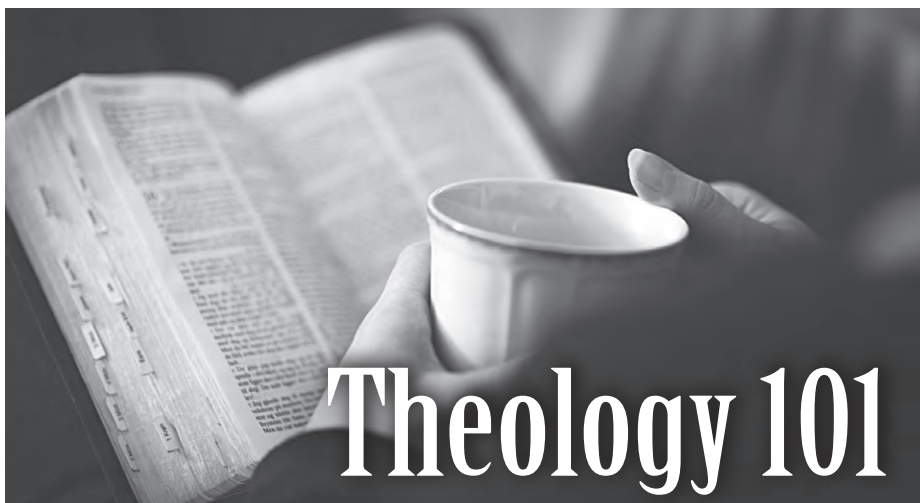
## REFLECTIONS

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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Songs of Christmas

### 'Magnificat': Mary's Song

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

In this month that brings us once again to celebrating Christmas our focus will be on four songs of Christmas, poetic and prophetic passages associated with Christ's coming into the world.

We begin the month with Mary's song as given us in Luke 1:46-55. Mary began her song with the testimony, "My soul magnifies the Lord." In the ancient Latin version the first word is magnifies, which in Latin is "magnificat." Hence Mary's song has passed down with the Latin title "The Magnificat," taken from that opening word.

Looking at Mary's song through a theological lens, our dual focus will be on Mary's magnificent song in general and her magnificent Lord in particular.

As to the song in general we read words that came from deep within Mary's inner being: "My soul magnifies the Lord." It went deeper than memorized words sung mechanically. Her song flowed from a saving relationship with the Lord ("my spirit rejoices in God my Savior").

Noteworthy is the fact that Mary looked upon God as her Savior without any hint of having been conceived immaculately without a sinful nature or living out her life without sin. We recall the occasions when Jesus address her as "woman," not as "mother," perchance a gentle reminder that Mary needed to know Him more as sinner to Savior and servant to Master, than as mother to son.

#### In submission to the Lord

The song also was offered in humility out of submission to the Lord ("He has looked on the humble estate of His servant"). Mary's song exalted the Lord for His mighty deeds ("for He who is mighty has done great things for me"). Her song exalted Him for the excellency of His person ("holy is His name"). Her song offered hope to the hopeless and hungry ("He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things").

Mary's magnificent song offers us insight into praise. Our praise is magnificent when it comes from deep within our hearts and is filled with genuine feeling.

Our praise is magnificent when it flows out of a saving relationship with Christ and is offered from submissive and humble hearts.

Praise is magnificent when it extols and exalts the Lord rather than being a melodious "selfie" that invites admiration and applause. The same might be said of sermons preached and Bible lessons taught.

As with Mary praise that magnifies the Lord rejoices our hearts while uplifting and blessing others.

#### Mary's magnificent God

We are at the very heart of theology when we are thinking about God, His attributes and His actions. In the song we behold Mary's magnificent God. He is the Savior of sinners ("God my Savior") and the Lover of the lowly ("He has looked on the humble estate of His servant"). Mary's Lord is the mighty Doer of great things ("for He who is mighty has done great things"), as well as the Dispenser of mercy to those who are reverent in heart ("His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation").

At the same time God is the mighty Disposer of the high and mighty ("He has brought down the mighty from their thrones"). He is the faithful Fulfiller of His promises ("He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers").

As God was to Mary so He is to each of us. As He was in ancient times so He is in our times. ☩

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.



# Today's culture & marriage

## Warren discusses God's plan for marriage with international religious leaders at Vatican

Christians must defend marriage by facing opponents winsomely and demonstrating that God's plan of one man and one woman for life promotes human flourishing, Rick Warren told international religious leaders at the Vatican on Nov. 18.

Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in the Los Angeles area, said he supports God's unchanging model for marriage and opposes gay "marriage" because "the only way to always be relevant is to be eternal. What is in style goes out of style. But no revolution lasts. Every lie eventually crumbles under its own deception. Cultures rise and fall. Cultures come and go. It isn't necessary to be on the right side of culture. It is necessary to be on the right side."

Along with Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Warren provided an evangelical Protestant viewpoint on the complementarity of man and woman during the second day of a Vatican-sponsored colloquium on marriage. About 350 religious, academic and civil society leaders from 23 countries and various world religions gathered at the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church for the Nov. 17-19 event.

Warren said he planned to speak on "Why Marriage Matters" but changed his topic to "What Must We Do?" after the 27 speakers on the program before him explained thoroughly the importance of traditional marriage. He outlined action steps for leaders to take in defense of marriage following the Vatican gathering. Among them:

► Believe what Jesus taught about marriage.

Male-female marriage is God's idea, not man's, and sex was created for marriage, Warren said.

"Even if you disbelieve the Bible, every human body, every living person, is a witness and testimony to God's intended purpose for sex," Warren said, according to his manuscript. "Sex was not created for recreation but for the connection of a husband and wife and the procreation of life."

► Celebrate healthy marriages.

"We will convert more opponents by being winsome and positive about the beauty and joy of marriage than by being negative about immorality," Warren said.

Churches should encourage people with happy marriages to share their testimonies, he said. Highlighting the benefits of marriage also is important, including healthier children, increased safety for women and greater economic stability, Warren said.

► Engage every media to promote marriage.

"Right now the Church is being out-

marketed by opponents of marriage," Warren said. "The minority view is getting the majority of media attention. Right now Christians are known more for what we are against than for what we are for. Whichever side tells the best stories wins."

To stem the cultural tide in favor of gay "marriage" Christians should promote "tasteful" movies and television shows that celebrate marriage, Warren said. Media produced by marriage proponents should portray "the joys and benefits of healthy marriages and the hard work it takes to maintain a great marriage."

Social media should be used "to mentor the next generation" regarding marriage, he said. Warren personally uses nine social media channels, he said.

► Face attackers with joy and winsomeness.

"Culture has accepted two lies: that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must hate them or are afraid of them [and] that to love someone means that you must agree with everything they believe or do," Warren said.

"Both are nonsense."

Citing the Bible's commands to "overcome evil with good" and "bless those who curse you," Warren said, "Attackers are not the enemy; they are the missions field. Jesus died for them."

To "stay winsome under attack" believers must be willing to face ridicule for the truth and remember that they "live for an audience of One," he said.

Traditional marriage advocates also must give people hope that a biblical marriage is attainable and teach the purposes of marriage, Warren said. He listed among marriage's purposes eliminating loneliness, channeling sexual expression and multiplying the human race.

#### Christ's love

But the deepest purpose of marriage is to illustrate "the mystery of Christ's love for His bride and body," the Church, Warren said.

"No other relationship, including the parent-child relationship, can picture this intimate union," he said. "To redefine marriage would destroy the picture that God intends for marriage to portray. We cannot cave on this issue."

Warren concluded, "The Church must never be captivated by culture, manipulated by critics, motivated by applause, frustrated by problems, debilitated by distractions or intimidated by evil. We must keep running the race with our eyes on the goal, not on those shouting from the sideline. We must be Spirit-led, purpose-driven and missions-focused so we cannot be bought, will not be compromised and shall not quit until we finish the race." (BP)



WARREN

# Discipleship in action

## IMB missionaries plant churches, see exponential growth in South Asia

For Mitch Englehart, it's a beautiful sight that's taking place in some very dirty water. The South Carolina native watches from the bank of a stagnant canal as six new believers are baptized outside a small village in the South Asian countryside. Dhanwan is one of them.

"I want to follow Jesus," the young man said, explaining that he became a Christian following a miraculous healing through the prayers of a local pastor. That pastor, Lalbahadur, is a fifth-generation Christian whose faith can be traced back to Englehart's church planting network. It is mid-January and Dhanwan shivers as he steps into the canal. Lalbahadur starts the baptism

chain, first dunking Dhanwan, as each newly baptized believer baptizes the next. This is discipleship in action, Englehart said, and it's what brought him to South Asia.

### Training leaders

He and his wife, Nellie, have spent the past nine years training church leaders like Lalbahadur. For 47-year-old Englehart that means travel — and lots of it. On average he spends 10 to 12 nights a month away from Nellie and their two children, Rachel and Peyton, as he disciples national believers. But he said the sacrifice is worthwhile. It's part of the commitment the Texas couple made when God called them as full-time Christian missionaries.

"When you look back at Paul and Jesus you can almost spell 'disciple' (as) T-I-M-E," Englehart said. "If we want to see God move in an area, then we need to invest between 60 and 90 days a year into these guys."

"These guys" are Englehart's two main church planting partners, Rakesh and Manoj. Between them they've seen more

than 1,200 new churches and 3,000-plus baptisms in the past five years. Trouble is, they work more than 500 miles apart.

Rakesh is six hours away by train. Manoj is much farther, 14 hours by train, which is why Englehart opts to fly. The \$140 ticket shaves travel time down to an hour. Both the partners' ministries center around rural villages, which means that after Englehart arrives in their respective cities there's often hours of driving still ahead to get where they're going.

### Distributing Bibles

"One hundred dollars gets us a taxi or jeep to travel around for three days so we can go from village to village," Englehart said. The same amount buys about 35

Bibles, "so we can put the Word in people's hands."

All of these expenses — from trains to taxis to Bibles — represent just a few of the Englehart's needs provided for by Southern Baptists' giving through the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

"We can do so much more together than we can by ourselves and that's the genius of Lottie Moon."

Englehart said, speaking of the offering that supports him, his family and their ministry, as well as that of more than 4,800 other Southern Baptist missionaries overseas. "When we go home [to America] they call us heroes. But all of us are heroes because we couldn't do it without those folks

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## Reverse Mortgages to Change

By Jimmy Dixon

Starting March 2, 2015, FHA will require a credit analysis and proof of a certain amount of income for anyone applying for a reverse mortgage. They've been talking about this for some time and now will drop the ax very soon. I plan to give you more details after the lenders study and discuss the 78-page memorandum and issue their policies on compliance. Meanwhile, if you or someone you know is considering a reverse mortgage, you may want to encourage them to think about applying before March 2 to avoid the added paperwork and scrutiny.

In FHA's defense, they are implementing these changes to make sure seniors are able to pay for their homeowner's insurance and property taxes. All mortgages require that the property be insured,

so this is nothing new. By the way, many of you have become accustomed to seeing retired Pastor Max and Carolyn Youngblood's picture in my articles. I dropped by to see them the other day and they told me they are about to sell their home and move in with a daughter. He volunteered to write about his experience of selling a home that has a reverse mortgage, so we'll look forward to his article.

Remember, like *The Alabama Baptist*, Jimmy covers our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. He is a Sunday School teacher and deacon at Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown. For a free brochure, quote or discussion, call him direct at 205-567-4800 or email [jdixon@mcgowinking.com](mailto:jdixon@mcgowinking.com).

**Jimmy Dixon**

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# tion

Silhouettes of the Himalayan foothills stretch to the horizon as Mitch Englehart (left) and Rakesh, one of Englehart's key South Asian church planting partners, discuss strategy for sharing Jesus in hard-to-reach places.



IMB photo

who are praying and giving. They're our heroes."

Englehart believes it's all part of one sacred effort that God is using to fulfill the Great Commission. The total number of believers in the Engleharts' church planting network alone tops 10,000 and there are dozens more Christian workers scattered throughout the region. Better still Englehart said much of the growth is happening among unengaged, unreached people groups who are hearing the gospel for the first time. But there's still plenty of work to be done.

Englehart's team is busy developing a new wave of church planters focused on the area's least-reached districts — many less than 0.1 percent Christian. Progress can sometimes seem painfully slow but Englehart knows that's a small price to pay compared with that of the South Asian believers he's training.

He's awed by the sacrifices many are willing to make — like walking nine miles in sweltering heat to attend a training event. "Who wouldn't want to be around a leader like that? It's from those guys I've learned

how to give my life for the gospel," Englehart said. "I've seen these guys suffer and the joy they have in doing it."

But it's not their dedication — or even their success — that keeps him going. It's about calling — about finding his place in God's story.

Englehart remembers when God first began pulling him toward full-time Christian work. A successful businessman chasing the American dream, he was first introduced to South Asians in Texas. Almost immediately Englehart knew something was different. He was able to connect with them in a way he couldn't with his American friends — especially when it came to sharing the gospel.

### 'It was that easy'

With Americans "it was like I was pushing a boulder up a hill," Englehart explained. "But when I sat with South Asian friends, it was like chasing that boulder down a hill — it was that easy."

And today, after helping train dozens of church planters, there's little doubt Englehart is exactly where God wants him to be. "I

wish I could stretch my day into 36 hours. I wish I could have 45 days in a month — that's how much I love what I do," he said.

"God is using these guys in mighty ways," Englehart added with a grin. "There's already a fire burning. My role is to pour a little gasoline on that fire."

Learn more about South Asian people groups and how to pray for and reach them with the gospel at [southasianpeoples.imb.org](http://southasianpeoples.imb.org).

Visit [imb.org/offering](http://imb.org/offering) for resources to help promote the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in your church, including downloadable videos at [imb.org/lm-covideo](http://imb.org/lm-covideo) and one featuring Mitch Englehart: [vimeo.com/95749556](http://vimeo.com/95749556).

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Program and Lottie Moon offering through an Alabama Baptist church. There also is a Donate Now button for online Lottie

Moon giving at [imb.org/offering](http://imb.org/offering).

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

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More than 800 Northside and Emmanuel Christian School students attend a joint chapel event at Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, on Nov. 6.

# Sharing common ground



Photo courtesy of Matthew Johnson

## Dothan Christian schools reach students through joint chapel event

By Anna Keller  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**D**othan's joint-Christian schools chapel event, now in its third year, initially sprung from a desire to quell a rivalry between two schools. The most recent event was held Nov. 6 at Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, and more than 800 students were in attendance.

Matthew Johnson, minister of administration for Ridgecrest Baptist, was the head of school for Northside Methodist Academy during the event's inception in 2012. Johnson was upset by the competitive nature Northside and Emmanuel Christian School shared and was concerned that the competitiveness wasn't teaching students the right message.

### 'Be examples'

"We needed to bring them together and be examples instead of letting things tear us apart," Johnson said. "Having parents fight and get kicked out of sports games? That's not a good message to be sending and it doesn't glorify Christ at all."

Johnson felt moved to do something to bring the two schools together, but an opportunity to do so didn't present itself until a student at Emmanuel unexpectedly died on the court during basketball practice.

"When he passed away students came to me and said they wanted to do something for

Emmanuel," Johnson said. "We took all our students to Emmanuel for an assembly and, coming out of that get-together, the students from Northside expressed interest in a joint chapel service with Emmanuel."

The two schools' praise bands got together in advance of the combined service and practiced. They both led music during the event. The service was well-received by students and faculty alike and so a second combined chapel event was held in the fall of 2013, this time including four area Christian schools along with a group of homeschooled students.

At that point, though, Johnson left his position at Northside for his current role at Ridgecrest Baptist.

"When I left Northside I wondered if they were going to do this event again," he said. "Someone has to be the one to coordinate the event and as much as God has worked on this and the way kids responded to the event, I couldn't just let it go."

So Ridgecrest Baptist became the location for the 2014 combined chapel service.

Lloyd Blank, youth pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist and guest speaker at the service, heard several positive comments about the message and entire service.

"This service offered the schools time to gather for a time of worship and community," Blank said. "Often the only time these schools come together for anything is as

opponents in a sporting event, and with that comes the intensity that is common between rivals. It helped them see that while they do compete against one another they also share the common ground of being part of the body of Christ."

### Positive responses

Johnson said he continues to receive positive responses from students about the event.

"They have a chapel every week, but there's something about getting off campus and doing the same thing but differently and with different people," Johnson said. "I looked at the audience at this massive amount of kids and knew someone was being changed. It's worth it for that — even just for one."

Emory Latta — head of school for Providence Christian School, also in Dothan — said this event is a good reminder of how Christian education stands out.

"We believe that there is nothing that can be taught from a neutral perspective," Latta said. "Some worldview is going to be conveyed, as there is no neutrality in education. An event like this gives us the opportunity to remind ourselves and our community of that truth."

Johnson is excited to see God continue to use the annual combined chapel event. "I want this to change lives and can't wait to see how we can evolve this." ❏

## Want to know GOD?

Pastor Charles King  
Paint Rock Baptist Church

**D**o you want to "know God" or better still do you want "God to know you?" God knows all about us; however, there is a level of knowledge (a relationship) He calls "knowing us." The same holds true for humans. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing Him. When God speaks of knowing, He means an intimate relationship where both parties have intimate knowledge of one another.

There are a number of Scriptures where God states "I never knew you," such as Matthew 7:23. Just a few verses before this (v. 21) Jesus says that His followers "do the will of God" and a few verses later (v. 24) He says those that "hear and do His word" are wise.

To understand how to "know God" in the manner God requires, we can look at Samuel. The Bible says that the sons of Eli, who were serving as priests, did not "know God" and the Word of God was rare in that day. A few verses later (1 Sam. 3:3-10) God called out to Samuel. Samuel's response is "key to knowing God." In verse 10, Samuel responded, "Speak Lord Your servant listens." The three key words in this short phrase are "Lord," "Servant" and "listen." 1) Samuel acknowledged God as Lord, 2) Samuel committed himself as a servant to the Lord and 3) as a committed servant, Samuel listened and obeyed God's instructions.

An example of acknowledging God is worshipping Him for who He is as seen in Revelation 4:11, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things." Also Samuel acknowledges himself as a servant which might best be demonstrated by Paul's statement of himself being "a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." (Titus 1:1). The third part of Samuel's commitment was to "listen" and can be seen in John's challenge to us in 1 John 2:4 to keep His commandments. We must therefore examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith. Those who pass the test know Him and are known by Him. ❏

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# Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

## Steve Price



PRICE

*First Baptist Church, Boaz  
Marshall Baptist Association*

**FAVORITE VERSE:** Matthew 6:33

**FAVORITE HYMN:** "How Great Thou Art"

**HOBBY:** Bow hunting

**FAMILY STATUS:** Widower for two years after 17 years of marriage to wife, Sharma; daughter, Sara Price

**F**orty-six-year-old Steve Price is not only a deacon, but also is involved in his church's prayer ministry and greeter ministry. Previously he served in outreach and in the video ministry. He has been a construction team member on short-term missions endeavors in Alabama, Mississippi and North Carolina. For nearly 24 years he has worked at Wayne Farms in Albertville. Price holds a bachelor of science degree in poultry science from Auburn University.

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

A: Definitely would be family and friends at church. I was saved at nine at First Baptist, Boaz. I would say the biggest influence was my parents had me in church and my friends' parents had them in church.

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

A: My wife got me involved in anything at church and elsewhere. Anything I've been involved in, she got me involved.

**Q: What does this ministry work demand?**

A: Currently it's just being

faithful and aware enough to see opportunities to help people in my daily activities.

**Q: What do you get from this ministry work?**

A: If I can help someone through my testimony or my failures or successes or just help somebody complete a task, God can be glorified through that. Just to be able to be used is the main point.

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

A: They help me tremendously. I know they pray for me every day.

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

A: In the present and the future my involvement needs to be a way of life.

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

A: I want to be faithful. My personal relationship with Christ will improve if I continue to be faithful to Him.

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

A: He's given me hope through forgiveness. I'm sure I would have made a lot more bad choices if I hadn't accepted Christ at an early age. 🙏

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

## 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

# Have a plan in place

## Churches should look at their facilities for vulnerabilities

(continued from page 1)

and to put policies in place that are going to make it more difficult for a crime to happen."

For example Brotherhood Mutual suggests that churches consider installing an alarm system which can substantially reduce the likelihood of buildings being burglarized. A less expensive practice is to use a safe to protect petty cash, small valuables, keys and important documents. In addition expensive electronics such as computers, DVD players, projectors and musical equipment should be secured behind good doors with good locks, Dodgen said. Another good idea is to limit the number of people within the church who have keys or access codes to church buildings.

However, one of the best crime deterrents is what Dodgen calls natural surveillance which is having human eyes on parking lots, office spaces and other areas in order to reduce opportunities for thieves to act.

"Thieves will choose the path of least resistance so they're looking for a place that is not vigilant," she said.

Dodgen said many churches have greeter teams who not only give out bulletins but also patrol parking areas, child care areas and other facilities during services. Some churches rely on video surveillance that can be helpful after a crime has been committed, as in the case of Trinity Baptist. Natural surveillance is a more effective deterrent, however, Dodgen said.

Finally, churches can take steps at any time of the year to protect their people both inside and outside church facilities. The use of lighting and land-

scaping to reduce risk is part of a strategy called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. Dodgen said churches should look at their facilities through the eyes of a criminal and look for vulnerabilities.

"Do we have places that people could hide? Do we have adequate lighting at night? Is our parking lot well lit? Have we eliminated ambush points? These are all questions church leaders can ask in order make the church grounds safer," Dodgen said.

### Plan for crisis situations

In addition churches should have a plan in place for crisis situations. Turpen suggests enlisting current or retired members of law enforcement, military or other emergency agencies to form a Safety and Security Committee. Such individuals already have been trained for emergency situations and can offer their expertise to the church, Turpen said. In certain situations a security consultant might be called in as well to help leaders assess the church's campus and facilities for areas of concern.

Church members who are the first point of contact as people enter church facilities also should be trained, Dodgen said. For example greeters should be trained in what to do if someone comes in who seems unstable. Church personnel need to know how to identify dangers and deescalate those situations, Dodgen added.

"The worst thing that can happen in a crisis is that this is the first time you've thought about it happening," Dodgen said. "There always needs to be a plan in place for handling difficult situations." 🙏

## FBC Jasper ordains 5 deacons in November



Photo courtesy of FBC Jasper

First Baptist Church, Jasper, in Walker Baptist Association ordained deacons Nov. 16. They are (front row, l to r) Kyle Cooper, Lincoln Moody, Mike Scott, Michael Schwab and Phillip Williams. They were ordained by Pastor Dennis Culbreth (back row).

# One Man's Redemption

## Gordo church bases Judgement House on member's testimony

By Anna Keller  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**D**oug Averett grew up in a rough environment. When his dad drank he would get pretty mean, and Averett was sexually abused when he was eight years old.

He kept the abuse a secret and by the time he was a teenager he was doing drugs.

Jump ahead several years to after Averett married his wife, Conni. She was a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ; he wasn't but she prayed fervently for him to be saved.

Averett "gave in" and joined a motorcycle ministry at one point but his participation didn't last long.

After leaving a bar one night he ended up in a horrific motorcycle accident that resulted in him flatlining three times. But even that experience didn't change him.

A church event did, however.

It was the October 2011 Judgement House at Zion Community Baptist Church, Gordo, in Sipsey Baptist Association that finally made the difference for Averett.

Not only did he find Jesus at the event but he also went on to become a dedicated member of the church. And the 2014 Judgement House storyline focused on his life's story.

"[Doug] accepted Christ at Judgement House and from that point on he was always at church," Pastor Mike Skelton said. "He was living about 40 miles away but he drove to church every Sunday morning, many Sunday evenings and every Wednesday night."

Eventually Averett relocated and now lives in a home that's "just a stone's throw" from the church.

Something about Averett's story touched Zion Baptist member Jennifer Driver, who plans and coordinates the church's Judgement House each year.

### Personal testimony

"Every year as soon as [Judgement House] is over the Lord will start dealing with me, showing me new situations to use, but after 2013 I told my team I didn't know what we were going to do the next year," Driver recalled. "Time moved on and the Lord quickened my spirit to ask Doug Averett to pray about using his testimony for this year's Judgement House. I knew this would be something like we had never done before."

Averett agreed and events from his life were depicted in the three-day outreach event — One Man's Redemption — that took place Halloween weekend.

"This year six people were saved as a result and lives were changed and hearts were touched," Driver said. "It was worth it. That's our goal every year, that if we just save one soul it's worth it." ❧

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# Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

## Floyd releases e-book for prayer, revival

SPRINGDALE, Ark. — Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Ronnie Floyd has released a motivational book to help pastors and churches across the SBC engage in concerted prayer for the next great awakening in advance of the 2015 annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

Floyd announced the release of his e-book in a press conference call Nov. 19, joined by Southern Baptist editors, writers and state convention leaders. The announcement also marked the release of the annual meeting theme, "Great Awakening: Clear Agreement, Visible Union, Extraordinary Prayer," based on Romans 13:11, for the June 16-17 gathering.

Floyd's e-book, "Pleading with Southern Baptists To Humbly Come Together before God in Clear Agreement, Visible Union and in Extraordinary Prayer for the Next Great Awakening and for the World to Be Reached for Christ," is available for free download at pray4awakening.com, sbc.net, RonnieFloyd.com and ibookstore.com. Additional tools and resources to promote the call to prayer are available on pray4awakening.com, including sermons from SBC pastors encouraging pastors to learn from one another, Floyd said.

## BWA honored with Top-Rated Nonprofit Award

WASHINGTON — The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has been honored with a prestigious 2014 Top-Rated Award by GreatNonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews of nonprofit organizations.

The award was based on the large number of positive reviews BWA received — reviews written by volunteers, donors and clients.

In addition BWA has been added to GreatNonprofits #GivingTuesday Guide — an interactive guide to top nonprofits throughout the years. This will appear during the upcoming holiday season.

Being on the Top-Rated list gives donors and volunteers more confidence that BWA is a credible organization.

Visit <http://bit.ly/1viasp4> to read the reviews left for the BWA. ☞

# Giving sacrificially

## Dogwood Grove continues to teach, support missions

By Michael J. Brooks  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Missions offerings have been a major focus for members of Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Montevallo, in Shelby Baptist Association for nearly 20 years.

With about 200 people attending two morning worship services, the church has developed a legacy of not only reaching but also surpassing its three annual missions offerings. It is rare the church doesn't make its goal for its offerings: the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO), the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) and the Kathleen Mallory State Missions offering.

"I've encouraged our folks to give sacrificially to missions," said Todd Burr, pastor since 1998. "I suggest that they ought not spend more on a single Christmas gift than they give to the Lottie Moon Offering or spend more on an Easter outfit than they give to the Annie Armstrong Offering. I remind them we have an awesome God and we can't out give Him."

Burr said though the promotion procedure used in the church was an idea he and his wife, Kari, honed in a previous pastorate, the members of Dogwood Grove Baptist have been wonderfully supportive in the process. Kari Burr currently serves as Woman's Missionary Union director and gives leadership to the church's missionary giving.

### Offering goals

The church's current LMCO goal is \$9,600. The congregation's AAEO goal last spring was \$9,500 and more than \$10,000 was given.

Vicki Greenhill serves on the church's publicity committee that plays a large role in helping the church reach its goals.

"We work intentionally and regularly to increase awareness," she said. "We ask our members for suggestions when we set our goals. Our people have been very generous in spite of the bad economy we've known in recent years."

Greenhill, a Dogwood Grove member since 1995, said the church customarily establishes the same goal amount for the Christmas and Easter offerings.

"We think both are important," she said. "We believe our state missions work is important too. Our Kathleen Mallory goal last spring was \$2,500 and we received nearly \$4,000."

Greenhill said her committee uses posters provided by the missionary agencies and includes information in the Sunday bulletins and on the church's website to inform the congregation. Videos are used in worship services leading up to the target dates.

"The videos give us a window into [the missionaries'] work and show images that make an impact," she said, noting the church also uses other creative ways to promote the offerings.



One year the church hosted a Wednesday night Lottie Moon banquet, she said.

Dogwood Grove sets aside three special days each year to receive the gifts of its members.

"We make one Sunday 'Victory Sunday' and work toward reaching our goal that day," Greenhill said. "People can and do give prior to that day but we encourage our members to bring their offerings on Victory Sunday. It's a day of celebration for us."

The church normally receives its weekly offerings at the conclusion of worship services but the process is reversed on Victory Sunday, she added. At the conclusion of morning worship on that day the children lead the way and everyone is encouraged to follow. They place their missions gifts in whatever special container is set up near the pulpit area.


### Setting an example

Burr believes he must set the pace as pastor.

"I heard Dr. Rick Lance several years ago challenge us at a pastors conference to step up and lead our churches to do great things," Burr said. "He said we set an example by what we're passionate about. I'm grateful our church has supported me in this commitment to our missionaries."


Burr said Dogwood Grove also gives generously to Southern Baptist's unified plan for missions giving.


"The Cooperative Program is the greatest system ever developed to fund missions," he said. "We believe giving to the Cooperative Program as well as to these three special offerings is part of our ministry for the Lord." ☞



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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 7

## Explore the Bible By Doug Wilson, Ph.D. Dean of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

### DELIVERANCE IS NEEDED Esther 3:1-9

During the reign of Ahasuerus (a.k.a. Xerxes), descendants of the exiled nation of Judah still lived in Babylon with some living farther east in Persia. In order to blend in to the majority cultures, they took on Babylonian names like Ishtar and Marduk (see also Dan. 1). Esther's given Hebrew name was Hadassah.

Mordecai was a descendant of Kish and Kish was the father of King Saul (1 Sam. 8). Saul publicly humiliated the Amalekite king, Agag, before the prophet Samuel executed this enemy of Israel (1 Sam. 15). This cultural and historical context is significant for understanding this narrative.

Fear often accompanies encounters with strangers especially those from another ethnic, religious or language background. The Jews spoke a different language, held to a different law (Torah) and practiced a different diet than the Persians.

Haman, a descendant of Agag, played upon the suspicions of the king and his court by pointing out that the Jews were a threat to their national security. Like the months and years following Pearl Harbor when Japanese Americans were treated as a threat, the Jews were worthy of extermination, according to Haman.

#### Mordecai Honors God Only (1-5)

Haman is promoted to a place of honor, higher than anyone else in Ahasuerus' court. All the royal staff bowed down to give him honor, everyone except Mordecai. The assumption in the narrative is that Mordecai determined not to bow down to anyone but God or an Israelite king (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 17:15). No name for God is used in this narrative though dependence upon God is understood in the subtext. When Haman discovered Mordecai's background he conspired to get rid of the entire population of Jews in Medo-Persia.

Twenty-first century followers of Jesus should not be surprised when they face

similar life and death scenarios. Christians face persecution around the world from Muslims in Nigeria and the Sudan, Hindus in India, secularists in North America, animistic tribalists in Africa and communists in North Korea. When we determine to honor God alone others are offended.

#### Genocide Planned (6-9)

"Your majesty, this people group is a threat to national security. They speak a different language, they follow different laws and they keep to themselves. They cannot be trusted." Haman has it all planned out. First cast lots (Hebrew purim) to determine when the attack was to take place. Second convince the Medo-Persian king the people are bad for the nation. Third finance the genocide through royal revenue.

Haman is well aware of the law of the Medes and the Persians. No one is above, not even the king (Dan. 6:12). As such when royalty pronounces an edict it cannot be revoked. Once the decree is made that the Jews will be eliminated no amount of backroom lawyering could change the outcome. The Jews were going to die.

Today Christians face threats around the world. ISIS continues to hunt down Nasrani — Christians from Iraq and elsewhere who are fleeing for their lives. Though American Christians are not facing such persecution the time may come when we will.

How do we and our brothers in Christ prepare for persecution whether spiritual, social, legal or physical? The answer is found in Revelation 12:11. These selfless, persecuted believers overcame by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimonies and because they did not love their lives, even unto death. ☞

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## Bible Studies for Life By Kevin Blackwell, Ph.D. Director of Ministry Training Institute, Samford University

### THE SHELTER OF GOD'S PRESENCE Psalm 23:1-6

Few passages stir up more emotions than the 23rd Psalm. It is perhaps the most widely quoted and read section of Scripture. For most Christians it has been dedicated to memory. We should not let our familiarity with the Psalm override the profound impact its meaning can have on our daily life. As David writes the passage he reflects on a difficult time in his life. David lived in exile as King Saul tried to kill him. The passage reveals God as Shepherd and Host.

#### God is with me to guide and provide what I need. (1-3)

David begins the Psalm with "The Lord" or "Yahweh." It is interesting to note he begins and ends the Psalm with the powerful name of Yahweh. David understood the role of the shepherd. He was called out by Samuel from the sheep (1 Sam. 16:11) as God's anointed leader for Israel. The relationship between shepherd and sheep is indeed personal and providential. The title of shepherd was given to kings, especially David (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7), and the Messiah who was to come (Ezek. 34:23-24; Mic. 5:4). Jesus identified Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). When David spoke of Yahweh as his Shepherd he thought of Him not only as his Provider and Protector but also as his King.

With Yahweh, David was "lacking nothing." As the passage is framed in the context of David's hiding from those trying to kill him, he was in need of shelter, protection, food and water yet in Yahweh he lacked nothing. David recognized God as one who "leads me in the paths of righteousness." Solomon reminded us of this promise in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

### God is present with me even in difficult circumstances. (4-5)

The key word of this section is the word "through." David believed that though he was faced with a valley situation, he would walk through it. The shepherd would lead the sheep through the difficulties. How does a Christian overcome the valleys of life? The key is found in verse 4, "You are with me. Your rod and staff comfort me." The word used here "nakhama" refers to comforting and consoling. It is the awareness of the presence of the shepherd that keep the sheep moving through the dangerous valleys in their journey.

The indwelling Holy Spirit often reminds us we are not alone. We are not to be overwhelmed by the fears of the valleys, especially the valley of the shadow of death. Shadows do not have the ability to hurt anyone. Through Christ, the Victor of the grave, we shall not fear death. It has become a mere shadow.

Verse 5 reveals God as the great Host. To sit as a guest at the table of a host was to be assured of food, housing, fellowship and protection. The table prepared in the presence of David's enemies was the Host's public announcement to them not to attempt to harm David in any way.

#### Dwelling in God's loving presence can be a constant in my life. (6)

Goodness and mercy shall follow (pursue) me. David uses two significant words, "radaf" (violent pursuit) and "tov vakheshed" (goodness and faithfulness). The Hebrew word "radaf" usually refers to an enemy pursuing for the sake of destroying. Yet here it refers to goodness and mercy pursuing David so as to bless him. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." David could not have been speaking of the temple of God because it was not built yet. Rather he is referring to the security of God's eternal presence. Though the dangers of life pursue, this passage reminds us that God pursues us even more. ☞

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

- I am the \_\_\_ and the life. (John 11:25)
- First garden.
- Shiphai, the son of \_\_\_. (1 Chron. 4:37)
- I stand \_\_\_ the door. (Rev. 3:20)
- Ye do well that ye take \_\_\_. (2 Pet. 1:19)
- Abstain from \_\_\_ offered to idols. (Acts 15:29)
- \_\_\_ not steal. (Mark 10:19)
- Set in \_\_\_. (Titus 1:5)
- Positive votes.
- What you do at meals.
- Short for Ezra.
- Taxi \_\_\_.
- A Hebrew refrain found often in Psalms. (Ps. 4:2)
- Uncle's mate.
- The captain's name. (Jer. 37:13)
- His \_\_\_ are open unto their prayers. (1 Pet. 3:12)

- Rosemary's nickname. (1 Chron. 23:23)
- I am not come \_\_\_ destroy. (Matt. 5:17)
- Benjamin's nickname.
- Joseph's uncle. (Gen. 33:1, 2)
- \_\_\_ thou not unto his words. (Prov. 30:6)
- Allow.
- They shall \_\_\_ comforted. (Matt. 5:4)
- Pronoun.
- A fool hath no delight \_\_\_ understanding. (Prov. 18:2)
- The harvest is \_\_\_. (Joel 3:13)
- Not fat.
- New Hampshire. (abbr.)
- England. (abbr.)
- A man shall \_\_\_ a pit. (Ex. 21:33)
- Have no other \_\_\_ before me. (Ex. 20:3)
- Solomon's son. (1 Kings 11:43)
- Mushi, Mahli and \_\_\_.

- The \_\_\_ is the Word of God. (Luke 8:11)
- Be not children in \_\_\_. (1 Cor. 14:20)
- Abraham's sacrifice. (Gen. 22:13)
- Aaron's son. (Num. 3:32)
- Bodies of \_\_\_. (Job 13:12)
- Small children.
- \_\_\_ and outs.
- And she bare him \_\_\_. (Ex. 6:23)
- Total. (abbr.)
- In lowliness of mind let \_\_\_ esteem others. (Phil. 2:3)
- Elijah's companion. (2 Kings 2:11)
- He that is an \_\_\_. (John 10:12)
- Book of wisdom written by Solomon.
- Help in time of \_\_\_. (Heb. 4:16)
- Israel's favorite son. (Gen. 37:3)

- \_\_\_ himself in water. (Num. 19:19)
- \_\_\_ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
- I will raise \_\_\_ up. (John 2:19)
- Opposite of "out."
- Edwin's nickname.
- \_\_\_ forth into Galilee. (John 1:43)

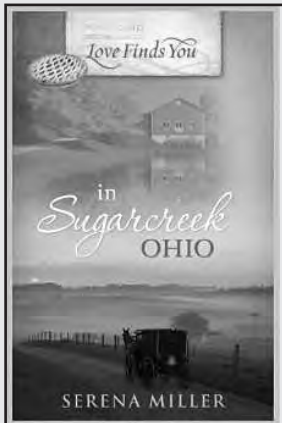
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# TOP 10

best-selling books from *LifeWay*

For the month of November

## FICTION



### 1. Love Finds You in Sugarcreek Ohio

By Serena Miller  
(Summerside)



### 2. Forbidden

By Ted Dekker and  
Tosca Lee  
(Center Street)

### 3. The Shoe Box

By Francine Rivers  
(Multnomah)

### 4. Evergreen

By Susan May Warren  
(Tyndale)

### 5. The Christmas Cat

By Melody Carlson  
(Revell)



### 6. Angels Walking

By Karen Kingsbury  
(Howard Books)

### 7. Silent Night, Holy Night

By Colleen Coble  
(Thomas Nelson)



### 8. Somewhere Safe with Somebody Good

By Jan Karon  
(Putnam)

### 9. The Auschwitz Escape

By Joel C. Rosenberg  
(Tyndale House)

### 10. The Donkey in the Living Room

By Sarah Cunningham  
(B&H)

Source: [blog.lifeway.com/christianfiction](http://blog.lifeway.com/christianfiction)



BP photo

# 'Right out of our wrong'

## Christian documentary, movie tackle tough issues

By Phil Boatwright  
Columnist, Baptist Press

**D**ramatized precautionary tales for the Christian come at a cost, whether tackling the issue of abortion in the documentary "40" or adultery in "Redeemed."

The pro-life documentary "40" examines the effects of abortion during the 40 years since Roe v. Wade. The film takes a straightforward stand and sends a warning to young women, making it clear there is a subconscious price to pay for aborting a child. The documentary will no doubt have an effect on thousands of girls and women who have reasoned that they, not the unborn, are the only ones with civil rights.

But what of the woman who has already undergone the procedure? How do these messages affect her?

Too often we defenders of the unborn come across as unfeeling or unthinking in regard to those who followed through on that course of action. Abortion is a sin but it can be forgiven. The woman who condemns herself for the deed need only ask for God's forgiveness. If she does she will find it. And one day she will be reunited with her child in heaven. Anyone who suggests otherwise is just throwing stones.

The movie "Redeemed" concerns a church-going businessman who has been married 20 years but is tempted when he encounters a beautiful female associate. The movie is a potent, well-meaning warning that emphasizes how infidelity will haunt those with a conscience. Indeed it is a film that should be seen by newlyweds and those getting ready to enter the 7-year-itch period.

### 'Fires of guilt'

But for those who have already repented of adultery the experience of seeing films that focus on this subject can rekindle the fires of guilt.

Ever wish you could push a button and revisit a decision you made that defined your character?

Have you pondered how it would change your world if you could just go back and alter that particular decision? We are reminded in Genesis that when Esau gave away his birthright for a bowl of soup he later cried bitter tears over that bad judgment. His regret didn't change the outcome.

The point of that story, at least one point, is that we have to live with bad decisions. As we grow spiritually those undoable acts can haunt us. And no matter how often we ask God for forgiveness we may be further frustrated by screen characters who make the right choices and avoid our mistakes.

### Still redeemed

There is good news which often takes a back-seat in movie parables. Most biblical personalities including Moses, David, Peter and Paul had to live with their transgressions. Our biblical heroes underwent negative character-defining moments. Punished, and perhaps feeling tremendously unworthy because of their folly, each was still redeemed. They were loved by God and went on to serve our heavenly Father.

Does that mean King David never again thought about the man he had murdered even after repenting and being renewed by God's embrace? Did he just blissfully go through the rest of his life never thinking about that past evil act?

Maybe. But this raises one more question concerning our guilt. That is, even if we believe God has forgiven us, how can we forgive ourselves? To truly trust God means accepting He can bring right out of our wrong.

If we are forgiven will our prayers for those we've wronged fall on deaf ears? Satan will try to convince us God won't listen. That's when we must remember the importance of faith in our heavenly Father.

There is comfort in Romans 8:1: "Therefore no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus." Remember this the next time you're overcome by guilt. ☮



NAMB photo

Pastor Martin Vargas (right) leads volunteers at Iglesia Real in Hollywood, Fla., in a Bible study before tackling remodeling jobs on the former theater they are renovating.

# Real Church

## Miami church plant gets new home in renovated theater

**W**hen the house lights dim in the newly renovated historic Hollywood, Fla., theater and the spotlight trains on Pastor Martin Vargas, a message — not a person — will take center stage. The message: “God knows; He changes lives; there is growth in the Truth; and we are fulfilling the Great Commission.”

Vargas, a native of the Dominican Republic, appreciates the vision Hollywood Playhouse had for more than six decades in bringing live theater to its community — but he wants more.

Real Church, or Iglesia Real, is set to share the gospel in Spanish, English and Portuguese — from one of the largest stages in South Florida — and will serve as a hub for church plants.

“I wanted to plant a church that is doctrinally sound and that has authentic Christians,” Vargas said.

When he saw the vintage theater in 2012 — a vandalized building with broken skylights — he wasn’t deterred. Vargas saw a gift from God.

Just five years earlier the theater had undergone a restorative face-lift. A magazine described the 18,000-square-foot facility as a “full-service venue” with recording and dance studios, a design shop, film-editing suites and a closed sound stage.

### Searching for a place to plant

In 2004, Vargas left a lucrative business to start a church in South Florida. Eight years later, with a passion to move his congregation to where they could have the greatest impact, he prayed about the \$1.5 million price tag for the two-acre theater property with its 300-seat auditorium.

The timing was not right and soon the bank that owned the property sold it to a Miami man who hoped to re-vamp the declining theater.

After a two-year search for a building Vargas led his congregation in a 40 Days of Prayer campaign. On the final day of the prayer campaign he got a call. The bank wanted to meet. The man with the cash had been jailed on federal charges.

“That Monday was a divine appointment,” Vargas recalled. “I went to the meeting with my realtor, (who was) a member of my church, with the thought, ‘I’m just a pastor with no money.’ I said, ‘If this is coming from God, I need to see God’s hand clearly.’”

Vargas could not believe what he heard at the meeting. The bank would lower the selling price to \$1.2 million and pay for the installation of new electrical wiring, 17 new air conditioning units and a new roof.

### A big expense

The only big expense the banker warned Vargas about was a need to purchase theater seats. At that point, Vargas started smiling. A local synagogue had offered him 300 seats they no longer needed — just in case.

With just three months to raise a quarter of a million dollars Vargas and his son, Homer, who will lead the English-speaking congregation at Real, started a Nehemiah fundraising campaign. Sacrificial pledges and commitments poured in — some from believers as far away as Bolivia and Nicaragua.

The bank called and moved the closing date up to June 26. They told Vargas to bring whatever he had in his hands. He still needed about \$70,000.

A local restaurant owner gave a large donation. A church member drove by and handed him a check. A barbecue yielded several thousand dollars. Meanwhile renovations began with members providing skilled labor to return the theater to its former luster.

Alex Comesañas, a Send North America: Miami city missionary, organized a missions team from Suwanee Baptist Association in the Florida Panhandle to assist through the North American Mission Board’s Send North America strategy.

Construction should be complete by the end of 2014 and the church plans to start meeting in the theater in early 2015.

Learn more about Send North America: Miami and how you can become involved at [namb.net/Miami](http://namb.net/Miami). (NAMB)

## PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



### Pastors in Bangladesh arrested, could face prison

DHAKA, Bangladesh — Two pastors in northwestern Bangladesh could face two years in prison if convicted for “hurting religious sentiments.”

On Nov. 9 police arrested the pastors and 41 others listening to a sermon at a house in a village 186 miles northwest of Dhaka. The arrest came after more than 100 Muslims had disrupted the meeting and began “jabbing” at the church leaders’ faces, sources said.

The 41 people who were detained along with their children were released that night. The pastors of Faith Bible Church of God were not released on bail until Nov. 17. They were charged with “hurting religious sentiments” and luring Muslims to convert by offering money. The church leaders deny both charges.

“We did not tell anything to anyone that might hurt religious sensibility,” said one of the released pastors, Arif Mondol. “We did not offer any money to anyone to be converted to Christianity.”

An area source said the incident caused a sweeping furor among local Muslims.

“More than 100 Muslims headed by local Jamaat-e-Islami party members and Muslim clerics gathered at the house and started barking questions at the pastors — why did they propagate Christianity in the locality and convert some of them,” the source said.

The Islamist leaders asked the pastors who had given them permission to spread Christianity in the area.

“The pastors replied that it did not take any permission from any authority to propagate any religion and convert people to any religion,” the source said. “Suddenly the Muslims became apoplectic with rage, tried to pick a fight and started jabbing the pastors’ faces.”

Local imams filed a case against the pastors the following day.

### Attacks on Mennonite church in Vietnam prompt SOS

BEN CAT, Vietnam — Police in Vietnam employed thugs wielding hammers and metal cutters to ransack a Mennonite church center Nov. 12 and drag away nine Christians, who were then charged with not having proper papers — documents of officials had confiscated from them in previous raids.

The thugs — accompanied this time by provocatively attired prostitutes — arrived just before midnight, screaming and intimidating Christians staying at the center in Ben Cat, Binh Duong Province north of Ho Chi Minh City.

Police stood by filming the attack.

Two Mennonite pastors and the son of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang were among those arrested, threatened and interrogated for two hours before being released and charged with not having their ID cards and temporary residence papers. The documents had been confiscated during earlier raids and not returned, church leaders said.

Not having these papers leaves them subject to further police harassment and difficulties with employment and school studies. The nine Christians have been summoned to return for further interrogation.

### Church leaders arrested, church dispersed in South Sudan

JUBA, South Sudan — Police and security personnel dispersed a congregation keeping vigil over its property in North Khartoum, South Sudan, and arrested five church leaders Nov. 25.

Authorities arrived at noon at the compound of Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church where they had recently demolished a pastor’s house and church wall and threatened to arrest members of the congregation camped out on the site of the destroyed house.

Five church leaders were arrested for refusing to surrender the property as they encouraged the church to remain vigilant. The leaders of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church-affiliated congregation were taken to Khartoum North Police Station.

After a bulldozer accompanied by police knocked down a wall of the church and houses Nov. 17–18, the Christians formed a human barrier to face down further demolition attempts Nov. 19–20.

Church leaders hold ownership papers to the property and believe any contract surrendering it comes from a government ruse. ☞