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INSIDE



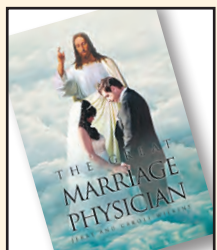
Siluria Baptist RA repays money he took from church vending machine 40 years ago

◆ Page 3



Tuscaloosa disaster relief ministry continues to fulfill needs after 2011 tornadoes

◆ Page 5



Former Tuscaloosa DOM, wife spend retirement writing books

◆ Page 11

Alabama ranks eighth on the list of national adult obesity rates with 32.4 percent of the population, up from 27.7 percent in 2004.

'Part of the culture'



Once among the healthiest of professions, clergy seeing spike in obesity

More than a third of American clergy members are obese. Shocking? Historically clergy have been among the healthiest of major professions, with only teachers having lower mortality rates, but recent research shows that clergy's obesity rate has climbed to 30 percent, according to Pulpit & Pew, a research project on pastoral leadership.

So what are the culprits for this rise in obesity? According to a recent Baylor University study — stress, longer hours, low pay and lack of self-care.

"Pastors are an integral part of the most intimate aspects of community life — marriages, deaths, births — and these often entail food," said Todd W. Ferguson, lead researcher. "It's part of the culture."

"Pastors are 'on' or 'on call' at all times. The role or identity of a pastor is something you can't just shut off," said Ferguson, a former associate Baptist pastor in a Houston church. "And you are in an organiza-

tion that relies partly — or even fully — on volunteers rather than a paid staff who can leave on a whim."

Varied denominations

Ferguson and other Baylor researchers analyzed data representative of 539 clergy from varied denominations and religious traditions. They drew upon the Random Sample Leader Survey, part of the U.S. Congregational Life Survey.

Clergy are in a relatively high-status occupation, yet many are compensated poorly compared to other professionals with similar education levels. Pastors may have no other option than to be bivocational. The study showed that 10 percent lead more than one congregation,

while 15 percent are employed in a second job of another type.

The stress of an additional job — coupled with the long hours and demands of being a pastor — may make it difficult to have a lifestyle that includes nutritious foods, exercise and time to recover from physiological stress that contributes to weight gain.

According to thestateofobesity.org, the South and Midwest host the top 10 states with the highest rates of obesity in 2013. Alabama ranks eighth on the list with an adult obesity rate of 32.4 percent of the population, up from 27.7 percent in 2004. Mississippi, West Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky take the top five ranks. Every state, according to the research, has an

adult obesity rate above 20 percent.

With the rise in obesity rates comes the rise in heart disease, arthritis and obesity-related cancers, according to the annual report (formerly known as F as in Fat).

But according to the Baylor study, the profession has some built-in prevention methods that can help clergy be healthier — if they can take advantage of them.

Support groups

Clergy who take a day off each week, take a sabbatical or take part in a support group with other pastors lower their odds of being obese, according to the study titled "Occupational conditions, self-care and obesity among clergy in the United States."

Researchers used a "distress index," assessing clergy members' stress levels by asking how often in the past year, they: had too many demands made on them by congregation members; experienced stress because of dealing with critical congregants; felt lonely and isolated in their work; experienced stress because of the challenges they faced in their congregation; worked more than 46 hours per week.

The study showed that 20 percent of those surveyed had taken a sabbatical in the past 10 years, while 43 percent are involved in a support group that focuses on their personal concerns or struggles.

To help combat stress, overeating (See 'Self-care,' page 6)



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COMMENT

Time to Enforce Laws Against Illegal Gambling

When State Attorney General Luther Strange took office in 2011 he promised to resolve the controversy over illegal electronic bingo gambling in Alabama through the court system. Now that has been done.

A seemingly endless number of lawsuits and appeals has finally resulted in a definitive ruling that so-called electronic bingo is illegal in Alabama. That was the unanimous decision of the state Supreme Court: “The game traditionally known as bingo is not one played by or within an electronic or computerized machine, terminal or server but is one played outside of machines and electronic circuitry.”

The state Supreme Court, in *Houston County Economic Development Authority vs. The State of Alabama*, reiterated the criteria for bingo first announced in 2009 when the Supreme Court said bingo must be played on paper cards by a group of people who must mark their own numbers.

Definition of bingo

The court went further by ruling that its definition of bingo applied to all counties in Alabama including those that adopted local amendments permitting bingo for charitable purposes. That means electronic bingo in Alabama is illegal. Period. Final.

Strange shared credit with others for this victory. In a Jan. 7 memo to Alabama law enforcement personnel and district attorneys he said joint efforts of law enforcement agencies and district attorneys around the state resulted in seizure and destruction of thousands of illegal machines, forfeiture of more than a million dollars in illegal funds from gambling operations to the state general fund and the closure of numerous illegal casinos.

He wrote, “I encourage and expect local law enforcement and district attorneys to investigate and enforce our anti-gambling laws just as they would investigate and enforce other laws.” There is the rub.

Some areas of the state have been hesitant to enforce illegal gambling laws. Greene County District Judge Lillie Jones-Osborne told the *Greene County Democrat* she had “never been a willing participant” in the four Greene County



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

raids on illegal gambling operations carried out in March 2014 by the attorney general’s office.

Jones-Osborne said she signed the search warrants only after being ordered to do so by the Alabama Supreme Court. At one point a local sheriff arrested and jailed state police officers investigating illegal gambling.

In Lowndes County an electronic bingo operation in White Hall restarted despite the court’s latest ruling.

In the process it has been interesting to see local judges dismiss state attempts to stamp out illegal electronic bingo gambling only to have the Alabama Supreme Court overturn the lower court verdicts by unanimous 9–0 decisions. That should be a clear indication of where some local officials place their loyalties.

Most Alabamians know the Phenix City story — local officials looked the other way while gambling and other vices flourished. It was not until massive state intervention through martial law that corruption was rooted out. That is why it was reassuring to read Strange’s memo pledging state efforts to enforce Alabama’s illegal gambling laws would continue. Local officials would not be allowed to thwart state law.

A week later that confidence turned to confusion. Gov. Robert Bentley sent a memo to the distribution list of the attorney general’s Jan. 6 memo. The governor praised the Supreme Court rulings for “providing clear direction to local law enforcement and district attorneys.” He pointed out that local law enforcement and district attorneys hold “the primary duty to investigate and enforce these laws.”

Gov. Bentley observed the Alabama Law

Enforcement Agency (ALEA) has limited resources. Therefore ALEA personnel would assist “upon request of local officials.” He urged that local officials who do not enforce state laws be impeached before the Alabama Supreme Court.

The governor’s memo created consternation in some law enforcement officials. Was the governor saying ALEA was not available to enforce Alabama’s illegal gambling laws? Was the governor saying the attorney general’s main weapon going forward would be impeachment? When Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore was removed from office in 2003 for failure to follow the direction of the federal courts, that process took 28 months and created chaos for the state legal system.

Would the time required for the legal system to grind through all the required steps to impeach a local official embolden gamblers to go for the quick buck? By insisting that state law enforcement will assist “upon request” was the governor giving a blank check to those who continue to flaunt the law?

Instead of Alabama uniting behind the clear victory against illegal electronic bingo gambling, the state is almost paralyzed because of the uncertainty about how to proceed in enforcing Alabama’s laws in every county.

Executive order

Hopefully this is all a misunderstanding that can be cleared up quickly. After all, Gov. Bentley did write in his Jan. 13 memo that he expects the attorney general “will continue to carry out the responsibilities stated in my executive order No. 1, dated Jan. 18, 2011.”

In that executive order the governor said he “anticipate(s) and expect(s) that Luther Strange, attorney general, will fully and completely enforce the laws of the state of Alabama with respect to anti-gambling, lottery schemes and illegal gambling.”

Perhaps the governor was simply reminding officials that illegal gambling is just one area of responsibility of ALEA. Perhaps the governor was reminding the attorney general that he has another weapon in his arsenal to use against local officials who don’t want to enforce state law — impeachment.

Whatever the case, Alabama’s two top law enforcement officials — the governor and the attorney general — need to clarify the situation quickly. Alabama does not need a replay of these two state officials being on different sides of the illegal electronic bingo gambling issue.

The court has settled the issue of what is legal and what is not concerning bingo in Alabama. There are no more excuses. Now it is time for state law to be enforced and illegal electronic bingo gambling to be stamped out. Both the governor and the attorney general must make that happen. 🙏

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

MENTAL ILLNESS

Thank you for initiating the discussion on a frequently invisible disability — mental illness. The “Dealing with Mental Health Issues” package in the Jan. 8 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* beautifully stressed the urgency of education to effective-

ly address conditions suffered quietly by a quarter of Americans.

Praise God Scripture did not minimize the highs and lows of David’s life. Yet despite David’s bipolar behaviors he was a man after God’s own heart. Glory.

The combination of medication,

psychotherapy and the unconditional love ever present in my former and present church has calmed the ravages
(See ‘Letters,’ page 10)





"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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Gift & story of grace

Siluria Baptist RA repays money he took from church vending machine 40 years ago

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

About 40 years ago a Royal Ambassador (RA) at Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, managed to get the coin box out of the Coca-Cola machine on a Wednesday night. He and two buddies each grabbed a heavy handful of quarters.

Four decades later he still had a heavy conscience and that led to one of the most surprising phone calls Michael Brooks has ever gotten as a pastor.

"I was here alone," he said, "and I answered the phone and the person on the other end said, 'Can you tell me who your pastor is?'"

Brooks, pastor of Siluria Baptist, said he immediately thought it was a benevolence call.

"We were getting a lot of those in December," he said.

But the man — who had blocked his identity and location from Brooks' caller ID — didn't call to ask for anything.

Instead he called to tell the decades-old story of what he'd taken and pay retribution for the debt Brooks didn't even realize he had.

Christmas gift

A few years after the vending machine incident he had come to faith in Christ and his family moved away from Siluria.

He told Brooks he knew it was wrong and that he shouldn't have done it.

And he wanted to put a check in the mail to the church to make it up.

"It had always bothered him all these years. It was something that was really oppressive to him," Brooks said. "He didn't want his identity revealed but he said, 'I want

you to be free to share the story in any way you see fit. Maybe my story will help others who are facing decisions about right or wrong in their lives.'"

When the check came on Christmas Eve 2014 — for \$1,000 — Brooks took him up on his offer.

That night at the church's candlelight service he talked about the forgiveness offered through the gift of Christ's birth.

And then it got personal.

He told the story of the man's unconfessed sin that had taken place right there at the church and haunted the man for years.

And Brooks pulled the check from his pocket, the check that had arrived that very afternoon.

"People gasped," he said. "I felt the same way — I was just bowled over when it arrived."

Church member Allen Massey said he was stunned by the gesture.

"It's unreal that someone would really do that these days," he said. "I don't know how much he took, but what he gave back was

an astronomical amount more."

Most people, he said, would let something like that slide because they had done it as a child.

"It just shows how the Lord works in people's lives," Massey said. "He got right with God and did the right thing."

Brooks said the Holy Spirit impressed the man — who is a successful businessman in another county — to do as Zacchaeus did and make up for the wrong he had done before he became a Christian.

It's something Brooks said he personally is still processing.

"I know restitution is a biblical principle, but I still remain amazed

"Maybe my story will help others who are facing decisions about right or wrong in their lives."

Former Siluria Baptist Church RA

"It's unreal that someone would really do that these days. I don't know how much he took, but what he gave back was an astronomical amount more."

Allen Massey
church member, Siluria Baptist Church

at what has happened. We all do," he said. "God allowed him to show the sincerity of his commitment by repaying the money he had taken falsely 40 years ago."

When they talked on the phone Brooks asked the man what he would like done with the money.

He told Brooks he would really like for it to go to the children's ministry.

'Still amazed'

It became a perfectly timed down payment on a playground project the church had recently proposed.

"It was a Christmas gift to our children," Brooks said. "The man offered our church two things this Christmas — a gift and a story of Christmas grace."

And no one — except for Brooks and the church treasurer — knows who the benefactor is.

"He said he wanted to stop by sometime, and I hope he will," Brooks said. "I'd love to hear more of his story. He talked about the Lord's leadership, that he felt God really wanted him to do this. What a way to honor what God placed on his heart. We are all still amazed." ❏



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An estimated 1.5 million people have fled their homes because of threats and attacks.

targeting

CHRISTIANS

Nigerian Baptist leader castigates international community for ignoring terrorism in Nigeria

Samson Ayokunle, president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), has castigated the international community for ignoring terrorist violence and attacks in the West African country. NBC is the largest Baptist World Alliance (BWA) member organization in Africa with approximately 3.5 million members in some 10,000 churches.

“My consternation is in the attitude of the international community toward the huge destruction going on in Nigeria,” Ayokunle said. “The earnestness with which they intervened in the ISIL attack in Syria and Iraq, or the Taliban problem in Afghanistan, etc., is not shown in the case of Nigeria.”

He accused the world community of devaluing Nigerian lives. “Does it not matter to the rest of the world if Boko Haram continues to kill hundreds of people every week? Are these people less human than those being killed in other places where they have gone to directly intervene? My people are being killed like animals and the whole world is just watching.”

Boko Haram attacks

Ayokunle was responding to the latest spurt of attacks by Boko Haram, a jihadist group that seeks to establish Sharia law in Nigeria.

Boko Haram conducted the Baga mas-

sacre in the northeastern Nigerian state of Borno in early January causing an unknown number of deaths, though estimates range from dozens to more than 2,000. In April 2013, more than 185 people were killed and more than 2,000 homes in Baga were destroyed as a result of fighting between the Nigerian military and Boko Haram.

“Continue to join us in prayer so that the gates of hell might not prevail against the Church ... in Nigeria.”

**Samson Ayokunle
president, Nigerian
Baptist Convention**

Up to 2014, the group killed more than 5,000 civilians in attacks occurring mainly in northeast, north central and central Nigeria. Since 2009, Boko Haram has abducted more than 500 people including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014. An estimated 1.5 million people have fled their homes because of threats and attacks.

“The situation is pathetic,” Ayokunle declared. “The main targets in all these attacks are the Christians first and any other person that opposes them. Any town they enter, after killing the Christians there, they go ahead and bring down all the churches sparing the mosques. Major Christian cities such as Gwoza and Mubi among others have fallen to them. Christians in cities such as Michika and Baga are also on the run.”

The Nigerian Baptist leader said “the Church is under siege of severe persecution.” Baptists have been directly affected. “No Christian church is standing anymore in Mubi where more than 2,000 Baptists fled the city through Cameroon

when Boko Haram attacked.”

These Baptist Christians, he said, returned to Nigeria through another town called Yola in Adamawa State but never to their homes again. “They have become displaced and are now living in displaced people’s camps scampering for food, without decent accommodation and naked.”

Ayokunle said Baptist buildings, including the offices of the secretariat of Fellowship Baptist Conference of the NBC, was burned in Mubi and the home of the conference president was vandalized. The conference president and Baptist pastors have fled to the city of Jos in Plateau state,

another region that has been attacked by Boko Haram. “Our Baptist high school in Mubi has been closed while our Baptist pastors’ school in another neighboring town, Gombi, was indefinitely shut down.”

Prayerful support

He expressed appreciation for the prayerful support of Baptists and other Christians and requested financial support to assist those who have been displaced by the terrorist attacks. “Continue to join us in prayer so that the gates of hell might not prevail against the Church ... in Nigeria.” (BWA)



Up to 2014, Boko Haram has killed more than 5,000 civilians in attacks occurring mainly in northeast, north central and central Nigeria.

BP photo



Photo courtesy of Wings of Grace

Wings of Grace Disaster Relief Center holds a Christmas bicycle event in Tuscaloosa.



Photos courtesy of Wings of Grace

Tuscaloosa residents stand in line for a Thanksgiving turkey giveaway at Wings of Grace Disaster Relief Center.

Wings of GRACE

Tuscaloosa disaster relief ministry continues to fulfill needs after 2011 tornadoes

By June Mathews
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

April 27, 2011, was a turning point for many Alabamians. The storms that rolled through the state that day left behind death and destruction and lives were changed forever.

The day after the storms marked a turning point for Terri Hibbard. That's when Donald Payne, her pastor at Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, asked her to head up the church's storm assistance effort, which became known as Wings of Grace Disaster Relief Center.

Hibbard, who grew up attending Forest Lake Baptist but moved away as a young adult, had only recently moved back to Tuscaloosa to care for her aging parents. And not long before the storms she was sidelined

with a broken neck in a bicycle accident, rendering her physically unable to continue her job as a tennis player. Though she didn't know it at the time God was paving the way for her eventual calling by putting her in a place and position of availability.

'Walking miracle'

"I'm a walking miracle," Hibbard said. "The Lord took me out of the athletic field and put me in this area of work."

Through serving, often in leadership capacities with various charitable organizations over the years, Hibbard knew about recruiting volunteers and managing resources to benefit worthy causes. She realized the project she was about to take on would be a tremendous task, but she also knew it had to be done. So the day after the storms she and a host of volunteers pulled some tables together and got down to business.

"The 18-wheelers started arriving with

supplies and people were coming to help any way they possibly could," she recalled. "People brought sandwiches and other food; the Salvation Army set up in the parking lot and fed people for six weeks."

Wings of Grace also received help from such organizations as the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, World Vision, CitiIMPACT Ministries and others. Donated items poured in from other churches, retail stores, corporations, student groups, civic groups and individuals. In fact, Hibbard could talk all day long when asked to name even just the major contributors to Wings of Grace.

"We were so blessed here in Tuscaloosa to have so many hearts touched by our story," she said.

Nearly four years later Wings of Grace continues full-throttle. While some of the organizations initially involved have had to move on to other crises the Tuscaloosa community is doing its best to take up the slack in terms of donations. Dry cleaners donate unclaimed clothing; a local newspaper holds coat drives; bakeries donate day-old bread; elementary school kids collect canned goods; and the list goes on.

And as long as the need continues so will the ministry, Hibbard said. During the holidays alone, Wings of Grace served 340 clients at Thanksgiving and nearly 300 more at Christmas. Since the storms, tons of food,

clothing, toiletries and other items have been distributed including around 1,500 Bibles.

"It's just incredible," Hibbard said. "We never dreamed we'd be here this long, but the Lord keeps providing more and more people for us to help and more and more things for us to help them with. People read or hear about what we're doing and want to pitch in."

The need, however, isn't limited to clients. Wings of Grace is now lacking in at least one critical area. Over the past year or so some of the ministry's volunteers have been lost to illness and other circumstances, leaving the remaining staff members stretched to their limits. One of the most faithful volunteers, Hibbard's father, James Mosely, passed away in 2014.

Need for volunteers

"My prayer is for more volunteers," Hibbard said. "We don't want to keep people waiting to be helped. The need is still out there and we don't turn anybody away. Even if they don't qualify for food assistance, they get something."

In the meantime the work never ceases. But the compensation as far as Hibbard is concerned couldn't be greater.

"It's been a reward every day," she said. "You never know how the Lord is going to bless your ministry." ❧

For information on volunteering with or donating to Wings of Grace Disaster Relief Center, visit the ministry's Facebook page or contact Terri Hibbard at 205-759-1039 or thmiracle@msn.com.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

▶ **North Highlands Church, Hueytown**, will host the Hueytown Revival, Feb. 15–18, 6:30 nightly. Guest speakers will be Emir Caner, Sunday; Kevin Hamm, Monday; Robert Smith Jr., Tuesday; and Jared Hall, Wednesday. For more information visit hueytownrevival.com. Joe Kitchens is pastor.

BETHEL

▶ **Linden Church** will host a wild game supper Feb. 6, 7 p.m. Guest speaker will be Clay Dyer who has caught more than 7,000 fish during the Bassmaster Open Series. Dyer was born without lower limbs, without his left arm and a partial right arm. Tickets are required and can be purchased at the door or at Lane's Tire & Muffler in Linden and Demopolis. For more information call 334-295-4278 or visit

lindenbaptist.net. Randy Creel is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

▶ **Mark Searby** is the new interim pastor of **Deerfoot Church, Trussville**. He currently works as the director of doctor of ministry studies at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. Searby previously served as administrator at Lincoln Christian College and Seminary in Lincoln, Ill. Prior to that he served as pastor of churches in Illinois for 24 years. He began serving Jan. 4. Searby and his wife, Linda, have two children and four grandchildren.



SEARBY

GENEVA

▶ **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host The 39er's C.L.U.B. (Christians Living Under the Blood) nondenominational luncheon Feb. 10, 11 a.m. Bryan Hawkins and his wife, Amy, will present a special musical program. Hawkins is the minister of music and children for First Church, Geneva. For reservations call 334-684-9617 by Feb. 4. Mike Shirah is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE

▶ **Lakeview Church, Auburn**, will host Christian apologist Mary Jo Sharp at a women's conference Feb. 20, 6 p.m. The conference theme will be "Asking the Right Questions" and will have a session on how to share Jesus more naturally and effectively and will address the whys and hows of our faith. For tickets visit lakeviewbaptist.org. Al Jackson is pastor. ☞

Self-care is important, SBOM's Huff says

(continued from page 1) and other habits that lead to obesity, StatePoint suggests the following: don't skip breakfast, eat smart snacks that combine protein and carbohydrates, exercise regularly and seek help from registered dietitian nutritionists.

Taking the time and effort to do self-care is important because the physical affects the spiritual, according to Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"We talk about the different aspects — spiritual, physical, mental, emotional — as if they're separate components, but you can't separate them from each other. They flow together," Huff said in a previous article in *The Alabama Baptist*.

Often churches don't actively help their pastor take care of himself, Huff said. And even nice gestures from church members, like providing meals or fellowships, can hurt sometimes — "they can make it hard to help a pastor keep his weight down," Huff said. (See "Healthy balance vital for those in leadership roles" in the Feb. 28, 2013, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*).

Rondie Wilks, wife of Bill Wilks who serves as pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, said another way to help combat obesity is to think of it this way — "If God made it, we eat it." "Put God-made foods in your God-made body."

In a clergy-wellness handbook, Pamela Lee Cranston writes, "The healthier and more whole clergy are the more likely ... congregations will become healthier too." (BNG, ABP, TAB)

REFLECTIONS

"LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GLORIFY GOD."

LORD, I WANT TO BE ONE OF YOUR LONG-LASTING BULBS!



— Correction —

In the "In Loving Memory" column of the Jan. 22 issue, Don Pendergrass was noted as being a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, at the time of his death. He was a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscombina.

Church ANNIVERSARIES

Coosada Baptist celebrates 125th anniversary

Coosada Baptist Church celebrated its 125th anniversary Nov. 2, 2014, in each of its three morning worship services.

The 8:30, 9:40 and 11 a.m. services each featured Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presenting a certificate to a group of 4–8 members of varying age groups to represent the church body. Included in one of the groups were Jack and Vivian Wilson who have been members of Coosada Baptist for more than 63 years.

Coosada's first-ever youth director, Charles Parker, brought the sermon in each service. He now works for InterFACE Ministries in Nashville, a nonprofit Christian organization that networks with international students.

Parker's return as speaker was special for Coosada Baptist's minister of senior adults, Randy Naylor, as he was in the youth group when Parker was director.

Naylor said, "It was good for him to come back. I thought that was pretty neat."

A fellowship meal followed the later two services for the almost 650 participants. (Maggie Walsh)

Lineville Baptist holds 'day of remembrance'

Pastor Jerry Colquett said the 175th anniversary of Lineville Baptist Church on Nov. 14, 2014, was "a day of remembrance."

There were paintings of the original church building displayed around the church as the history of Lineville Baptist was read during the service. There was an emphasis on not dwelling on the past but "looking to the future and to God's good plan for us," Colquett said.

"We've had guest speakers from our past come the last few years, but this year it was all in-house with myself giving the message and our regular worship team doing the music," he said.

Sonja Adams, an Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, presented the congregation with a plaque acknowledging their years of dedicated service.

Lunch was served afterward on beautifully decorated tables that held historic pieces and symbols of the Carey Baptist Association church. (Caitlin Lea)

FBC Cloverdale celebrates 50 years of ministry

Displays featuring pictures, handouts with the church history and other paraphernalia let participants know that Nov. 9, 2014, was a special day for First Baptist Church, Cloverdale, as it celebrated 50 years in ministry.

The celebration began at 10 a.m. and featured special music by former and current members. Commemorative plaques were presented by Colbert Lauderdale Baptist Association Director of Missions Eddy Garner and Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Tom Allen.

Tim Wooten, former interim pastor and current deacon at First, Cloverdale, brought the morning's message to the nearly 100 participants.

Pastor Billy George said of the day, "Everybody had a time of fellowship and it was fun."

A fellowship lunch followed the service. (Maggie Walsh)

Jasper's Eastside marks 75 years of ministry

In a joint celebration with its homecoming, Eastside Baptist Church, Jasper, marked 75 years in ministry Oct. 26, 2014.

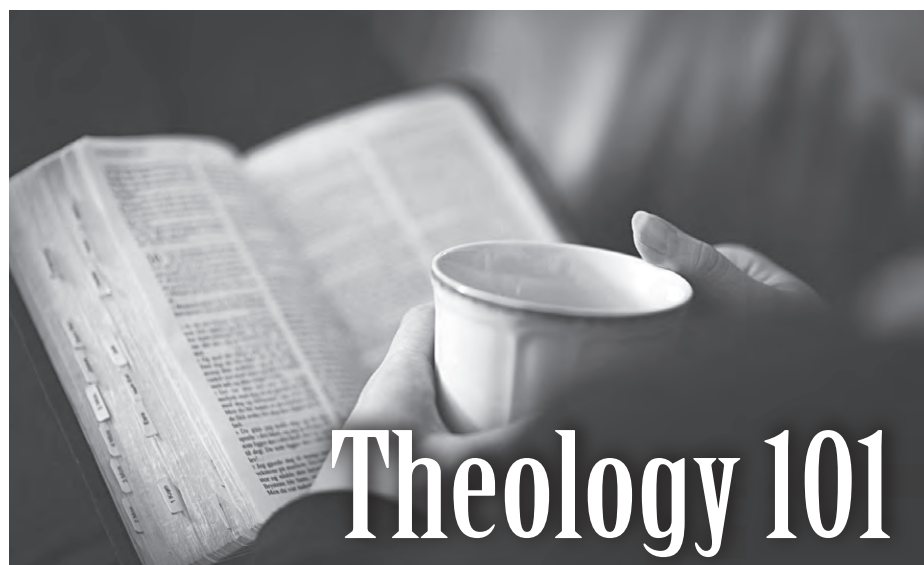
"A good crowd" participated in the service, said JoAnn Mann, secretary for Eastside Baptist, a Walker Baptist Association church.

The service featured a presentation by Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative Pat Musselwhite and special music by New Ground, a Scottsboro-based southern gospel quartet. Pastor Jimmy Collins brought the morning's message.

A fellowship meal followed the service. (Maggie Walsh)



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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of the Church

The Body of Christ (Part 2 of 3)

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

As we consider the Church as an analogy of a body, the idea not only calls attention to the Head of the body but also to the body's other components, referred to as the body's members. This points us to consider further the body metaphor as a window through which to view the Church. A major passage about the Church as the body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This passage opens with the observation, "Just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." This part of the analogy moves our attention from Christ the Head of the body to those of us who constitute the membership of His body, the Church.

Wide-angle lens

At this point we must clarify our thinking. Are we viewing this analogy in terms of a local congregation or as an image of all true believers who make up the Church at large? To apply truths derived from or illustrated by the imagery of a body we often tend to relate those truths exclusively to our own local congregation.

However, in thinking about the Church as the body of Christ we must view the Church through wide-angle lens. It is true that the Church appears most frequently in the New Testament as a local congregation. In this narrow focus we think of the church at Corinth or in Thessalonica or some other location.

Local, universal body

On the other hand some passages require us to look through the wide-angle lens to see the Church as the totality of the people of God in all places and throughout all time. Church is a term that can have both meanings — the local body of Christ in a specific place and the universal body of Christ composed of all true Christian believers. As Article VI of the Baptist Faith and

Message puts it, "The body of Christ ... includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

Spirit of competition

Awareness of the Church in its inclusive sense as the body of Christ can go a long way in eliminating any spirit of competition between local churches. Local churches are not properly in competition with one another. We are all on the same team. All of us together compose the one body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:4 declares, "There is one body." Recognition of this truth compels us to respond with a resounding "No" to the question asked in 1 Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided?" This "one body" truth also is clearly set forth in the language of 1 Corinthians 12:12.

Caring heart

The awareness of being a part of the one body of Christ also serves to create in us a caring heart for the suffering segments of Christ's body in lands where Christians are oppressed, persecuted and martyred. Since the body of Christ is made up of all true believers, when any portion of the body is hurting the rest of the body should be feeling the pain.

The oneness of the body of Christ is set forth in a portion of a hymn that we sometimes sing in our local church gatherings, "Who serves my Father as a child is surely kin to me." ☪

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.



Rebuilding lives

Disaster Relief does more than rebuild homes

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

From Limestone to Baldwin counties, they came in droves. Only there to help, they never asked for anything in return. Approximately 7,000 volunteers strong, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (DR) mobilized chainsaw teams, heavy equipment operators, chaplains, administration, child care and mass feeding personnel in 2014 to minister and help survivors of natural disasters.

Because of the back-to-back tornadoes and flooding of April 2014, last year was a "huge year for disaster relief," said Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Within the first 24 hours of the April tornadoes and flooding, 80 percent of Alabama's cleanup, recovery and chainsaw units along with other personnel were deployed to various areas across the state."

During 2014, DR volunteers logged more than 16,000 workdays. One workday is defined as one person providing 8-10 hours in relief work.

"Our trained disaster relief personnel provide a lifetime of skills and a gospel witness."

But DR is more than just rebuilding homes and clearing debris — it's rebuilding lives.

"As we engage homeowners to help them begin the recovery process following a di-

saster, we are afforded the opportunity to witness because people are eager to know why we have come and why we care," Johnson said.

The amount of time and preparation that goes into every response is immense and is made possible by the cooperation and support of Alabama Baptist churches.

February is Alabama Baptist Disaster Preparedness Month. Johnson encourages churches to set aside one Sunday to educate members about the mission and importance of disaster relief and how to get involved.

One way to get involved is by participating in the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Offering.

All money collected is placed in reserve "to meet the immediate needs of the families" for future crisis events. This is a lesson learned after the April 27, 2011, tornadoes.

DR hopes to raise \$200,000 through this offering, a goal that can be easily attained if each church member donates \$1 to the offering.

Church members also can get involved in disaster relief by becoming a volunteer. Annually, DR trains 800-1,000 volunteers through a two- or three-day process during which volunteers earn the necessary credentials to work nationally in disaster areas and alongside state and federal emergency management.

The 2015 annual state training will take place April 10-11 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega. ☪

Free resources for promoting Disaster Preparedness Month are available at sbd.org/beprepared or at alsbom.tv/disaster-relief.

For more information about Disaster Relief, visit sbd.org or contact Mondene Coker at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 273, mcoker@alsbom.org.

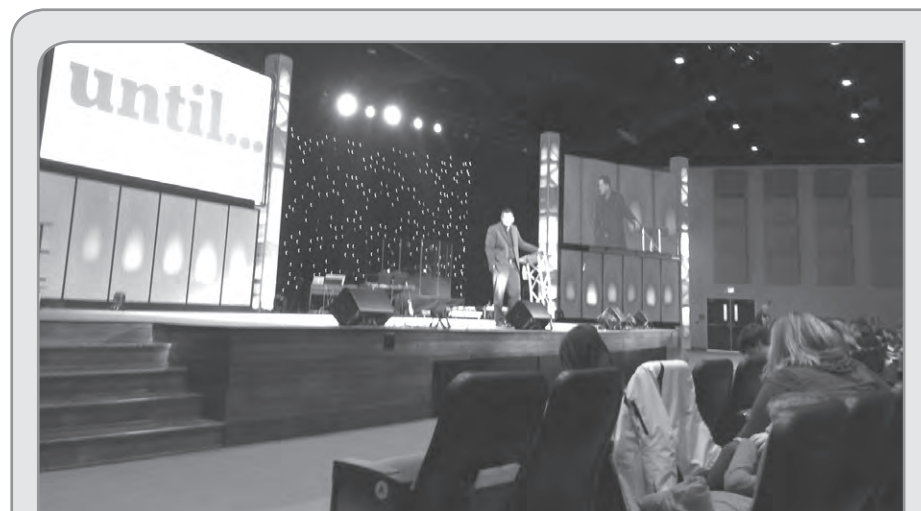


Photo by Rick Lance

Highland Park dedicates new campus location

Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, dedicated its new campus located on South Wilson Dam Road on Jan. 11. Pastor Brett Pitman spoke during the 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. services. The Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association church opened the doors for worship at the new location Dec. 14, 2014, and will continue to use the old campus for offices and Sunday School rooms until the new location is completed.

Alabama's 'budget crisis'

Gambling not 'solution' to budget problems, Armistead says

By Bill Armistead
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Politicians in Montgomery who believe an expansion of gambling is a way to collect needed funds to run state government are either uninformed or are misleading voters. They might begin doing their homework by reading an article in *The Atlantic* — “A Good Way to Wreck a Local Economy: Build Casinos” — written by David Frum.

As reported by Frum, “the towns and cities that turned to gambling to escape their problems may discover that they have accepted a sucker’s bet: local economies that look worse than ever, local residents tempted into new forms of self-destructive behavior and a dwindling flow of cash to show for it all.”

So why are some of our elected officials pushing an expansion of gambling as a “solution” to yet another “budget crisis”? The only winners in a state that promotes or expands gambling are the casino operators. Why would Alabama want to go down the path that has been the ruin of cities like Atlantic City?

Independent research has shown that casinos create social costs of \$3 for every dollar they bring in.

The democrat minority leader in the Alabama House of Representatives, Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, cites a supposed “shortfall” in the state’s general fund budget as his reasoning for proposing two pro-gambling bills that he said would raise the revenue needed to increase spending, expand Medicaid and grow the size of state government.

Like Rahm Emanuel, President Barack Obama’s former White House chief of staff, now Chicago mayor, Craig Ford must believe: “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.” What that really means is: Let’s create and exploit the appearance of a crisis to enact a liberal agenda that sensible people would never otherwise support.

‘Compact’ deal

One of Ford’s proposals is to negotiate a deal — called a “compact” — giving new rights to the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to offer full-blown Las Vegas-style gambling at their casinos in Atmore, Wetumpka and Montgomery in exchange for a share of the gambling revenues. Right now those casinos only operate so-called “electronic bingo” slot machines. Under Ford’s proposal, they would add table games and card games like roulette, craps and blackjack.

The sales pitch is that casinos create jobs and would keep more money in Alabama rather than “losing it” to neighboring states with lotteries or casinos. That’s nothing but snake oil of course. Economists know that more and bigger casinos do

not actually generate net job growth or positive economic activity. In fact as Frum states, casinos wreck local economies.

According to numerous studies, low-wage casino jobs typically come at the expense of other jobs lost as surrounding businesses and restaurants go under. For example within just four years of casinos being built in Atlantic City, one-third of the city’s retail businesses had closed.

And because gambling is a zero-sum game (meaning there is no economic output) the notion of “keeping the money in Alabama” is pure fallacy. Whether you gamble in Alabama, Mississippi or Las Vegas the money you lose simply goes into the pockets of the casino owners and the slot machine manufacturers.

Gambling redistributes wealth in a community; it doesn’t create it.

Regrettably many in Montgomery seem eager to enact Ford’s plan to expand gambling at American Indian casinos. But it’s a very bad idea for several reasons.

First the state’s official position in pending litigation is that the Poarch Creeks are already violating both state and federal law at their casinos. A federal judge threw the case out, ruling that the federal government has seized jurisdiction over Poarch Creek lands from the state. But Attorney General Luther Strange has appealed, determined to fight the President Obama Justice Department and defend Alabama’s state sovereignty from yet another federal encroachment.

The Legislature should not sabotage the attorney general’s efforts by cutting a deal with the Poarch Creeks before the court rules. Alabamians, not the federal government, should decide the gambling laws in Alabama.

Second if new revenue to avert a budget crisis is really the objective of a compact, politicians in Montgomery apparently haven’t thought through this thing. A compact to expand American Indian gambling would require a constitutional amendment. Even if it passes the Legislature, which is anything but assured, it likely wouldn’t go to a vote of the people before the 2016 general election. Therefore Ford’s bill couldn’t possibly “solve” a budget crisis anytime soon. Maybe that’s why Ford himself has admitted a compact wouldn’t solve the general fund budget problem at all.

Finally the last thing we need in the Legislature is another fight with gambling interests that takes up time that could be spent on coming up with “real” solutions to budget issues. If the casino “can of worms” is opened you can bet the halls of the Statehouse will be swarming with more casino lobbyists than you can shake a stick at. It also would invite bribes and corruption of the kind the Federal Bureau of Investigation investigated a few years ago.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Bill Armistead is chairman of the Alabama Republican Party and a former state senator. ☞

**The only winners
in a state that
promotes or
expands gambling
are the casino
operators.**

**Bill Armistead
Chairman of the Alabama
Republican Party**

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Atlanta fire chief fired over pro-family book

ATLANTA — Atlanta Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran has been fired over controversy about a Christian-themed book he wrote that has been criticized as promoting discriminatory attitudes against gays.

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed announced the termination in a press conference Jan. 6.

Reed said the fact that Cochran, a deacon at Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated Elizabeth Baptist Church, spoke publicly about the controversy during the investigation added to concerns about his judgment and ability to manage 750 employees in the fire and rescue department in one of the most lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-friendly cities in America.

Cochran recently spoke about the controversy to the Georgia Baptist Convention Executive Committee. Audio excerpts of the address are posted on the convention website, along with a petition containing nearly 4,500 signatures accusing the mayor of violating the fire chief’s religious liberty.

Cochran told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* he didn’t intend to be “hurtful to anyone,” but Christians, like gays, “have the right to express their beliefs regarding sexual orientation and be respected for their position without hate and without discrimination.”

Caner resigns from Brewton-Parker College

NEWNAN, Ga. — Citing his ongoing brokenness following the suicide of his teenage son in July 2014, Brewton-Parker College President Ergun Caner resigned Jan. 20 to return to Texas.

Caner’s family had never moved to Newnan, Ga., where the college is located, since he accepted the presidency on Dec. 2, 2013. Caner cited his November 2014 heart catheterization as being linked to the stress of losing his son in the midst of a grueling yet ultimately successful re-accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

“Brewton-Parker College cannot become a healthy, growing and stable college under the leadership of a man who is broken. And I am admitting to you that I am broken,” Caner said.

He then stated he was resigning “so I can go back to Texas and heal with my wife and 10-year-old son, Drake. It is one thing to lead a college through a crisis, but this position demands a person’s full attention and full strength. At the moment, I have neither.”

In the midst of the year of struggle, the college reported more than 100 confessions of faith from students during Brewton-Parker’s fall 2014 revival and balanced its budget.

CP giving 3.11 percent ahead of 2013 pace

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention’s portion of the Cooperative Program (CP) are 3.11 percent ahead of the same time frame at the end of 2013 and 3.84 percent under the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) CP Allocation Budget projection for the year, said Chief Executive Officer Frank S. Page.

The SBC allocation budget is distributed as follows: 50.41 percent to support more than 4,800 overseas personnel with the International Mission Board, 22.79 percent to help fuel North American evangelism and church planting through the North American Mission Board, 22.16 percent to help underwrite low-cost ministerial preparation and theological education through six SBC seminaries, 2.99 percent to the SBC operating budget and 1.65 percent to promote biblical morality and religious freedom through the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

LifeWay property sale lawsuit assigned new judge

GLORIETA, N.M. — A lawsuit challenging LifeWay Christian Resources’ sale of Glorieta Conference Center in 2013 has been reassigned to a new judge.

In September 2014, U.S. District Judge James Browning in Albuquerque, N.M., upheld most but not all recommendations by U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Hayes Scott to dismiss the lawsuit filed by Kirk and Susie Tompkins of Little Rock, Ark. The couple owns a vacation home on property formerly leased from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) publisher.

They claim LifeWay officials weren’t authorized to dispose of the 2,400-acre retreat center without SBC approval and that lessees weren’t offered a fair market value for homes. ☞



Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

He's only 9, but he's stepping up

Jack is a good-looking kid with a lovable smile who lives life in full-throttle and has a thirst for activity, adventure and amusement. He also can be a bit loud, but the volume merely represents the excitement he is experiencing in the moment.

Jack was a good big brother to Belle. With only two years' difference in their ages, they were buddies, roomies and confidants. He protected her as a big brother should and he challenged her as any sibling would.

Belle's fight against cancer ended Jan. 17. Jack and his sisters Taylor and Emily stood by her side through it all and were so strong as they said goodbye. They, along with their mommy and daddy, miss her beyond anything words can describe. So many of us do, but theirs is a pain only they can understand and a hurt so deep that climbing out of it seems impossible at the moment.

Brotherly instincts

And while Jack is the younger brother to Taylor and Emily, I can already see those brotherly instincts to protect his older sisters kicking in. I have a younger brother myself and he has those same instincts. The age order doesn't

always matter when it comes to brothers looking out for their sisters.

Jack was already prepped to make this move because he had turned a corner last summer. I'm not sure what clicked when he turned 9, but he was different. His mannerisms changed and he developed a protective and courteous spirit toward lots of us that we had not seen before then.

New maturity

And that new maturity continued to grow and develop through the fall and into winter, right in line with the decline of Belle's health.

As I watch Jack help shoulder grief and pain that comes with the loss of a child in a family, I also see him embrace his mom and dad's decision to "praise the name of the Lord" in all circumstances (Job 1:21).

Even at his young age, he gets it. He lives with hope and peace and knows that "God works all things together for good for those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

I can't wait to see the young man he becomes. His life is richer because Belle was his sister and I know he won't waste an ounce of the part of his heart that belongs to her. 🙏

"Belle is the bravest person I have ever seen. Belle is a dream come true."



— Jack

Rashional Extras...

To read previous columns about Belle, see October 2012 and September 2014 at www.rashionalthoughts.com.

Until We Meet Again ...

My eyes are only the telescope peeking in on the big screen production of your life,

you may think how can she learn anything simply from the gentle email Belle's aunt took time to write.

My life has been forever changed by someone I've never met — she made me think twice before dwelling on life's complaints and yesterday's regrets.

She fought sickness with such spunk, with a smile that could beat cancer itself

and told jokes that brought joy that could make your heart just melt.

Through it all — surgeries and even despite the loss of her hearing, she continued to hear God and stay in that fighter mode,

teaching those even multiples of her age lessons far wiser than she'll ever know.

Any loss may bring tears,

but peace comes when we think about where angels go.

We can still hear her laugh and see that smile, as she is probably playing with her halo.

What a blessing to be taught courage & the power of prayer, something we all needed to learn.

From an angel God let us borrow,

who He has now called to return.

With us still here on earth, we keep alive sweet Belle's story — which teaches far more than any of us may ever comprehend.

But, I do understand this

Though I have never seen you with my eyes,

I've seen your spirit — so I say, rest in peace my sweet friend.

I'll introduce myself when the time comes,

so save me a pair of angel wings for until we meet again.

By Brittney Knox
Former intern with *The Alabama Baptist*
Dedicated to Belle

Thank you for inviting others like me to join you and your family as you walked through Belle's journey. Though I never met Belle, I felt like I knew her through your emails and photos. I will continue to pray for God's comfort and peace to surround your family.

Jan White
Andalusia, Ala.

Belle was grace and mercy in motion — a life filled and explosive in the name Jesus. Belle has shown me how to do life in the face of death. She is joy in the flesh.

Jennifer, thank you for allowing me/us to see the way a little life with a big spirit and heart lived life to the fullest.

Jesse Conte
Montgomery, Ala.

It's amazing how someone so young and small could have such a galaxy-sized influence over those much older and larger. Her star will forever burn brightly in my universe and I look forward to meeting her again someday.

Susan Pruitt
Trussville, Ala.

If there was ever a little girl that was full of life, courage, strength and happiness, it was sweet Belle.

In her short life she touched so many with love and laughter. She will be in our hearts forever.

Wanda Bergeron
Birmingham, Ala.



Thank you

FOR LOVING BELLE AND OUR FAMILY, THE MITCHELLS
5-24-07 ♥ 1-17-15

Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago January 1965

A Long Pastorate: Brady Justice, pastor of First Baptist Church, Enterprise, will retire Feb. 1. He has served the church 25 years. A summary of the effectiveness of a long pastorate by a good man is seen in these facts: He has welcomed 2,534 new members, 927 of these by baptism; performed 336 wedding ceremonies and 486 funerals. The church has sponsored two missions, organized into Park Avenue and Hillcrest churches, and is aiding a present mission, Lee Street.

LETTERS

(continued from page 2)
of the illness for me. The open forum suggested could offer a quicker route to help and hope for others. What a great opportunity for outreach.

Thersia Tanner Smith
Daleville, Ala.

THANK YOU

I want to thank you personally for the fine article "Alabamian shares story of forgiveness, healing amid past with abortions" in the Jan. 15 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. It is a story people need to hear and that will be a blessing to many people.

Barbara Jane Kitchens
Adger, Ala. ☪

40 Years Ago January 1975

Impressive Records: Nita Rodkey and Louella Gillespie, two longtime staff members of *The Alabama Baptist*, retired Dec. 31, 1974 — Rodkey after 21 years as assistant to the editor and Gillespie after 13 years in the circulation department. The two ladies' presence in the paper's office will not be overlooked. They have compiled impressive records as has the paper during their tenure.

30 Years Ago January 1985

Director of Missions Retires: Harold Blackburn, retiring director of missions in Baldwin Baptist Association, was honored at a reception following annual "M" Night activities in the association. Blackburn served Baldwin Association for 12 years. He also served previously as director

of missions in East Liberty and Clarke Associations.

20 Years Ago January 1995

WMU Dedicates Museum: Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) board members and guests from across the United States gathered at the organization's national headquarters in Birmingham on Jan. 7 for the dedication of the Alma Hunt Museum of WMU. The museum, which highlights WMU's 107-year history, is named in honor of Alma Hunt, WMU executive director from 1948 to 1974. Hunt, along with Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry, spoke during dedication ceremonies held during WMU's Jan. 7-11 board meeting. Also on the program were Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, WMU executive director 1974-1989; Dellanna O'Brien, current WMU executive

director; Carolyn Miller, WMU president; and Dotson Nelson, Hunt's longtime friend.

10 Years Ago January 2005

Montgomery Pastor Retires: Byron Smith of Montgomery retired in December after 56 years of service to Alabama Baptist churches and state prisons. As a teenager Smith surrendered to the call to preach and was ordained at Highland Avenue Baptist Church. In 1971, Smith changed his focus from the local pastorate to prison ministry when he moved to Atmore to serve as chaplain for Holman Prison. In 1978, Smith transferred to Kilby Prison in Montgomery. After retiring from the chaplaincy in 1992, Smith accepted the pastorate at Letohatchee and Steep Creek Baptist churches in 1994. He wants to be remembered as a faithful servant. ☪

Golden Gate Seminary gifted land in Fremont

Following the relocation of its main campus to Southern California, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary will retain a presence in the San Francisco Bay area by opening a new campus in Fremont, Calif., on land donated by a local congregation that is moving to a house church ministry model.

The new campus will be situated just north of San Jose about 50 miles southeast of the present Mill Valley campus.

Mission Way Baptist Church, Fremont, announced that it will donate to the seminary land valued at \$2.9 million. The seminary plans to replace the existing church facilities with academic

buildings and has already begun the process of obtaining construction permits.

"We are committed to training students in the American West and the Bay Area," Golden Gate President Jeff Iorg said. "We have been given a generous gift of land in a prime location." (BP)

MARKET PLACE

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR: Loxley First Baptist Church in Gadsden, Ala., is seeking a pastor. Send resumé to: info@fbcloxley.com or to: First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 114, Loxley, AL 36551.

SENIOR PASTOR: Bellevue Baptist Church in Gadsden, Ala., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Interested parties please send resumé to: jmc@copelaw.com or mail to: Bellevue Baptist Church, 150 Noccalula Drive, Gadsden, AL 35904. Church website: www.bbcgadsden.com.

PASTOR: Brent Baptist Church is accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. Cut-off date is Feb. 4. Please send resumés to: Brent Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 246, Brent, AL 35034. No electronic resumés will be accepted. Please visit www.brentbaptistchurch.org for more information.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR/CHURCH PLANTER: Bay Side Baptist Church, Lillian (Gulf Shores area), seeking a bivocational pastor/church planter. Send resumés to: P.O. Box 533, Lillian, AL 36549.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: Community Baptist Church, Maylene,

Ala. (Alabaster area), is seeking a bivocational music minister. Send resumés to: cbcsearchcomm@gmail.com.

STUDENT MINISTER: FBC Pleasant Grove is accepting resumés for the position of full-time student minister. Please send resumé to: Donna Wilson at dwilson@fbcpg or mail to: FBC Pleasant Grove, 724 4th Street, Pleasant Grove, AL 35127. Church website: FBCPG.org.

STUDENT PASTOR: The First Baptist Church of Meridianville, Ala., is seeking a student pastor for grades 7-12. A seminary degree and a minimum of three years experience is preferred. Submit resumés to: jarichburg1969@gmail.com.

YOUTH MINISTER: Beck's Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N.C. seeks a full-time youth minister. A detailed job description may be found at becksbaptist.org/ymjobdescription. Resumés may be submitted to: ymscbbc@gmail.com.

STUDENT MINISTER: First Baptist Church, Guntersville, is searching for a full-time student minister, grades 6-12. Please send resumés to: Joel Samuels, 1000 Gunter Avenue, Guntersville, AL 35976 or jsamuels@gvillefbc.org.

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

OTHER POSITIONS

PART-TIME MINISTRY INTERN POSITION: Fifteen hours per week including Sundays and Wednesday nights. Work with students grades 5-12. Some teaching required. For information or to apply, contact Southcrest Baptist Church at 205-425-4991 or southcrestchurch@att.net.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Limestone Baptist Association is accepting resumés for director of missions through Feb. 28. Please send to: P.O. Box 153, Athens, AL 35612 or robert@limestonebaptist.org.

BUSINESS

TIME TO REPLACE THAT OLD CHURCH SIGN?: Reliable Sign Services, a Christian-operated, full-service sign company for two decades, is ready to assist you as you expand

your church sign ministry. From electronic message boards to traditional signs, Reliable will fabricate and install statewide or ship anywhere. www.reliableesigns.com. 1-800-729-6844, 205-664-0955.

MOVING? LOCAL, STATEWIDE OR LONG DISTANCE: Coleman American/Allied Van Lines. Special rate and programs for Alabama Baptist ministers, staff and church members. Contact Gary Washington at 205-942-0009 or birmingham.al@covan.com.

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

CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

CHURCH PROJECT: If you are planning a church project, new building, remodeling or upgrade of existing building, for free estimate or budget price, call Central Associates, Inc. at 251-421-2075.

TRAVEL/VACATION

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

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Bob Weber
Valley Creek Baptist Church,
Hueytown

I want an idyllic life. At the movie theater I get perturbed by yackers interrupting my focus on the storyline. I can feel my anxiety rise when the waiting room is packed and my Kindle is on my desk. Why is that "check engine" light on again?

Has your goal for a perfect day gone south when you trip over a toy, dropping your coffee mug before you ever get the first sip of caffeine delight? "Day ruined," you mumble as you roll out the paper towels.

If you have ever blamed circumstances, the weather or especially people for your problems you are not the first. Guilt transference is nothing new. "The parents eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). In other words this proverb means, "My day, my life and my future stinks because of you."

Desperation, fear, anger and resentment out-pointed personal responsibility when God spoke to His people through Ezekiel. The cause of malady had a culprit: sin. Individual sin had escalated to national proportions — so much so that extreme measures were taken by God to correct and cleanse His people. The verdict of a just God was levied. "The one who sins is the one who will die" (18:20). Sin is profoundly personal. It and its consequences can't be transferred.

Enter: grace. "When you turn from sin that person will surely live and not die" (18:21). God takes no pleasure in the death of offenders (18:32). Temple sacrifices illustrated His perpetual grace enabling all who would to experience forgiveness and engage in meaningful worship. Jesus made that clear and permanent through His blood: "We have been justified by His blood and are now saved from God's wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). Own your sin. Rather than calling God out, call out to Him instead. Take responsibility and be rescued.

A Christian does not live an idyllic life ... yet. A forgiven life is for now. An idyllic life will one day follow. ☪

About Alabama
 BY JIM WILLIAMS
 jwillia@samford.edu
 Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

Balancing Budget Accounts

When the Alabama Legislature convenes in March, its major challenge will be how to balance the state's two large budget accounts, which are the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and the General Fund. Neither budget is larger today than it was when state finances peaked in 2008. The state has fallen behind in its obligations. Improvement plans are being developed but where will the resources be found to cover them?

The General Fund is a major funding source for services other than education. It is budgeted to spend \$1.8 billion in 2015, about the same as seven years ago. Regular income to the fund from its continuing sources is expected to total only \$1.5 billion. "Intermittent" sources are counted on to provide the rest. For 2016 a funding gap of \$250 million or more is forecast. Over the next 10 years, the fund must repay \$600 million borrowed for short-term budget balance in the recent past.

The two largest General Fund expenditures are for Medicaid, which provides health care to the poor, and Corrections. Plans are being developed to reduce prison overcrowding and control Medicaid costs while improving health outcomes but in the short run, expenditure demands continue to rise. Other essential services have been squeezed as well. The courts for ex-

ample have been forced to rely heavily on fees that have proven hard to collect. Money earmarked for highways and education has been transferred to cover some of the General Fund's needs.

The ETF, the major funding source for the state's education programs, draws its revenues mainly from the state's growth-related taxes on income and sales. This has created a false impression that education is relatively well-funded, leading some to propose unearmarking as a budget solution. However, the ETF actually is budgeted to spend \$800 million less this year than in 2008, a bigger reduction than the General Fund is experiencing.

Investing wisely

Formulas that fund the public schools have not been restored to their pre-recession levels. Meanwhile an ambitious plan to improve educational performance by 2020 can succeed only by investing wisely in programs that make a difference.

It seems clear that additional resources are needed to meet the state's goals for educational improvement and cost-effectiveness in Medicaid and Corrections, as well as to cover General Fund obligations in other areas. Despite the Census Bureau's recent data showing that Alabama continues to have the lowest taxes per capita in the United States, finding where to get the money will be hard work. ❏

Helping the hurting

Former Tuscaloosa DOM, wife spend retirement writing books

By Grace Thornton
 Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While back Jerry Wilkins — like many pastors and directors of missions (DOM) — began to eye his upcoming retirement years and think about how to spend them purposefully.

"You hear of a lot of ministers retiring and going into missions work," said Wilkins, who served as DOM for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association for 28 years.

But he and his wife, Carole, began to feel that God was laying on their hearts a different kind of missions field.

"When you near 70, you want to start leaving something behind," Jerry Wilkins said.

And the couple began to think that the thing they could leave behind was to help the hurting by putting into books what they had been helping people with one-on-one for a long time.

"My wife and I have been counseling for years," he said. "She was a biblical lay counselor and has done free counseling with thousands of people."

When she retired they decided to write a book together about marriage.

"We really just want to help so many hurting marriages out there," Jerry Wilkins said.

The result was a book called "The Great Marriage Physician," a book currently displayed in the front window of the couple's local Barnes & Noble bookstore, along with "The Marriage Doctor," a version of the same book aimed at a secular audience.

Carole Wilkins said she and her husband feel like there are a lot of people who need access to good advice on how to handle hard situations.

"In my counseling ministry I saw so many problems but I knew God had all the answers," she said. "We've just tried to put it in book form as much as we can."

And hurting couples aren't the only people the

Wilkins have felt called to help through the written word.

Jerry Wilkins' newest book, "Smooth Sailing," describes mistakes ministers make and talks about "how to avoid storms in your ministry."

And together the couple has five more books coming out over the next two years. Each handles practical subjects like dealing with conflict and stress.

"About five years ago I realized that when churches and marriages are in conflict, we often toss God's

Word out the window and forget everything about how we are to act and speak," Jerry Wilkins said.

So the book coming out soon on conflict talks about how to apply Scripture to the moments where there is interpersonal tension.

Another of the books, called "The Counseling Pulpit," shows a pastor how to preach in such a way that he is counseling the hurting members of his church who sit in the pews every Sunday.

"For example Carole wrote a chapter on phobias, and then I wrote two sermon outlines on fear to go along with that chapter," Jerry Wilkins said.

Their hope is that putting practical help in people's hands will help

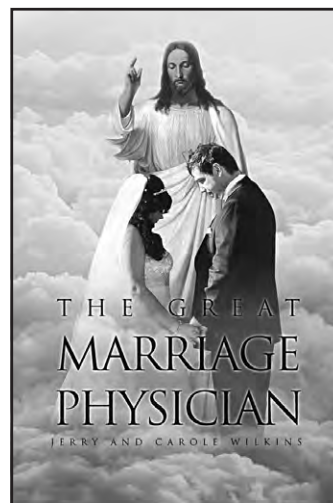
them tackle everyday problems head on and avoid the pain of a broken marriage or a wounded ministry.

It's a mission Jerry Wilkins started back in 1990 with a book he wrote called "Marketing Your Sunday School," which got his feet wet as an author. He then decided to write a practical guide to associational missions, a book he emailed for free chapter by chapter to every DOM in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Carole Wilkins began much the same way. She wrote books on the topics most relevant to her clients and passed them out to them for free.

She said she felt getting practical help in the hands of the hurting was one of the best things she could do for them.

"I just never dreamed that God would bring it to this point," she said. "I'm still amazed." ❏



Ministry Tips



BUILDING YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEAM

By Daniel Edmonds
 Director of Sunday School and Discipleship
 Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Jesus, the ultimate leadership example, called His team to a clear mission: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19).

Likewise in building your Sunday School team look for team members willing to spend time together, learn

together and be on a mission together. Game day is not the time for meeting and strategy planning; it is time to reap the reward of all the planning, practice and prayer. Look for team members who will commit the time it takes to strengthen the work and accomplish the goals that are set.

The team that is willing to learn together and from each other will prosper. Training is a key to health and growth in any

organization. Leadership should set the pace by attending and providing leadership training. People will respect and listen to leaders who are willing to undergo the rigors of training. Proper training enhances conversation, troubleshooting, strategy development and team cohesion. Enlist team members who will commit to being trained.

A unified commitment to a common goal

also is an important characteristic in team members. Numerous Sunday School teams have been sidetracked and rendered ineffective by members committed to the status quo rather than attaining a new, challenging goal. Enlist team members who are willing to commit to the mission.

For more on this topic, visit www.alsbom.org/sundayschool. ❏

'Hands & feet of Jesus'

Shower ministry connects downtown church to community

Downtown churches struggling to find their niche in ministry may want to try what First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn., has done: look and listen.

Paying attention to young voices within its membership and to underserved needs downtown, the congregation launched a shower ministry in October 2013 that has surprised even the most faithful members of the congregation.

Since then the ministry has become the launching point for a number of other services the church never dreamed of, said Thomas Quisenberry, pastor of the downtown congregation.

It all started four or five years ago in Colorado and Arizona where First, Chattanooga, college students saw shower ministries in action on a missions trip.

Back home they met with deacon Herb Hooper and suggested the idea as perfect for the Tennessee church and the homeless people around it. The church is located just blocks from a homeless shelter and other services for that population in Chattanooga.

Committed to volunteer

A fundraising campaign was launched in October 2012 to pay for the installation of showers just off the church gymnasium. The goal was \$104,000 but \$107,000 was raised in 12 months for eight showers. However, enough money was raised by July 2013 to start the work then, Hooper said.

Three college students committed to volunteer at the shower each Thursday, when it's open 2-5 p.m.

More than a year later some workers in the shower ministry are homeless people who have availed themselves of the service.

The ministry was expanded when a local politician donated two washing machines and two dryers to the ministry, which were added to the units the church already had. This enables someone to shower and have their laundry done simultaneously.

Six months ago the church started offering haircuts by volunteers from a local cosmetology school.

"And we have one guy who comes in to provide massages," Hooper said. "Last Thursday we had 18 haircuts, 12 showers, 13 who did laundry and three to four who got massages."

The church has found that its shower and laundry ministry dovetails with another program held at the church on Thursday nights.

It's an ecumenical ministry called Mustard Tree, which uses the church's gym to serve dinner and hold a Bible study for homeless people every week. Different churches serve as the host each night, with First, Chattanooga, taking responsibility once a month.

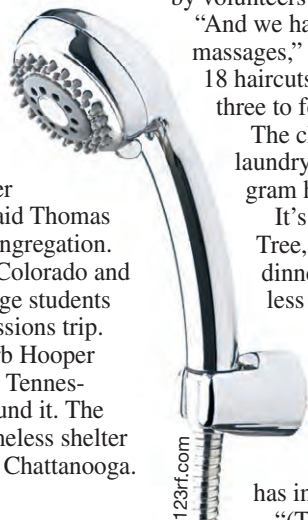
Hooper, who has been a member of the church for 52 years, said his involvement with the shower ministry has inspired him in numerous ways.

"(The college students) wanted to do more than go to Bible studies," Hooper said. "They wanted to be the hands and feet of Jesus wherever they could."

Knowing many other downtown churches are struggling to find their niches, Quisenberry said he doesn't recommend shower ministries as the answer.

It's the paying attention to their surroundings that matters, he said.

"I do think congregations can find ways to be a positive influence on their community, and maybe the best way is having contact and listening." (BNG)



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Burney Enzor

Former pastor, brigadier general dies at 77

Burney Enzor, who was called to become a pastor at age 13, died Jan. 8. He was 77.

Enzor served in the Army National Guard for 30 years as deputy chief of chaplains, earning the final rank of brigadier general.

He was ordained in 1955 and earned a bachelor's degree from Troy State University (now Troy University) and later a master of divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from the seminary in 1978.

He served as pastor of Northside Baptist Church, Troy, and later served as part-time pastor of two churches at the same time — Pleasant Home Baptist Church, Brantley, and Sardis Baptist Church, Greenville.

Enzor is survived by his wife of 57 years, Jeanell, three children and 12 grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



ENZOR

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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- Focus on issues, not people
- Be as concise as possible

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WMU to help children, youths reach postmodern culture

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) rolled out three new focus areas for 2015 to 2018 after its board meeting Jan. 10-12 — equipping leaders, preparing children and youth for missional living in a postmodern culture and focusing on small churches. WMU leadership partnered

with the International Mission Board (IMB) on a vision trip to the Nordic cluster in 2013 in order to learn more about post-modernism.

As a result WMU's Executive Director Wanda S. Lee said, "WMU must take the lead in preparing our children and youth for living in a postmodern culture

... for knowing what they believe and how to share their faith in this culture and for determining the truths of Scripture that never change when everything around them is changing."

About 150 people — including board members, state and national WMU staff members and guests — gathered for the meeting at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

"We believe WMU can re-shape the way we develop curriculum and guide teachers in their experiences with children and youth to help shape a stronger generation for faith and service," Lee said. "During 2016 to 2018 this will be at the forefront of our curriculum planning and training."

Lee said addressing faith issues in the midst of trauma also will be addressed through WMU's Project HELP: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

Addressing PTSD

"While exploring how to live in a postmodern culture we will continue to seek ways to address the issues of post-traumatic stress our children are now faced with, from violence in our schools to effects of war on families to the response needed in our churches," she said.

Finally Lee said WMU will focus on assisting smaller Southern Baptist churches with developing missions discipleship programs for all ages.

"WMU works well in the

small church," Lee said, "a church with a pastor and maybe another part-time staff member ... a church that values the gifts of its laypeople and cannot succeed without them in planning and taking the lead in ministry. With the right resources and training lay leaders in a church can help their pastor be an effective avenue for sharing the gospel."

Meeting participants also heard from Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board; David Platt, IMB president; and several missionaries from the field.


In other business the Executive Board of national WMU awarded approximately \$230,000 in endowments, grants and scholarships in partnership with the WMU Foundation. (WMU)

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Christians attacked after more *Hebdo* cartoons

Cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammad are proving costly for Christians in majority-Muslim countries in Africa.

At least 45 churches were torched in mid-January in Niger in two days of protests that left about 10 people dead. The targeted churches were mainly evangelical built in Niamey, the capital city.

Three other churches were ransacked Jan. 16 and three people were killed in Zinder, Niger's second-largest city. A French cultural center burned down in the city as other marches unfolded in Mali, Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria — all former French colonies. Christians' homes and businesses also have been at-

tacked as enraged mobs clash with police in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack in Paris on Jan. 7, in which gunmen killed 12 people working for the satirical weekly. The subsequent publication of more Muhammad cartoons in *Charlie Hebdo's* latest edition prompted renewed violence.

Sheikh Saliou Mbacke, a Muslim leader from the Muridiya Sufi Community of Senegal, said he strongly condemned the attacks on churches in Niger but "Muslim demonstrations to express their anger are legitimate. I join all Muslims in the world to also express my anger for the cartooning of prophet Muhammad." (RNS)





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TOP 10

best-selling books in the month of January

FICTION

1. **The Harbinger**
By Jonathan Cahn (Frontline)
2. **Angels Walking**
By Karen Kingsbury (Howard)
3. **The River**
By Beverly Lewis (Bethany)
4. **Redeeming Love**
By Francine Rivers (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
5. **The Shack — Mass Market Paperback**
By William Paul Young (Windblown)
6. **Bridge to Haven**
By Francine Rivers (Tyndale)
7. **An Amish Second Christmas**
By Beth Wiseman, Kathleen Fuller, Tricia Goyer and Ruth Reid (Thomas Nelson)
8. **The Westward Christmas Brides**
By Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour)
9. **The Auschwitz Escape**
By Joel C. Rosenberg (Tyndale)
10. **The Preacher's Bride Collection**
By DiAnn Mills, Colleen L. Reece, Kimberly Cameaux, Kristy Dykes, Darlene Franklin and Sally Laity (Barbour)

NONFICTION

1. **Jesus Calling — Hardcover**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **You Can, You Will**
By Joel Osteen (FaithWords)
3. **Live Original**
By Sadie Robertson (Howard)
4. **The Five Love Languages**
By Gary Chapman (Moody)
5. **The Total Money Makover**
By Dave Ramsey (Thomas Nelson)
6. **Jesus Calling — Leather**
By Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
7. **Unwrapping the Greatest Gift**
By Ann Voskamp (Tyndale)
8. **Heaven Is For Real — Paperback**
By Todd Burpo (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Unfiltered**
By Phil Robertson (Howard)
10. **Before Amen**
By Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)

Source: Christian Book Expo



Photo courtesy of Turning Point Media

Selah, the Dove Award-winning trio made up of (l to r) Allan Hall, Todd Smith and Amy Perry, has been inspiring audiences for almost two decades with their soul-stirring lyrics.

Finding security in Christ

Award-winning trio shares songs of salvation worldwide

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The contemporary Christian group Selah desires to reach the far corners of the world with its music and message to lift up the name of Jesus.

The Dove Award-winning trio is made up of Todd Smith, Amy Perry and Allan Hall. While performing signature songs such as “You Raise Me Up,” “Wonderful, Merciful Savior” and “Press On” the group has been inspiring audiences for almost two decades with their soul-stirring lyrics.

By sharing the message behind their music the group hopes to connect audiences with the truth of the gospel.

Their latest album, “You Amaze Us,” features a unique blend of traditional hymns and original songs filled with a compelling message about finding security in Christ.

The group hopes the musical selections on the album will reflect the importance of finding a balance between contemporary songs and traditional hymns in churches today. The hymns selected for the album were some of the group’s favorites growing up, including “I’d Rather Have Jesus,” “Just As I Am,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” “In the Garden” and “Victory in Jesus.”

“We love singing hymns and they will always be a bedrock of what we do,” Smith said. “It’s a way of teaching people the truth. In music there are ways you can communicate phrases that allow people to remember the messages for a long time. With spoken words people may not respond the same way.”

“Music strikes a chord with your soul. We want to

use the gifts that God has given us with music to remind people that we are all in need of a Savior. Our lives need to be transformed and we can be made new because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.”

During concerts Selah also hopes to raise awareness for missions organizations.

The group recently partnered with the International Mission Board (IMB) to create a music video for their original song, “We Must Not,” aimed at bringing awareness and aid for the persecuted church. The song was inspired by IMB missionary Nik Ripken’s book, “The Insanity of God.”

Hall said, “After reading this book I was really impacted because I didn’t know that much about the persecuted church. I felt like I had to respond in some way, which led me to create a whole album containing songs inspired by the book.”

“Prayer is the most powerful resource for them and it’s really what they are asking for,” Hall continued. “Many have asked us to pray this way: ‘Pray for our persecutors that they will come to know Jesus through our suffering. Don’t pray

we will get out of prison. Don’t pray we will be safe. Pray that we will stay true to the name of Jesus even if it costs our lives.’”

“With everything that is happening around the world, hopefully this brings awareness about the persecuted church and puts it on people’s hearts to constantly be lifting up our brothers and sisters around the world.”

“We need to stand in the gap for our brothers and sisters who are on the front lines. We are hearing amazing stories that remind us, even in the midst of darkness, God shows up.”





BP photo

Mike Alexander welcomes guests to Living Hope Fellowship, a church in Aurora, Colo., he started after seeing the need while on a missions trip. The church plant is part of Send North America: Denver.

'We could do that'

Retired teacher, wife relocate to Colorado to plant church

Mike Alexander never attended seminary. He had never served as pastor of a church. He said he didn't even know what a church planter did. That is, until he became one.

Now about two years after arriving in Aurora, Colo., and about 23 months after he began learning what church planters actually do, the church Alexander started has baptized more than 60 people.

The retired Texas teacher visited Aurora on a missions trip in the summer of 2012. During the trip 16 children began a relationship with Christ. As exciting as that was, Alexander couldn't help but wonder where those children — all from one mobile home community (Foxridge Farm Mobile Home Park) — would be disciplined through a local church.

"There wasn't anyone out here to disciple them, to move them along," Alexander said. "That really touched my heart. I overheard the manager of the [community] talking to someone else on our team, saying 'What we need is an older couple to come here and live here and minister to the people.'

"My wife and I are ex-school teachers and we could do that," Alexander told the manager.

What started with God gently tugging Alexander's heart and a short exchange with the mobile home community manager soon became a full-fledged missionary call. In the next few days he told his wife, Rosemary, what God was telling him about moving to Colorado. He looked at the house he'd one day purchase.

'I'll help you'

"As I left the house, the first person I met was a guy named Jimmy," Alexander said. "He's a Native American with tattoos all over him."

"What are you doing?" Jimmy asked Alexander.

"Well, Jimmy, I think God wants us to move here to minister to this community," Alexander said.

"If you do that, I'll help you," Jimmy said.

Eight weeks later the Alexanders moved to Colorado. It wasn't until he went to church plant-

ers' training through the Colorado Baptist General Convention a few days after arriving in Aurora that he began to understand what it meant to be a church planter.

Soon Alexander had a vision for building a church among the 481 units in the community. Six people — one family — attended the church's first worship service in the couples' home. Today Living Hope Fellowship has 35 to 40 people in a typical worship service.

Meeting physical needs

"Most of the work happens one-on-one. It's visitation. It's talking to people. It's taking the opportunity to visit," Alexander said. "And then you can't just lead people to the Lord and leave them alone. There's discipleship. There's Bible study."

"Physical needs are really important here," Alexander said. "This is not a rich community. This is a pretty low-income place. It's hard to find a job and if they find a job they don't have transportation."

During the past two years Alexander has become so identified with the community that even people not connected to his church come to him to get pastoral needs met, such as weddings. When one young couple wanted to get married in 2014 someone recommended they visit Alexander. As he sat down with them for premarital counseling before the first wedding he had ever performed he discovered the prospective groom had never committed his life to Christ.

"I'm not a Christian," the young man told Alexander. "I've done terrible, terrible things. God doesn't like me."

"That's not true. God does love you," Alexander said before opening up his Bible and taking him through the gospel. The young man became a follower of Christ and, for a couple of months before moving to San Diego, Calif., they were active members of the church.

Two years after answering God's call to Aurora, Alexander knows what a church planter does — because he is doing it. (BP)

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services



Gospel composer, singer Crouch dies at age 72

LOS ANGELES — Andrae Crouch, a Grammy-winning gospel composer and singer whose music remains a staple in many church hymnals, died Jan. 8. He was 72 and had been sick for many years.

Among his most well-known compositions is "My Tribute," whose chorus begins "To God be the glory." Others include "Take Me Back," "Soon and Very Soon," "Jesus Is the Answer" and "Through It All."

"Even to this day, this generation doesn't have any idea that some of the songs they sing every Sunday in church are songs Andrae Crouch wrote," said Bil Carpenter, author of "Uncloudy Days: The Gospel Music Encyclopedia."

Though best-known for his decades of pioneering work in the contemporary gospel music industry, Crouch also contributed to secular music projects, including recordings by Madonna and Michael Jackson and movie scores such as "The Lion King" and "Free Willy." He collaborated with Quincy Jones on the movie soundtrack for "The Color Purple."

Crouch, an African-American artist, was unusual in that his music became popular in white churches first and later among black audiences, Carpenter said.

Arizona sign ordinance considered in Supreme Court

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court considered Jan. 12 whether an Arizona town's sign ordinance infringes on a church's free speech and assembly rights.

The justices heard oral arguments in an appeal by the pastor of a small Phoenix-area church of a lower-court decision in support of the law, which he contends discriminates against congregations while favoring political and ideological messages.

Clyde Reed, pastor of Good News Community Church, Phoenix, Ariz., challenged a Gilbert, Ariz., code that limits the size of directional signs — like those for church meetings — to six square feet and 12 hours for display while permitting far greater sizes and durations of exhibition for political, ideological and home owners' association signs.

The Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) asserted in a friend-of-the-court brief filed by the Christian Legal Society that Gilbert's law is based on a sign's content and therefore abridges the First Amendment's free speech clause.

On the day of the arguments, ERLC President Russell Moore warned against government muting of a church's speech.

"This case is vitally important," he said. "[It] should mobilize supporters of religious liberty and supporters of free speech to stand together for our First Amendment freedoms."

Supreme Court in favor of prisoner's beard

WASHINGTON — In a unanimous 9-0 decision the Supreme Court ruled Jan. 20 that prison officials cannot arbitrarily ban peaceful religious practices, securing a landmark victory for religious freedom for all faiths.

"No religion is an island," said Eric Rassbach, deputy general counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty representing plaintiff Abdul Muhammad in this case.

In the case of Holt v. Hobbs the court ruled that Muhammad has the right to peacefully wear a half-inch beard in accordance with his Muslim faith after the state of Arkansas failed to show that it had a compelling interest in banning beards.

The Supreme Court heard the case Oct. 7, 2014. At issue was whether the Arkansas prison system's refusal to allow the peaceful wearing of a half-inch beard violates a federal civil rights law, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said of the case, "The Supreme Court did the right thing in this case. Religious liberty isn't a prize earned by those with the most political clout. ... Christians and others should be glad, especially in a time when the most basic religious liberties are routinely dismissed in many corners of our national debate." ❧