



INSIDE



In changing culture, Millennials drawn to deep preaching, doctrine, realness

◆ Page 4



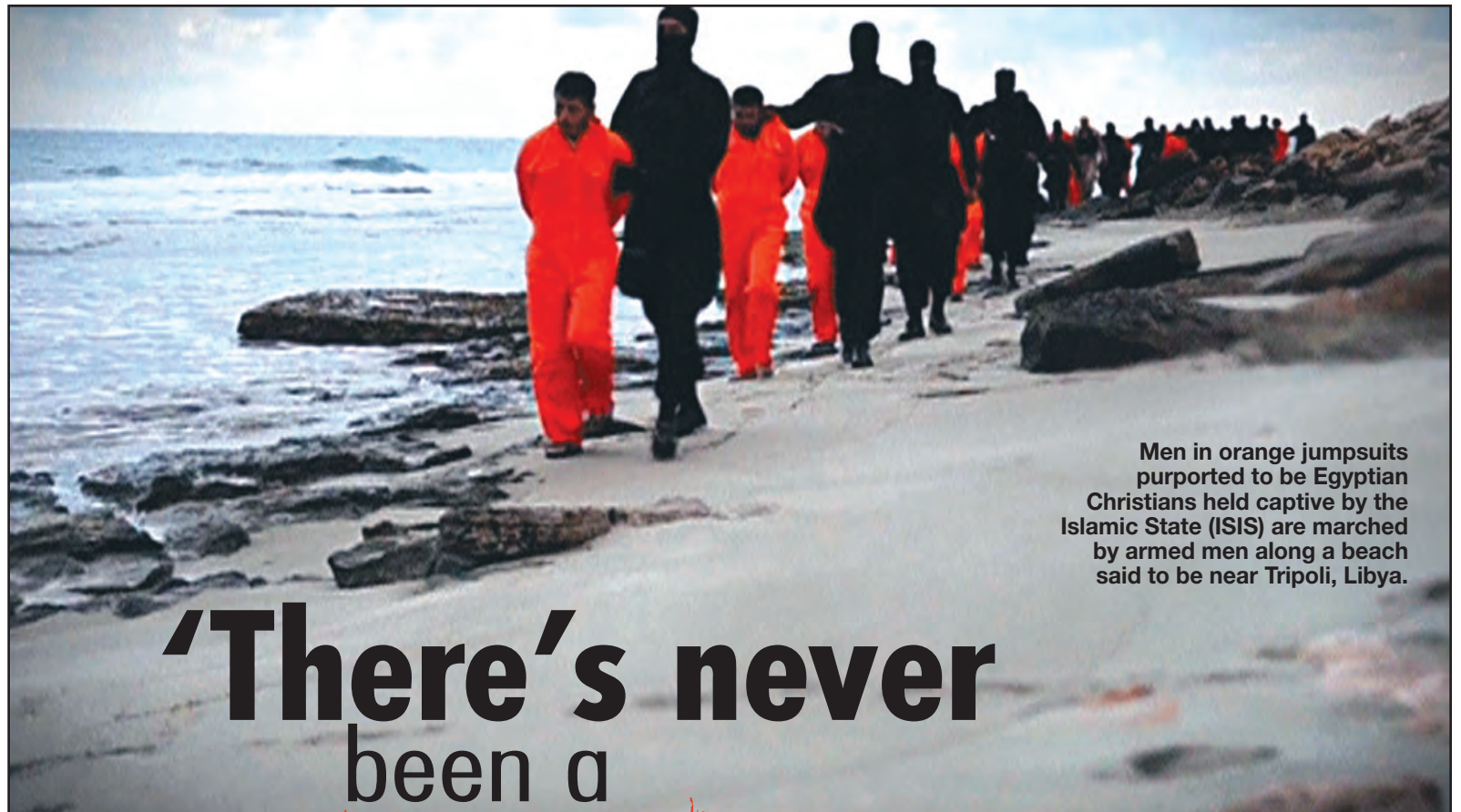
FBC Greenville helps set 'an example for a godly marriage'

◆ Page 5



Talladega broadcast station ministers worldwide

◆ Page 7



Men in orange jumpsuits purported to be Egyptian Christians held captive by the Islamic State (ISIS) are marched by armed men along a beach said to be near Tripoli, Libya.

'There's never been a

TIME LIKE THIS'

Reuters photo

Violence, conflict in recent years prompts many Muslims to question faith, turn to Christ

The image lingers vividly in David Garrison's mind just like it does for much of the Christian world — 21 orange-clad "people of the cross" kneeling on a Libyan beach just moments before Islamic State (ISIS) fighters beheaded them.

Images like that make Garrison angry. Sad. Full of deep grief. But they also stir something else in his heart — earnest, hopeful prayers that beauty will rise from the ashes just like he's seen happen again and again in the past in the Muslim world.

"When I hear these stories of violence, my heart goes out and I pray

that God will take what Satan intended for evil and turn it for good," said Garrison, global missions strategist for the International Mission Board. "We are in the midst of the greatest movement of Muslims turning to Christ in history."

'Direct correlation'

And there is a "direct correlation" between times of horrific bloodshed and the spread of the gospel among Muslims, he said. Muslim on Muslim atrocities such as those that ISIS fighters are committing in Iraq and Syria "reveal the worst in that religion and often wake Muslims up to say 'this is not my religion; this

cannot be God's perfect will.'"

In this crisis of faith, many are finding hope in Christ, Garrison said. It happened when a violent coup in Indonesia paved the way for at least 2 million Muslims to be baptized as new believers in Jesus between 1967 and 1971, he said.

It happened again in the 1990s

when 10,000 Muslim Berbers in Algeria turned to Christ after watching fellow Muslims slaughter each other in a Civil War that claimed 100,000 civilian lives.

The trend spread across the Muslim world, and it's still spreading today, Garrison said. In Iran, (See 'We can never,' page 3)

Egyptian Christians worship during a service amid violence in the Muslim world.



IMB photo

COMMENT

Choosing to Be a Part

Frequently churches act like a decision to cooperate with other Baptists on behalf of the kingdom of God through a local association, a state convention or a national body is a once-and-for-all decision. In fact, the decision whether or not to prioritize participation in a worldwide strategy of missions and ministry is a decision made over and over again in every local Baptist church.

The result of this once-and-for-all mindset about cooperation decisions has resulted in hundreds of churches which claim to be part of a worldwide strategy of missions and ministry but give little or no evidence of being a viable part of a fellowship of churches.

For example, the Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA) reports 139 member churches. These are churches that asked for BBA membership, agreed to cooperate and support the association and were accepted into membership based on that commitment.

For the last year of record, however, 42 of those churches (about 30 percent) provided no financial support to associational ministries. Many of these churches did not participate in any of the association's ministry projects. Nor did they have representatives at the association's executive board meetings.

That reality caused the association's executive board to recently affirm a proposal presented by Mike McLemore, executive director of BBA, that cooperating churches are expected to support the ministries of the association financially, participate in associational missions and ministry projects and have representation at the executive board meetings.

Otherwise the churches could be considered uncooperative and removed from the association.

No designated offerings

It is interesting that practically all the churches that did not contribute to the association gave nothing to missions through the Cooperative Program (CP) and 35 of the 42 gave no designated offerings for international missions, North American missions, world hunger or work in Alabama according to information provided by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

BBA is not alone in this situation. Many associations have churches that once had the best intentions of participating with sister churches in missions and ministries to their area. But over time, local church needs became the priority. That change of emphasis finds expression in every aspect of local church life from what it promotes to what it expects from members to



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

how undesignated receipts are used.

The result is that such churches drift away from their initial commitment to work with sister churches for Kingdom causes and begin to choose congregational needs over being a part of missions and ministry with other churches.

What is true for associations also is true for state conventions and the national Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The only difference is that neither the state nor national conventions vote to accept churches as members. Churches choose to cooperate in the worldwide strategy of missions and ministry done by Southern Baptists.

In 2014, Alabama Baptists reported 3,286 cooperating churches. However, 790 (almost 1 out of 4) contributed nothing to Baptist worldwide missions and ministries through CP. Additionally, 662 churches (1 in 5) gave nothing through designated state or national missions offerings. Almost 1 out of 7 churches (481) reported giving no contributions to missions through CP or through designated offerings.

Once these churches chose to work with sister churches for missions and ministry at home and around the world. Evidence now indicates that committee has waned.

This pattern reaches beyond Alabama. Speaking to the annual meeting of the Association of State Baptist Publications, SBC Executive Committee President Frank S. Page reported that 17,000 of the 46,210 cooperating SBC churches gave nothing to Southern Baptists' worldwide program of missions and ministries through CP for the last year of record. That means almost 4 out of 10 churches (36.8 percent) claiming to cooperate with Southern Baptists gave no financial support through CP, the preferred method of supporting state and national missions and ministries.

Most of these churches would endorse the theology of Southern Baptists as expressed in

the Baptist Faith & Message. They believe in the lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, personal salvation, primacy of the local church and more. Some would argue that believing those cardinal doctrines makes them a Southern Baptist church.

Certainly Southern Baptists share a common faith. We also share a common motivation — missions and evangelism. Historically we have shared a common methodology as well — a commitment to cooperation. Agreement on all three — message, motivation and methodology — has been a hallmark of Southern Baptists.

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary President Jason K. Allen recently observed the major issues before Southern Baptists today are about methodology. As we did a century ago, Southern Baptists are again discussing how they will work together to share the gospel message.

'Losing the lifeblood'

In other words, will churches choose to work with other Baptists on behalf of the kingdom of God or will churches prioritize local

programs and local needs? Allen went so far as to say Southern Baptists are "losing the lifeblood that has driven them for almost a century" — the CP.

On that point there is good news. Page reported that about 2,000 churches contribute 50 percent of all CP receipts. And 80 percent of CP receipts come from 8,200 churches. Like in most churches, about 20 percent of the members of SBC churches are doing 80 percent of the giving.

While the national percentage of undesignated receipts going to missions and ministries through CP climbed from 5.41 percent to 5.50 percent for the last year of record, the percentage of the 8,200 churches giving 80 percent of the CP total is 7.8 percent of undesignated receipts. One can only imagine what could be done in missions and ministries if the 17,000 nongiving churches were to contribute through CP at the national average.

Some churches indicate a strong commitment to working together on behalf of the kingdom of God. Others choose a different path. Like BBA, sometimes it could be necessary to acknowledge the decisions made by the various churches and go forward with those who choose to be a part of the Southern Baptist worldwide strategy of missions and ministry. 🙏

**Almost 4 out of 10
churches (36.8 percent)
claiming to cooperate
with Southern Baptists
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support through the
Cooperative Program.**

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

See page 12





"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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'We can never give up on FAITH AND HOPE'

'We're seeing things today that we've never seen before,' IMB's Garrison says

(continued from page 1)

Afghanistan, Pakistan and all across the globe, Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus in the midst of violence and persecution.

"We went 1,000 years without a recorded movement among Muslims to Christ (until 1870), and now in just the first 14 years of this century we've seen 69 movements," he said. "The violence in Islam creates tremendous internal turmoil for Muslims. I could tell story after story of how this has happened. We're seeing things today that we've never seen before. There's never been a time like this."

Garrison, author of "A Wind in the House of Islam," has traveled a quarter-million miles in recent years gathering the stories of Muslims who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and become a part of big movements of the gospel.

Wide range of believers

Worldwide, these Christ followers range from Indonesian to west African to Iranian, and they range from orthodox church members to underground secret believers who came to faith through satellite TV or radio.

"What's different today is that the Word of God is being translated into their heart languages and they are reading it and discovering that they have an alternative, that there is another way," he said.

The interconnectedness of the world has brought unprecedented gospel access to people in hard to reach areas, Garrison said.

"They are opening their computers, going to websites, watching the 'JESUS film' and downloading Scripture portions."

And new believers in Christ are growing in ways ranging from studying the Bible online themselves to gathering in secret church groups to attending online seminary.

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon, is one group reaching out to those potential movement leaders in closed countries via the Internet.

A need exists for Christian leaders in the midst of vast uncertainty in the Muslim world, said Elias Ghazal, ABTS online coordinator.

"A lot of people are coming to faith. Still, there is a lot more that the Church can and



Photo by Joseph Rose/BGR

For some Muslims, such as a number of Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict in their country, the violence inside their own religion causes them to question their belief system. As a result, many Muslims are turning to Christ, according to David Garrison, IMB global missions strategist.

should do," Ghazal said. "The number of people who are searching is growing, but the Church has to be intentional about taking those opportunities to share."

The classes train Arab believers in how to spread small groups in a place where opening a church and inviting people to come is likely not an option.

"It's a tool that can empower people to replicate Bible teaching in different contexts," Ghazal said. "And that's what we want to do — we want to train up workers for the Kingdom."

Alex Awad, dean of students at Bethlehem Bible College, a Christian school located in the conflict-riddled Palestinian West Bank, said he and other Arab Christians continue to pray fervently that the violent crisis will spread the Kingdom throughout the Muslim world.

"We continue to think that maybe the blood of the martyrs throughout the Middle East and northern Africa will generate a new spirit," he said. Jesus Himself said that unless a seed falls

to the ground and dies, it will not bring fruit, Awad noted.

"We continue to hope for a sweep of the Holy Spirit, a revival within the Church," he said. "We as God's people can never give up on faith and hope. Even though the Christians are a weak minority here, we can be a blessing to the majority people who are around us."

And that often starts with looking the enemy in the face and offering love and forgiveness, according to the family members of those Christians beheaded by ISIS in early February.

"The Bible tells us to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us," said Beshir Kamel, whose brothers Samuel and Bishoy were among those beheaded.

Praying for ISIS

"Today I was having a chat with my mother ... I asked her what will you do if you see those ISIS members passing on the street and I told you, 'that's the man who slayed your son,'" Kamel told SAT-7, an Arabic TV station. "She said, 'I will ask for God to open His eyes and ask Him into our house.'"

On the air, Kamel told the world that his family wanted no retaliation, just that the killers would find Christ. He prayed for ISIS — "Dear God, please open their eyes to be saved."

For resources on how to pray for the Middle East and northern Africa, visit namepeoples.imb.org. To read more of Garrison's studies on the movement of the gospel among Muslims, check out his book, "A Wind in the House of Islam," available at windinthehouse.org. (TAB)

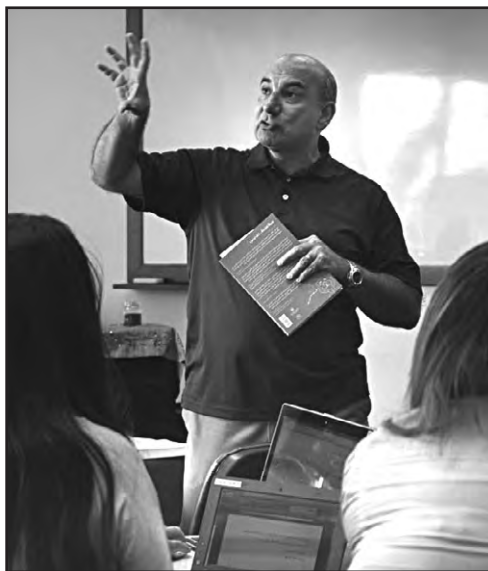


Photo courtesy of ABTS

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary offers online classes to Christians in countries that are hard to access with the gospel.



Photo by Neisha Roberts

In changing culture, Millennials drawn to deep preaching, doctrine, realness

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

For as long as anyone can remember, it's been this way in the South — being a church member didn't just bring spiritual blessings, it also was a great benefit to your business, your social life and your standing in the community.

But that day is "certainly changing," said Jason Dees, pastor of Valleydale Church, Birmingham. And as the culture shirks church and its beliefs more and more, the younger generation finds itself without an easy, comfortable home in Christianity, he said.

So one of two things happen: they either dig in or fall away, Dees said. "Christianity either has to be true and real, or it's really a waste of time."

And that's why the younger generation values deep sermons more than most people realize, he said.

Doctrine in sermons

"I think there is a deeper desire among younger people for doctrine in sermons, a deeper desire for conviction," Dees said. "I think that people in my generation want to know what the Bible has to say and how it works and fits together."

Sometimes churches tag Millennials as being more interested in entertaining worship services or social justice causes than Bible study, but Dees said he sees something different happening.

"When you live in a culture that is contrary to Christian beliefs, you really have to know why Christians hold to what they hold to," he said. "We live in a world that is forcing harder questions and needs more thorough, in-depth answers."



DEES

He said that's why he thinks pastors who preach long, challenging sermons — sermons that really dig into the Word and tackle tough questions head on — have "captured the hearts" of the younger generation.

"Real ministry and real justice and godliness is always driven by the pulpit, and I think that's true in any generation. The pulpit is the engine of the church," Dees said. And the pulpit, when harnessed properly, can offer meaty

answers to a hungry generation, he said.

Dwayne Norman, pastor of Bush Memorial Baptist Church, Troy, said he sees the same hunger for "meat and doctrine" in the college students who make up one-third of his congregation.

"They aren't just looking for felt-need sermons. They're looking for God. They're looking for something different. They are wanting to go deep," Norman said. "And that's my desire — to give them God's Word."

Right now he's preaching through Mark verse by verse, and the students "are loving it," he said.

As the culture changes, church attendance numbers may be dropping for the younger generation as a whole, but "the

ones who are coming, they are serious," Norman said. "They are going deep in the Word and then looking for hands-on opportunities to flesh that out in their community and through missions. If we as a church will put those two things together, Millennials will eat it alive."

Desiring authenticity

They want to know their faith and put feet to it, and they desire authenticity, he said. "They're looking for real. They can see right through things that are fake."

Norman is trying to harness that desire for realness and action by initiating a culture change in his church starting from the pulpit and trickling down.

As he's been preaching intentional discipleship from the pulpit, "you can see some lightbulbs coming on," he said. "People are catching that vision and wanting more depth."

Bush Memorial Baptist recently started disciple groups of three people each that meet weekly, and college students have been mixed in with older believers to form those groups.

"They want that intergenerational connection and wisdom. They enjoy that," Norman said.

And they've been challenged to, after six months, each go and start discipling two more people.

"If we will focus on making disciples, it will take care of all the other things," Nor-

man said. "That cuts through every generation, and we're trying to build it into the culture of our church."

Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, said he also feels the responsibility to help people of all generations go deep in the Word.

"God's Word is like the ocean. You can wade in the shallow shoreline or you can launch out and explore the depths," he said.

"My job is to expose God's truth to everyone with clarity and creativity while simultaneously counting on the Holy Spirit to seal His truth to receptive hearts."

And as God moves, Wolf said he's seen that happen among the Millennials, who range in age from 12 to 32.

"For instance my four children are all Millennials and they all appreciate different types of presentations as long as the focus remains on God's Word and not simply an ear-tickling message on positivity," he said.

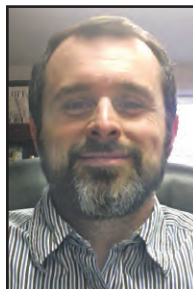
And last summer during Vacation Bible School, 80 preteens showed up each day for an hour of pure Bible teaching and they would "drink it in and take notes," Wolf said. "Their attendance affirms their desire to learn God's Word so they can live God's Word."

The Bible's truth has power, he said, and the Millennials who come to church want to hear it and be changed by it.

"It's important to share God's truth in an unvarnished fashion," Wolf said. "It touches every receptive person at the point of their greatest need." ■



WOLF



NORMAN

ALCAP seeks ruling to stop gay 'marriage'

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

In an effort to stop the “confusion and quandary” for Alabama’s probate judges over the issue of same-sex “marriage,” a petition has been filed with the Alabama Supreme Court. The petition asks the court to stop the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on the issue later this year.

Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP) and Alabama Policy Institute (API) jointly filed a petition for writ of mandamus Feb. 11, two days after same-sex “marriage” was legalized in the state through a federal court ruling. The writ seeks to have the state’s ban on same-sex “marriage” declared valid until struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, a ruling that would effectively halt the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Liberty Counsel, a nonprofit litigation, education and policy organization, and ALCAP attorney Eric Johnston filed the petition on behalf of ALCAP and API to protect the Sanctity of Marriage Amendment of Alabama’s Constitution, which was approved by 81 percent of Alabama voters in 2006.

On Feb. 13 the Alabama Supreme Court voted 6–2 to consider the petition. Chief Justice Roy Moore was the only justice not listed as taking part in the decision. However, the state’s probate judges filed responses Feb. 18 claiming ALCAP and API did not have the right to seek a writ of mandamus because neither was affected by the marriage ruling in any way.

Advising churches

ALCAP executive director Joe Godfrey disagreed. In an interview Godfrey said his organization was directly involved in providing assistance and counsel to churches and pastors about the issue of same-sex “marriage.” Godfrey said he had been invited by numerous Alabama Baptist churches and associations across the state to provide counsel on appropriate response to the recent federal court rulings and how they impacted congregations, pastors, families and individual members.

Equality Alabama, a group that supports same-sex couples, also filed a brief urging the Alabama Supreme Court to dismiss the petition.

ALCAP and API responded to both briefs Feb. 23. Now all parties will wait to see if the state’s high court grants or denies the writ, Johnston said.

“We want the Alabama Supreme Court to tell its own judges what to do until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on this issue in June,” he said. “It’s the only remedy available to us.” ☞



Interim Pastor Lamar Duke leads 15 couples in a marriage vow renewal ceremony at FBC Greenville. The renewal took place during the Sunday service Feb. 15, following a short sermon by Duke about the church being the bride of Christ.

Photo by Laura Skipper

MARRIAGE VOW

renewal

FBC Greenville helps set ‘an example for a godly marriage’

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Lamar Duke, interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, since December 2014, has hosted marriage vow renewal ceremonies at several of the churches where he’s ministered, but said he’s never gotten as big of a response as he did most recently.

“A few Sundays ago I preached a sermon on family, and the church announcements were all about the Valentine’s Day lunch taking place after church Feb. 15,” Duke said. “So I decided we’d have an opportunity for people to renew their wedding vows that Sunday morning also. I had no idea that on Feb. 9 — the next day — the same-sex ‘marriage’ thing would be such an issue in the state of Alabama.”

February 9 was the first day same-sex “marriage” was legalized in the state.

Showing convictions

“Initially, I thought it would be a nice thing to do before we had the Valentine’s Day lunch together, but it turned into something more as the status of our state changed,” Duke said. “It was a way for us to show our convictions with passion, but we weren’t trying to rub anyone the wrong way.”

Fifteen couples signed up to be a part of the vow renewal, including Chip and Jennifer Shealy, who have been members of the Butler Baptist Association church for 15 years. They were inspired to participate in large part because they wanted to make a public statement to show their commitment to their four young children. Both Jennifer and Chip’s parents were divorced after several decades of marriage, and

the Shealys want to ensure that their kids know that won’t happen to their family.

“Because of our families we are very intentional and honest with our children regarding fighting and forgiveness within our marriage, and how we forgive each other the same way Jesus forgives us for the sins we commit all the time,” Jennifer Shealy said. “We wanted to take that a step further by having our children see and hear those vows and understand that God intends marriage to be between one man and one woman for a lifetime.”

The renewal took place during the Sunday service Feb. 15, following a short sermon by Duke about the church being the bride of Christ.

Laura Mullins, along with her husband, Brad, also participated in the vow renewal. She said, “After the hymn of invitation, (Lamar) asked the couples who had signed up for the vow renewal to come up, and he took it from there. He called up each couple by name and announced the year they got married. At one point we all said a great big ‘I do’ and Lamar said he wanted it to be heard in Montgomery and Washington — everywhere — to let them know we were setting an example for a godly marriage.”

Each husband who participated in the

renewal was given a copy of “The Five Love Languages,” by Gary Chapman, and each wife received a long-stemmed red rose.

Duke said, “I joked that the women could read the book and let the men know what their takeaways should be.”

With couples ranging from 10 to 63 years of marriage, there were a total of 527 years of marriage represented at the vow renewal.

When Duke first brought up the idea for this event Feb. 8, he said he could think of three main reasons for couples to be a part of the renewal: to thank God for marriage, to affirm biblical marriage and to say to your spouse that you’d do it all over again.

Jennifer Shealy said she and her husband were surprised at how much being a part of the renewal meant to them.

“What started off as a sense of obligation to our family and to our church has really blossomed into something deeply spiritual for us,” she said. “As Chip said, the first time we married was just about us but this time the vows were about a commitment to those four children watching and to our church, sending the message to the world that this is what God intends marriage to be. In many ways it meant more this time than it did almost 16 years ago.” ☞



Photo by Laura Skipper

Jennifer and Chip Shealy participate in FBC Greenville’s marriage vow renewal ceremony Feb. 15.

time we married was just about us but this time the vows were about a commitment to those four children watching and to our church, sending the message to the world that this is what God intends marriage to be. In many ways it meant more this time than it did almost 16 years ago.” ☞



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.

CALHOUN

► **Jason Stewart** is the new bivocational pastor of **Alexandria Church**. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from Jacksonville State University and is pursuing a master of divinity from New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as associate pastor for East Heflin Church, Heflin. He also



STEWART

has served at First Church, Eulaton, in Anniston, and Cove Creek Church, Glencoe. He and his wife, Amanda, have two children.

COFFEE

► **Mt. Gilead Church, Elba**, will hold a barbecue dinner March 7, 5 p.m. The event is organized by Dewey Emfinger and Harry Smith. For more information call Emfinger at 334-494-4976, Smith at 334-389-3246 or Phyllis Smith at 334-494-2278. Fred Fowler is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

► **Woodmont Church, Florence**, will hold "Unlimiting God:

A Prayer Experience" on March 13-14. The keynote speakers will be Richard Blackaby and Rick Fisher of Blackaby Ministries. For more information call Steve Thompson at 256-766-1255. Jerry Rea is pastor.

GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host the 39er's C.L.U.B. on March 10, 11 a.m. Gary Watson will speak. To reserve a seat call the church office at 334-684-9617 by March 3. Mike Shirah is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Lookout Mountain Association** will host James Blakeney for the annual Vacation Bible School (VBS) Early Bird Clinic on March 9, 6:30 p.m. at the associational building. Janie Williams is associational VBS director. Lloyd Borden is director of missions.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**, will hold "Women and Worship" on March 5, 12 and 26 at 6 nightly. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m. Speakers will be: Susan Lovett, March 5; Tollie Meggs, March 12; and Krista Snyder, March 26. Valerie Nelson will perform special music each night. A love offering will be

collected. Curtis Kelley is pastor. ► **John Jenkins** is the new pastor of **Northport Church**.

His first day is expected to be March 8. He holds a bachelor of science from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a master of divinity from Sam-

ford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. He previously served as pastor of First Church, Kingsland, Ga. He also has served at Gardendale First Church. He and his wife, Paige, have three children.

MARSHALL

► **Sardis Church, Boaz**, will hold revival services March 1-4. Services will begin at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Sunday and 7 p.m., Monday-Wednesday. Speakers will be: Phil Hoskins, Sunday; Phil Waldrep, Monday; Robert Smith, Tuesday; and Junior Hill, Wednesday. Loren Harris will perform special music. For more information call the church office at 256-593-7762. Michael Goforth is pastor. ☪



JENKINS

ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Russellville native dives into missions in retirement

For many, retirement brings leisure. It's a time to kick up one's feet and rest after all the years of hard work. Retirement was not like that for Grady Fuller.

After his retirement from teaching history at the collegiate level in 1987, the Russellville native became active in the Gideon International ministry. It was after he gave his Gideon's report to a rural church that he "felt the call of Acts 1:8 as plain as day," and began missions work shortly after.

Since that call Fuller has participated in building projects, disaster relief, evangelism, Gideon ministry, medical relief efforts and school and orphanage founding all over the world. Countries he has served include Argentina, Ghana, China, Ukraine, India, Guam, Australia, South Africa, Taiwan, Venezuela, Brazil, Thailand, England, Haiti, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Uganda and the Philippines.



FULLER

The only time Fuller has ever turned down an opportunity to go on a missions trip was a 1997 trip to Indonesia. Fuller said that decision "will trouble me for as long as I live." Fuller also has had an orphanage named after him in Andhra Pradesh, India, because he gave the first donation for the building. In the United States, Fuller has helped build churches in Maryland, Wyoming, Illinois, Indiana, Texas and Wisconsin through the Franklin County Baptist Builders Association.

Fuller, who is now 92, has received recognition from the International Mission Board and from his home church, First Baptist Church, Russellville, for his numerous short-term missions trips. With the help of his wife of 58 years, Martha, Fuller has compiled accounts of his missions work into a book titled, "The Power of God in My Life."

He and Martha have four children and seven grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)



Photo by Philip Hicks

Bivocational Minister, Spouse Retreat elects new officers

The 2015 Bivocational Minister and Spouse Retreat was held at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega on Feb. 13-14. Officers elected for the coming year are (l to r) Harold Donald, president, pastor of Cane Creek Baptist Church, Warrior; Charles Woodfin, vice president, member of First Baptist Church, Centre; and Orlando Buck, secretary/treasurer, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Ariton.

REFLECTIONS

"THE WEATHER FORECASTERS ARE TO BLAME. THEY CALLED IT RIGHT, BUT THEY'RE WRONG SO MUCH NO ONE BELIEVED THEM."



JEFF GARDNER .COM

'Limitless boundaries'

Talladega broadcast station ministers worldwide

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Of the 7.2 billion people in the world, approximately 3 billion are active Internet users, according to We Are Social, a global agency that specializes in creative social media marketing and communications.

And Talladega resident James W. Anderson is trying to grab a piece of that market for God's glory.

Anderson sees the unlimited reach of the Internet and understands the power of such a medium.

"I feel that history will bear out that the Internet and its spin-off services will be recognized as the greatest invention to date of mankind," he said.

One of those spin-off services is Anderson's SonShine Satellite Network.

In 2006, Anderson was approached with the idea for creating a Christian radio station in the Talladega area. Because he has been involved in radio broadcasting and television production for about 30 years, Anderson took the idea and got to work.

However, after hitting a "political brick wall blocking approval" Anderson had to get creative. In May 2006, SonShine Satellite Network began with a monophonic (AM) and stereophonic (FM) Christian broadcast ministry through the Internet.

Since its inception SonShine has grown from one pastor delivering weekly sermons and Anderson handling the technical side of broadcasting to "opening up airtime" to 18 local churches and religious organizations, Anderson said. The network has garnered listeners from 194 countries with the largest concentration coming from China.

Expanded reach

"What we do is vitally important to participating churches and religious organizations since they can obviously expand their reach by virtually limitless boundaries. ... This enables the church to reach the homebound and the unchurched and members currently out of the area that otherwise would not be reached."

In July 2009 the project expanded into a live video broadcast with a call-in program with Talladega Mayor Larry Barton called

"In the Interest of the People." To date the political program has reached more than 38,000 viewers.

Now run by four volunteers, SonShine also works with budding Christian artists to help them get started in the music industry. Artists Anderson has worked with include Ivan Parker, Squire Parsons, Henry Brooks and the Chuck Wagon Gang.

Partnering with churches

Locally Anderson works with Bill "Guitar Bill" Smelley to broadcast a Christian cowboy kids show affiliated with First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, on SonShine three times a week.

Smelley said, "I can't say enough ... that I appreciate his ministry."

SonShine is an important ministry because of the attention it brings to the gospel, Smelley said, and he intends to continue to record the children's show as long as possible.

Sam Tate, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Talladega, records his sermons weekly and streams them via the "emerging ministry."

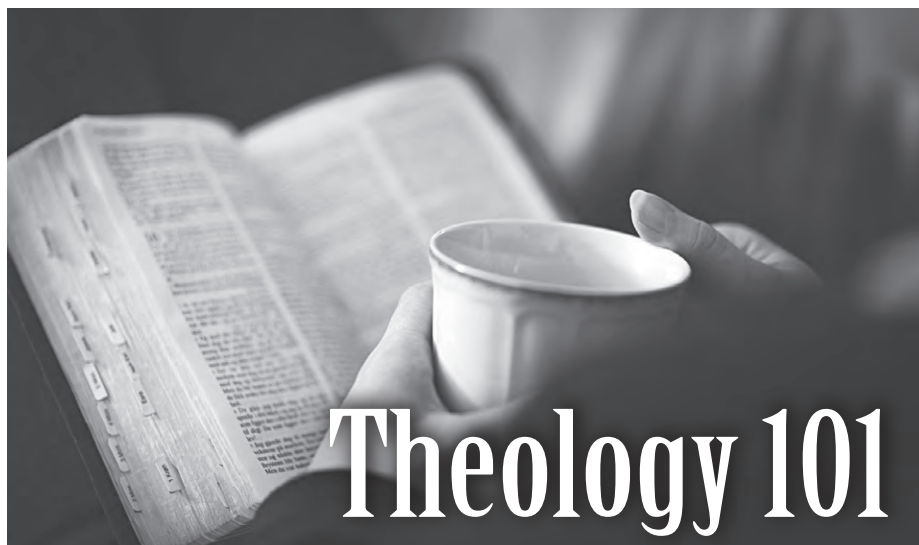
"What (Anderson) is doing is a good thing," Tate said. "I think (SonShine is) getting the world platform out there and I'm glad he's doing it."

Anderson also runs the Coosa River Baptist Association church's website and uploads Tate's sermons there.

By opening up website construction and video broadcasting services to churches and religious organizations, Anderson enables "live" worship experiences that reach past the United States and into selected areas of Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Australia, Italy and Great Britain.

Offering all of these services free of charge is Anderson's ministry. He has always strived to "live a dedicated Christian life" but has a renewed fervor since surviving three life-threatening medical events with his heart.

"I firmly believe that God still had a need for me and that's why I am still here," Anderson said. "I feel that my broadcast ministry work is a fulfillment of the mandate found in Matthew 24:14," which speaks of the gospel being preached to the whole world. 📖



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Images of the Church

The Church as God's Building (Part 2 of 3)

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

Last week we ended by thinking about believers being the "living stones" Jesus is using to build His Church. Ephesians 2:21 states that the whole structure is "being joined together."

Buildings are not built out of disconnected or isolated stones. Bricks must be joined together. People who have become living stones must join themselves with other living stones in order for the Church to grow and be all that God intends it to be.

From the Bible's perspective, "Lone Ranger" Christians are an anomaly. God's blueprint calls for church members to be in fellowship with one another. Inactive members separated from this fellowship are a disappointment.

The analogy of the Church as a building certainly goes beyond the reality of a physical structure. Ephesians 2:22 explains that the whole structure, "being joined together, grows into a holy temple."

Physical buildings grow by building new foundations and superstructures onto the existing property. The Church cannot grow in this fashion, in light of 1 Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So how does the Church grow? It grows only as local congregations grow.

Numerical growth

Most immediately we think of a local church growing by adding more layers of stone upon the foundation. We describe this as growth through evangelism. New Christians joining the church causes numerical growth. Numerical growth ideally means potential for wider ministries and greater impact on the world.

But there is another kind of growth that must not be neglected. The church grows spiritually as each member is growing spiritually. Bricks in a building do not change their size as time goes by, but living stones in God's building can grow. Miniature bricks do not make for strong buildings. Strong

and growing members make for strong churches.

Thus the image of the Church as God's building suggests the ongoing and simultaneous challenge of giving attention to evangelism and Christian nurture. Churches must be intentional about adding new believers and while giving serious attention to helping all members continue to grow in Christ.

Joined together

A word of caution is in order. Mention was made at the outset of this session that the living stones of God's Church must be joined together. Spiritual growth happens best when "togetherness" describes the church's membership. When members are argumentative or divided, spiritual growth is hampered or even absent.

A physical building with cracks in its walls or walls that are shifting off the foundation is likely to be condemned as an unsafe place. Fractured churches or churches with alternative foundation, having moved away from the centrality of Christ, put themselves at risk for divine condemnation. In such an atmosphere Christian growth cannot realistically happen.

Since a local church is the visible expression of the Church as God's building, the total building is only as strong and viable as its component churches. The component churches are only as strong and viable as its genuine fellowship and unity. Divided churches are stymied, but harmonious churches can grow into "a holy temple in the Lord" and "a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22). 📖

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.



"I feel that my broadcast ministry work is a fulfillment of the mandate found in Matthew 24:14."

James W. Anderson
founder of SonShine Satellite Network

Disagreements on marriage

Madison Assoc. recommends withdrawal of Weatherly Heights

The officers of Madison Baptist Association have recommended the association's executive board withdraw fellowship from Weatherly Heights Baptist Church, Huntsville, whose pastor supports same-sex "marriage."

Madison Association said in a written statement that Weatherly Heights Baptist is in violation of a section in the association's bylaws that defines marriage as "a union between one man and one woman."

The church's position on same-sex "marriage" became national news when Ellin Jimmerson, the church's unpaid minister to the community, announced she would officiate the first same-sex "marriage" in Huntsville on Feb. 9 following a federal court decision overturning the state's ban on same-sex unions (see "SBC ethics leader Moore foresees national legalization of gay 'marriage'" in the Feb. 19 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*).

David Freeman, pastor of Weatherly Heights, had earlier shared from the pulpit that he supported same-sex "marriage." Freeman said in a statement to *The Alabama Baptist*, "(Same-sex 'marriage') does not conflict with other teachings of the Bible, which, in my opinion, do not address adult, loving monogamous same-sex relationships. We must not equate abusive relationships (rape or pederasty) with adult, loving, monogamous same-sex relationships."

Freeman said his position "created a lot of tension in the church." Leaders told him that while he was free to perform same-sex unions as an individual, no such weddings could be performed on any church property and that he was "not free to perform the weddings in the name of Weatherly Heights Baptist Church."

Meeting with pastor, church

Following a conversation between Freeman and Charles Howell, Madison Association director of missions, about the church's position on same-sex "marriage," associational officers met with representatives of the congregation Feb. 17. That meeting led to a recommendation by the officers that the association's executive board withdraw fellowship from Weatherly Heights at the board's March 5 meeting.

A written statement released by Madison Association said, "As the meeting between leaders progressed it became evident that there would be no agreement on this issue concerning same-sex 'marriage,' and that the association's constitution

and bylaws, with relation to this issue, would not be adhered to. Thus the general officers of the Madison Baptist Association are making a recommendation to the executive board that Weatherly Heights Baptist Church be dismissed from membership in the Madison Baptist Association."

The association's bylaws state, "Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, following biblical principles. ... God sanctions only the union in marriage of a man to a woman." The association's constitution defines "the latest revision adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention" of the Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) as the "biblical doctrines which churches of this body hold in common."

'Covenant commitment'

The BF&M defines marriage as "the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime" and states that Christians should oppose "all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography."

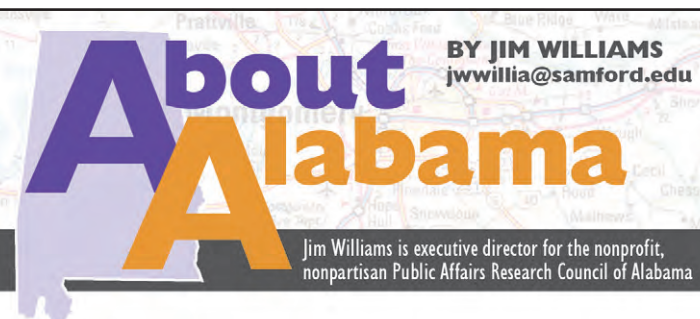
Both Freeman and Howell described the meeting as "cordial." Freeman added, "(Madison Association) representatives determined that my beliefs about homosexuality and same-sex 'marriage' fall outside the positions adopted in the association's bylaws."

In an email to the Weatherly Heights congregation following his meeting with associational leaders, Freeman speculated that the church will be disfellowshipped.

"I emphasized that our church has not formed a position on these matters," Freeman wrote regarding homosexuality, according to WHNT news in Huntsville. "Members of our church are free to form their own positions. My positions are mine alone."

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Executive Director Rick Lance said in a written statement, "We have full confidence in the leadership of the Madison Baptist Association and we are assured that they are handling this situation in the proper biblical way. Our position is that any church that allows staff members to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples has demonstrated that they are no longer in like-minded fellowship and friendly cooperation with Alabama Baptists and Southern Baptists."

"We have publicly stated that this position, concerning the biblical definition of marriage between one man and one woman, is a non-negotiable basic belief among the overwhelming majority of Southern Baptists." (TAB, BP)



Reforming the State's Correctional System

When the Legislature convenes in March, one of the most pressing issues it will face is reforming the state's correctional system.

Alabama has the most overcrowded prisons in the nation. Built to house 13,000 inmates, the state's prison facilities today hold about 25,000.

The prisons are understaffed and prisoners have been mistreated. When offenders are placed on probation in lieu of prison or released from prison on parole, there are far too few officers to supervise their re-entry into the community. The average officer has a caseload of 192 people, far too many for meaningful supervision. About 3,000 offenders are released from prison each year without any supervision at all.

These conditions create a "revolving door," with too many returning to prison: 44 percent of the inmates in state custody have served at least one previous prison sentence in Alabama.

Sentencing practices also are part of the problem. Alabama has a higher proportion of its population in prison than all but three other states.

There is some urgency to resolve these issues. The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits cruel and unusual punishment and the state is facing lawsuits from prisoners and has been investigated by the Department of Justice.

The U.S. Supreme Court recently ordered California to reduce its prison population to end overcrowding.

There is very little money available to bring about reforms. Funding for the Alabama Department of Corrections exceeds \$470 million a year, which is the second largest item in the state's General Fund budget. That budget is facing a shortfall of \$250 million for the coming year, with even larger obligations due in following years.

Task force

A Prison Reform Task Force is working on solutions and is assisted by experts from the Council of State Governments.

The most obvious option is to build more prisons, but this would be very expensive in terms of both capital costs and the staffing required. Instead the task force has focused on developing better risk assessments to guide the placement of offenders; increasing the resources for community-based supervision and treatment; requiring effective supervision for all those released from prison; and enacting sentencing reforms to divert nonviolent offenders, where appropriate, from prison into effective community programs.

These types of investments have proven to be most cost-effective in other states, protecting public safety while reducing the rate of return to prison. ☞

Ministry Tips



TEACHING KIDS WITH DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

By Andy Wilbanks

Minister of Children, Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover

People all learn a little differently. The same is true for kids. Whether you serve as a Sunday School teacher, small group leader, music teacher or kids worship speaker, it's important for us to

remember that the kids in front of us all learn a little bit differently.

Learning styles

With so many foundations being set in place during the elementary years it is vital that we think through not only the material we teach, but also how we teach it.

Some kids need to hear it to learn. Others

need to see it. And then there are the kids who need to move and interact with the information for it to stick.

As you prepare for your kids think through how you present the information and key ideas you want the kids to grasp. Make sure there are elements that appeal to kids who learn visually, those who learn by hearing and the kids that need to

move and engage in order to connect.

As Christians we have the most important message in the entire world. Our desire is to see our kids grasp and understand the truths of the gospel. Let's be intentional about how we connect kids to the Truth. ☞

'The gospel is the foremost need'

NAMB's GenSend proves to be life changing for Liberty University student

Perhaps this is only supposed to happen in movies. But with a little help from Google and one click of a mouse, Sarah Reese found her life's direction and eventually her husband.

The North American Mission Board (NAMB) can't guarantee the same result for every college student, but NAMB can guarantee that checking out Generation Send (GenSend) can be life changing for college students and the cities they serve as summer missionaries.

The Louisville, Ky., native thought she had her life figured out. After high school missions trips to the Philippines and Guatemala, she became further engaged in city reaching back home during her senior year in high school in a Louisville community called Portland. The area is rough, Reese said, but through a Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club, she was able to minister by tutoring inner-city kids and doing Bible studies with the girls.

"I had been overseas," Reese said, "but 25 minutes down the road from me people were broken."

The tutoring pointed her toward education as a college major at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va. During a church planting emphasis week there her plans began to change. She never saw herself in a "traditional" church ministry role.

Paraphrasing the words of Jesus, Reese said, "If I am the Cornerstone of the Church and the Church is the vessel that I want to accomplish My purpose with it would not

make sense for you not to be a part of that."

That's when she pulled up Google.

Reese applied for a GenSend appointment through NAMB, which assigned her to Portland, Ore. GenSend is the student portion of NAMB's Farm System, assisting churches in the discovery, development and deployment of everyday missionaries.

"I came to Portland (in summer 2013) and the Lord woke me up to the need for healthy bodies of believers to exist within America," Reese said. "Coming from the South, it's hard to fathom that within America there are places where healthy [church] bodies don't exist.

"When you see the darkness and the idolatry and the lostness, the gospel is not planted like it needs to be planted," she added.

Go, live and learn

Her assignment sounded relatively simple: go, live and learn how to do life in Oregon. The formula NAMB gave the team she joined also was simple. Identify the city, invest in relationships, invite people into your biblical community and increase through sustainable discipleship.

The objective was not so much to start a church in one summer as it was for the students to learn how to be a biblical community and to discover the foundations of church planting.

Reese said the city has a strong liberal socio-political bent. She often runs up against religious pluralism, which espouses multiple pathways to know God. Consequently



NAMB photos by Susan Whitley



Main photo: Sarah Reese (second from right) serves as a Send North America campus mobilizer at Liberty University where she is completing her studies. She served as a 2013 GenSend missionary in Portland, Ore. **Small photo:** Sarah Reese (right) meets with Lisa Bryant, women's ministry director of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Va., to explore ministry opportunities through the church. Bryant served as a mentor to Reese during a previous internship.

she doesn't find hostility toward the gospel. Mostly it's apathy.

"Oh you're a Christian," people will say to Reese. "Good for you."

That response represents what she calls a facade of tolerance.

"I had never been exposed to that where I was looking into the face of a real person who believes that [pluralism]," Reese said. "Going overseas did not prepare me for the culture shock I'd find within our own country."

Spending the summer in Portland hooked Reese on urban church planting and she wanted other students to have the same experience. She became a NAMB GenSend Mobilizer. Her assignment was to recruit 10 students from her university to go back to Portland, 1 of 32 Send North America cities.

Reese returned to Portland for the summer of 2014 with a team. Three other teams also went to Portland. With 42 students on the ground, two teams focused on two areas of urban Portland: Saint Johns and The Pearl District. Neither is impoverished as some envision inner cities to be. Reese worked in the Pearl District, an area she describes as "super wealthy" with many young urban professionals. The student's work was foundational for church planters who would eventually be coming to those areas.

"The Lord has convicted me that being part of church is what we're called to do," Reese said. But like most Millennials, she believes church can't be the way it's always been.

One of those differences is how Millen-

nials view the Church as a whole. They see the Church as the body of Christ forming authentic biblical communities.

"The body of Christ is a very biblical term," Reese said. "My devotion needs to be to His [Jesus'] bride, the Church. Church planting is how we bring the bride to places where she's not."

Denver is similar to Portland in many respects. But there is one major difference. Jonathan Hunt is there co-planting with a lead church planter through Send North America: Denver. Reese met Hunt during NAMB's Send North America Conference in 2013.

He was a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary student in Louisville and attended Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, as did Reese's family coincidentally. But they didn't know each other then. After they met at the conference the couple became engaged in the summer of 2014.

Women's ministry

Reese changed her major at Liberty to women's ministry and hopes to focus on developing girls and women as disciples. In a church planting context, that can lead to any number of development ministry avenues for women.

"Everyone needs the gospel," Reese said. "The white, middle-class suburban church-going little girl needs the gospel just as much as the little girl on the streets of Pacux, Guatemala, who is starving.

"The gospel is the foremost need." (NAMB)

ANNIE ARMSTRONG
EASTER OFFERING

National goal
\$60 million

Alabama's goal
\$6.1 million

SEND NORTH AMERICA

For more information, visit anniearmstrong.com.

Sarah Reese (right) shares a photo with fellow Liberty University students (from left) Andrea Bowman, Hayley Brown and Haley Alverson. Reese served as a 2013 GenSend missionary last year in Portland, Ore., and is now a Send North America campus mobilizer at Liberty.



Historical HIGHLIGHTS

FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



50 Years Ago February 1965

Pilot Project: W.T. Edwards Jr., professor in Howard College's department of Bible and religious education, is teaching New Testament and Greek courses this semester in a pilot project at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He is the first college professor to be invited to teach at Southern in the seminary's efforts to help coordinate teaching on seminary and collegiate levels.

40 Years Ago February 1975

Historic Building Destroyed: The historic Springhill Baptist Church, located on Clairmont Springs Road just off Highway 77 west of Ashland, was destroyed by the tornado that hit Clay County

in January. According to Pastor Martin L. Deweeses, Springhill is one of the oldest in its association, having been organized in 1851. The building that was destroyed was erected in 1899. The church has the distinction of being one of the charter member churches of Carey Baptist Association in Clay County.

30 Years Ago February 1985

President Inaugurated: Altus Newell, former pastor of First Baptist Church, Opelika, has been inaugurated as president of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. He was pastor in Opelika from 1982 until his appointment as a Southern Baptist missionary in July 1984.

20 Years Ago February 1995

Missions Pioneer Dies: Alabama native and Florida Baptist missions pioneer Clyde Merrill Maguire, 85, died from heart failure Feb. 5. She was the widow of John Maguire, executive secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1945 to 1967. A Heflin native, she inherited a love for missions from her mother who was "the pillar of missions study in Alabama," according to Carolyn Weatherford Crumpter, former executive director of national Woman's Missionary Union. "Even before she had married Dr. John, the lives of both the Maguires were just missions," Crumpter said. Florida Baptists named the Maguire State Missions Offering in their honor.

10 Years Ago February 2005

Vinesville Disbands But Leaves Legacy Behind: Eighty years ago founders of Vinesville Baptist Church, Birmingham, met in a drugstore to organize a church that would meet the needs of their community. Over the years attendance grew tremendously but then dwindled down significantly. Last year Vinesville members voted to disband. The members said they feel that they could no longer carry out the church's mission and meet the needs of the transitional community surrounding them. On Dec. 26 the church held its last service after selling its facility to New Rising Star Primitive Baptist Church formerly located in Fairfield. ☪

Want to know GOD?

Pastor Bob Tucker
Barnwell Baptist Church, Fairhope

Without any positive male influence, my life was certain to mirror my father's and grandfather's. Both men died at an early age from years of alcohol abuse. My father deserted us when I was only 5 years old. We moved around among housing projects and wherever we could survive on my mother's meager income as a store clerk. We were a close single-parent family, however, life offered very little hope for the future.

In the ninth grade I was invited to attend a revival at the local Baptist church. To my knowledge I had only been in church once. I had no idea what to expect but if this revival gave me a chance to meet some cute girls, I was up for going.

My first night in attendance I heard something I had never heard in my life. I heard God loved me so much He sent His son to the cross for my salvation. I learned forgiveness for my sins was free for the asking if I believed in Jesus Christ the Son of God. I discovered Jesus came that I might have new life, abundant life and eternal life.

The good news I heard that evening was the most exciting thing I had ever heard and felt. I didn't hesitate to receive Christ as my personal Savior. That night I prayed and confessed my belief in Jesus Christ. I invited Christ into my heart and received God's wondrous gift of salvation.

In that moment I went from being a fatherless child to a son of the King of Kings. I lost all the baggage of my life and those before me and I gained everything. I inherited everything God has in store for those who believe in His Son. I became His and He became mine.

Forty-two years later, He walks with me and guides me. I've been blessed beyond measure. I have lived the life God planned for me rather than what the world offered.

The Bible says, "For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:17)

You too can discover the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. ☪

Family Christian Stores files for bankruptcy in order to restructure

Family Christian Stores, the largest Christian retail chain which includes seven stores in Alabama, filed for bankruptcy, seeking to restructure so it can keep its more than 260 stores open.

Chuck Bengochea, president and CEO, said the Grand Rapids, Mich.-based company "took on too much debt" due to declining sales and was hit by the 2008-2009 recession and the digital revolution that has changed the sales of books, movies and music.

"I wish that we had alternatives but we do not," Bengochea said in mid-February.

On Feb. 17, Bankruptcy Court Judge John

T. Gregg in Grand Rapids ruled the company could continue to function during the Chapter 11 bankruptcy process using money it receives from its operations, according to senior vice president Steve Biondo.

No planned layoffs

MLive Media Group reported that the chain, which has stores in 36 states, had \$230 million in sales in 2014, down from \$305 million in 2008. Family Christian Stores said it does not plan to close any stores or lay off any of its more than 3,200 full- and part-time employees during the restructuring.

"We made the decision after much prayerful consideration and only after working to cut costs and taking other steps," according to its website.

Founded in the 1930s, Family Christian Stores owns two other companies: iDisciple, an app with sermons and music, and the Christian movie production company Giving Films. Those two companies operate independently of the chain of stores and are not part of the restructuring plans.

The closest competitor to Family Christian Stores is LifeWay Christian Stores, with more than 180 stores. (RNS)

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC: Taylorville Baptist Church is seeking a part-time or interim minister of music. Interested parties should send resumés to: Taylorville Baptist Church, 7201 Moundville Lane, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405, or email resumés to: jnelson@taylorvillebaptist.org. 205-758-0868.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER: First Baptist Church of Red Bay, Ala., is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumé to: First Baptist Church, c/o: Music Minister Search Committee, P.O. Box 616, Red Bay, AL 35582. 256-356-9505.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & YOUTH: Greensboro Baptist Church is accepting resumés for the position of full-time minister of music and youth. Interested parties should mail resumés to: Greensboro Baptist Church, c/o Search Committee, 908 Main Street, Greensboro, AL 36744 or email resumés to: greensboro@bellsouth.net.

STUDENT PASTOR: First Baptist Church of Alexander City announces a full-time position for student pastor grades 7-12. Resumés are accepted at P.O. Box 400, Alexander City, AL 35011 and spsc@fbc-ac.org.

YOUTH MINISTER: First Baptist Church of Red Bay, Ala., is seeking a full-time youth minister. Resumés may

be sent to: Glen Vinson, P.O. Box 360, Red Bay, AL 35582, or emailed to: glen93@bellsouth.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

CHURCH SECRETARY: Eastside, Birmingham, is seeking an exemplary Christian to support the pastoral staff as part of a dynamic ministry team leading the church in reaching the community. Proficiency in MS Office, publication design, office equipment, office administration and good communication skills required. 30 hour week. Send resumés to: bfmurphy@bham.rr.com.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANT: FBC Birmingham is accepting resumés for the position of full-time financial assistant. Please send resumé to: Cyndy James at cjames@fbcbbm.org.

PIANIST: First Baptist Church, Union Grove, is seeking a pianist. For more information, call 256-753-2704.

FINANCIAL SECRETARY: Cloverdale Baptist Church is seeking a financial secretary. Applicants must be a Christian and have previous experience as a financial secretary. The church uses the ACS software. Therefore, ACS experience is preferred. Resumés will be received through March 4. Please address resumés to: Cloverdale Baptist Church, Personnel Committee, 806 Dexter Street, Dothan, AL 36301. Re-

sumés may also be emailed to: ray@cloverdaletohan.com.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS: Limestone Baptist Association is accepting resumés for director of missions through Feb. 28. Please send to: P.O. Box 1530, 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.reliablesigns.com. 1-800-729-6844, 205-664-0955.

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

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

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.

FOR SALE

ORGAN: Baldwin Organ Model 625 needs new home. Contact Maytown Baptist Church at 205-786-5359 if you have any questions. \$1,000 OBO.

MONITOR SYSTEM: 1 M3R audio-technical stereo personal monitor system. Used only 5 times. New \$550. Price now is only \$400. Contact Randy Boone at Grove Hill Baptist Church, 251-275-3238 or randy@grovehillbaptist.org.

CAMPUS News



SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford University's Journalism and Mass Communication Department Earns Ranking of National Journalism Program:** The Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC) department at Samford University in Birmingham has earned

honors in a new ranking of national journalism education programs. Samford debuted at number 43 out of 187 programs ranked by the College Factual website.

The site also revealed Samford's journalism program is:

- A top-25 in "major" value in journalism education nationally.
- The top journalism program in Alabama.
- One of the top journalism

programs among U.S. private universities.

► One of the top journalism programs in the South.

For more information about JMC, visit www.howard.samford.edu/jmc.

► **Samford University Names Robert Smith Jr. the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity:** The trustees of Samford University have

named Dr. Robert Smith Jr. as the Charles T. Carter Baptist chair of divinity at Beeson Divinity School.



SMITH

Dean Timothy George said, "Robert Smith Jr. has been a beloved professor at Beeson Divinity School since 1997. Through his love for the gospel and his passion for preaching, Dr. Smith has had a shaping influence on several generations of faithful proclaimers of God's Word."

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile Alum Baxter-Simonic to Host Art Exhibit and Artist Talk:** University of Mobile (UMobile) graduate Lenda Baxter-Simonic will return to her alma mater for an artist's talk and to share her artwork in an exhibit called "Landscapes: Be Still and the Earth will Speak" at the Marilyn Foley Art Gallery on the UMobile campus.

Baxter-Simonic's exhibit will be March 2 to April 10. She also will talk about her art March 19, 1 p.m., at the gallery followed by a reception.

For more information, visit www.umobile.edu.

► **Historian Elizabeth Varon to Speak at University of Mobile's Billy G. Hines Lecture Series:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) will host



VARON

historian Elizabeth Varon as speaker for the 10th anniversary of the Billy G. Hines Lecture Series at the History Museum of Mobile on March 19, 7 p.m.

Varon is the Longbourne M. Williams professor of American history at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va. The program, titled "Legacies of Appomattox: Lee's Surrender in History and Memory," will include a lecture, a reception and a book signing. The public is invited.

For more information, contact

Burnett at 251-442-2319 or lburnett@umobile.edu.

JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Hosts Graffiti Ministries Founder at Christian Emphasis Week:** Erin Davis, popular author and Internet blogger, was the featured

speaker during Judson College's Christian Emphasis Week activities in Marion in late January. The annual event allows the college community to



DAVIS

engage in additional focused worship and study.

Davis is the founder of Graffiti Ministries and the author of 13 books including "Connected: Curing the Pandemic of Everyone Feeling Alone Together" and "True Princess: Embracing Humility in an All-About-Me World." She also is a lead author for the blog Lies Young Women Believe.

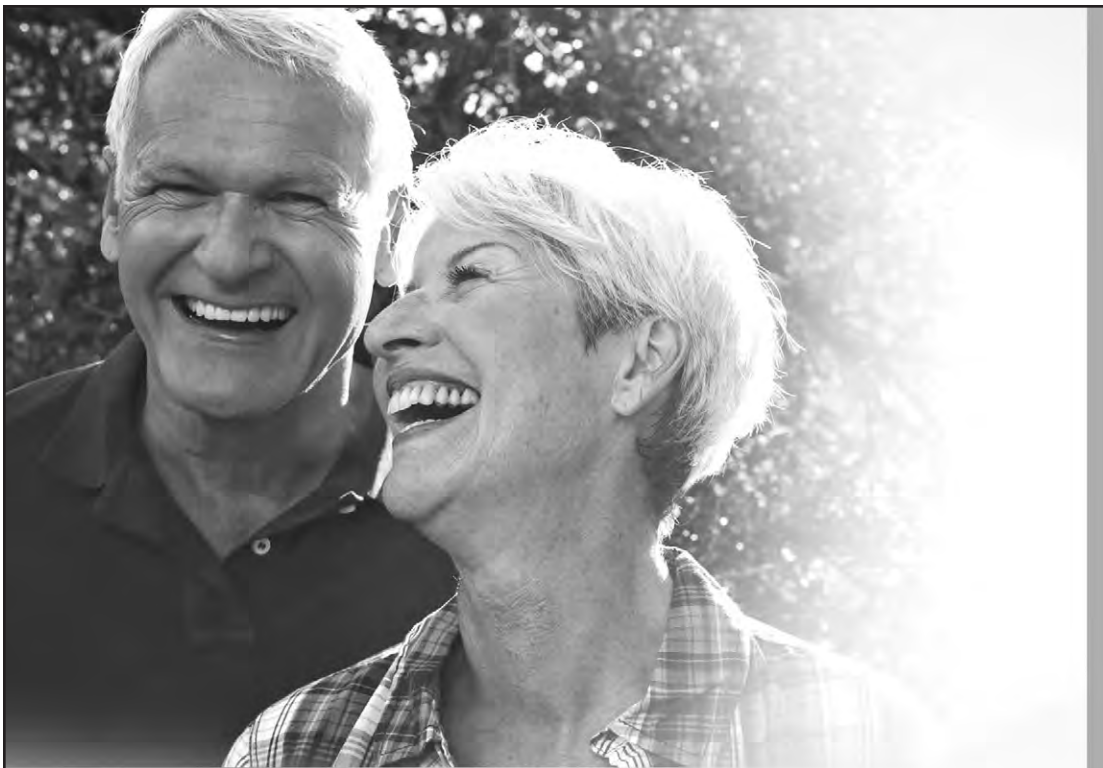
► **Judson College Hosted Pastor's Conference with Scott Bullard:** Judson College in Marion partnered with the office of LeaderCare and church administration of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to offer the annual Pastor's Conference on Jan. 27. Scott Bullard, Judson's vice president, academic dean and author of "Re-Membering the Body: The Lord's Supper and Ecclesial Unity in the Free Church Traditions," dialogued with pastors about how the Lord's Supper can be used to promote congregational unity.

► **Judson to Present Civil Rights Era Drama 'JimmyLee':** As part of the Civil Rights 50th anniversary celebration of Bloody Sunday and the march from Selma to Montgomery, Judson College in Marion will present three performances of "JimmyLee," the Civil Rights-era drama. A fourth performance will be given in Selma.

"JimmyLee," was written by Billie Jean Young, Judson artist in residence and associate professor of fine and performing arts.

"JimmyLee," will be performed at Judson's Alumnae Auditorium on March 5, 10:30 a.m., and March 6-7, 6 p.m. The play also will be performed at the Larry Striplon Performing Arts Center in Selma, March 5, 5:45 p.m.

For tickets, call the Judson business office at 334-683-5125.



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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



CATHOLIC COALITION?

I was reading my copy of the Feb. 5 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* when the article "Evangelical-Catholic coalition addresses same-sex 'marriage'" caught my eye. I did not know that any Southern Baptist was a part of Evangelicals and Catholics Together. (Why should we) embrace the Catholic religion, especially when its leader claims to be the "vicar" of Christ on earth? A religion that has called all who believe the teachings of Scripture and The Baptist Faith & Message "anathema," a formal curse by a Catholic leader denouncing a doctrine.

We should not be joined together in any coalition, union or alliance with a group that does not hold to the true tenets of the Christian faith. Should we align ourselves with the Muslims? After all they believe same-sex "marriage" is wrong. What about asking the Mormons to join as well? No, heed the warnings of the holy Scriptures.

Let the other groups work on their own. Let us concentrate on Christ's agenda for His kingdom and His Church. We should be casting the gospel seed and praying it finds the "good soil." Governments can't change until Christ changes the people.

Tony Fisher
Birmingham, Ala.

CARDS TO INMATES

I want to thank the readers of *The Alabama Baptist* for their help in getting Christmas cards for inmates in the correctional system. Together we had more than 8,000 cards. We were happy about that and each inmate who got one was very happy and appreciative. We thank you.

Now it is time to get busy with Easter cards for our inmates. We follow the same guidelines as we

do at Christmas: choose Easter cards, sign the card and place it in an envelope, do not seal the envelope, do not include your home address and send the cards by March 25.

Remember we are doing this to show God's love to people who may not experience it very often. Pray for the ones who will receive your card.

The address is MAC D Ministries, c/o Scarlett Dunnam, 4030 6th St. East, Tuscaloosa, AL 35404. For more information call 205-553-1592 or email adunnam4030@comcast.net. I will be happy to help you.

Scarlett Dunnam
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

'HEAVEN TOURISM'

The article on Alex Malarkey's fabricated story about going to heaven, "Publisher to pull book after boy says he didn't go to heaven," in the Feb. 5 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* should make everyone skeptical of Near Death Experience (NDE) books or what Christian critics call "Heaven tourism."

Some NDE books have a Christian perspective, but most do not. A number focus on Mormon theology, New Age ideas or attempt to counter almost everything the Bible teaches about heaven, hell and God's divine judgment.

NDE books are completely unreliable as a means to determine what eternity is like. There is great disagreement and conflicting details of these heavenly visits. Which near-death experience account is the most accurate?

God's glory should stand out the most in heaven, yet most NDE books say little about the glory of God. Their focus seems more on self, while barely noticing God's glory. God's glory is the highest reward of heaven (1 John 3:2).

Some NDE authors claim we

can find confidence God's Word is true and have a better understanding of heaven and God from their experiences in heaven. If God's Word given through the Holy Spirit is not sufficient for believers, one will not find any true hope in any of these unproven tales (Rom. 10:17).

Scripture tells us there is no reason to believe any of these heavenly visits (John 1:18).

People do not go to heaven and come back (John 3:13). All of these NDE stories need to be tested very carefully (1 Thess. 5:21). Alex Malarkey's revelation throws into question these heavenly stories.

About the believability of NDEs, Alex Malarkey said, "the Bible is the only source of truth." God's Word is more certain and authoritative than anyone's near-death experience. The only true place we learn about heaven and the immortality of our souls is found in the Scriptures.

Larry Dunagan
Headland, Ala. ☞

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

Remember to:

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

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Peppi Garrett (a.k.a. Comedian "Just Peppi")



GARRETT

FBC North Mobile, in Saraland
Mobile Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSES: Romans 8:28;
Philippians 1:19-20

FAVORITE HYMN: "When We See Christ"

HOBBIES: Writing; reading;
watching documentaries

FAMILY STATUS: Husband of 32
years, Gary; sons Kenny (wife, Meaghan) and Dalton

She was born Cheryl Ann Miller. Yet older sister, Brenda, quickly renamed her "Peppi," a possible foreshadowing of what God would call Cheryl Ann to do. Peppi had long felt her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was a flaw that kept her from being useful to God. However, God revealed to her that her ADHD is a gift to bring laughter into the lives of others. The 52-year-old has done comedic shows in churches in Alabama, Florida and Mississippi. A member of the Christian Comedy Association, Peppi also is active in her church choir, teaches missions groups and English as a Second Language (ESL) and volunteers at Mission of Hope in Mobile.

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

A: My parents were my greatest godly influence. My mom led me to the Lord when I was nine. I grew up at Mission of Hope, a Christian alcohol and drug treatment program that my dad, Lonnie Miller, founded 43 years ago. I saw my parents live out their faith daily. They were the same at home as they were in public. I witnessed the Lord do great things through them and wanted God to use me too.

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

A: Though I had friends tell me all my life, "You are so funny," and, "You could be a comedian," I never held on to those thoughts. The Lord began calling me to comedy when I was approaching my 50th birthday. It took almost three years before I really under-

stood. And then I whined, "But people will laugh at me." God answered, "Duh." Yes God really does say, "Duh."

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: First I must stay in constant communication with God. This was all His idea. It's His gig. I'm just the microphone. He can unplug me at any time. Second I must study the science of comedy, which is just as important as having funny material. Third I must be funny.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: There is great joy in being allowed to have this much fun while pointing audiences to Christ. Comedy tears down walls so audiences are more receptive to the message God gives me to share. The greatest joy is when precious audience members come to faith in Christ at my shows.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My husband, Gary, is my greatest supporter, adviser, manager, sounding board and prayer partner. My sons take my business cards to work with them. My mom goes to many of my shows with me and my sister has been there from the beginning as a great encourager and prayer partner. They all graciously allow me to use them as some of my most hilarious material.

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

A: I pray I will always see the funny in life and look for ways to share that joy with others. That can be done with or without a microphone or platform. ☞

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Rashional thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Executive editor • jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

It's all about 'face time'

What? The baby came early — more than a week ago? When did his dad die? A month ago?

They are engaged? For several weeks now?

How did I miss all these major moments in my friends' lives?

It's true, I don't talk with many people outside my household and workplace on a daily basis. And I rarely know the intricate details of many people's moment-by-moment routines, but with today's technology staying in touch has never been easier.

That is unless you miss a day or two checking Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Then you may fall so far behind that you will have to actually call the person to catch up. Seriously? Call? That's something I'm not so good at doing any more.

Social media has become our community bulletin board of sorts. We post our news and life updates for all our friends to see — and are shocked to discover when someone close to us hasn't heard about something major in our lives.

If you read Rashional Thoughts regularly then you know I share much of what is happening in my life as I'm learning how to live out my faith in the simple routines and bumps and curves of each day.

I too am surprised when someone close to me is behind on various elements happening in my life because everyone wants to read every Rashional Thoughts published in *The Alabama Baptist* and posted online at www.rashionalthoughts.com, right? Ha!

And how many of us notice the amount of online traffic we generate to our comments section? Come on now — I'm not the only one who gets excited when a post tops 100 likes and garners scores of comments, am I?

Sharing your story

But whether our posts receive hundreds of "likes" or only a few nods, the process of sharing our story is what matters. We are processing the moments of our lives and transparently inviting others in to see, know and experience.

It's almost as if we all have hundreds, maybe thousands, of reporters embedded in homes, schools, workplaces, churches and communities around the world — all there to keep us personally informed on the happenings of that particular location. And we also serve as one of those reporters for the rest of the team.

Yes some social media zealots have gone a little far with the play-by-plays of every minute of every day — and that is definitely a topic for another day — but the overall concept of social media truly does tighten the communication circles.

Still too much of a good thing depletes the goodness of it. One of my mentors, Terry Newberry, describes it this way: "Strength overdone becomes weakness."

With the rapidly growing and never-ending options related to social media, are we as individuals losing our ability to talk to each other? Are we impatient with face-to-face conversations? Can we go to dinner with family or friends and actually focus on the people at the table the entire time? Or at some point during the course of the meal do we end up checking our phones for messages, maybe even just to see the latest social media updates that have popped in since the last time we looked?

Staying connected

My Aunt Louise is one example of many grandparents I know who transitioned to a smart phone, purchased a tablet with Skype or FaceTime capability and set up a Facebook account solely to maintain consistent communication with her grandchildren. She, like so many others, pushed past the fears and learned enough to function in this new style and are now texting and messaging maniacs. Staying connected was that important. They are doing what they have to do — even when they don't always totally understand what they are doing — to keep their relationships tightly intertwined.

But are all of us who are falling farther and farther down the techno-social media hole willing to reach back up and meet them somewhere in the middle?

There's really nothing else like getting to share what's happening in your life with your parents and grandparents when you have parents and grandparents who are truly invested in you. And sometimes we are given special gifts to have aunts, uncles and other special relatives and friends who are invested at a similar level.

The difference of who we are and who we will become can be greatly impacted by these in-depth conversations and in-person moments throughout our lives. I'm thankful to have an incredible support system where a whole lot of people basically won't allow me to pull too far away, no matter how busy I think I am. 🙏

Rashional Extras...

Follow me
on Twitter:

@RashionalThts

Living Life Today

"What if the main issue in our culture today is not poverty or sex trafficking, homosexuality or abortion? What if the main issue is God? And what might happen if we made Him our focus instead? In a world marked by sex slavery and sexual immorality, the abandonment of children and the murder of children, racism and persecution, the needs of the poor and the neglect of the widow, how would we act if we fixed our gaze on the holiness, love, goodness, truth, justice, authority and mercy of God revealed in the gospel? ... And what if Christ's call in our lives ... [is] to courageously share and show our convictions through what we say and how we live, even (or especially) when these convictions contradict the popular positions of our day. And to do all of this not with conceited minds or calloused hearts, but with the humble compassion of Christ on constant display in everything we say and do."

**David Platt, president
International Mission Board
(an excerpt from his new book "A
Compassionate Call to Counter Culture")**

"People who seek to restrict religious liberty are not intentionally thinking how to silence Christianity. It is usually an ignorance about religious motivations. They assume there must be some other motivation at the root of that. They don't understand how we think. People tend to live in a community of likeminded thinking. ... We need to spend time explaining why we are motivated by what we are ... defend our rights while we proclaim the gospel like Paul did."

**Russell Moore, president
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission**

"Our future is ours to yet determine. It is before us. Can we be theologically faithful, denominationally optimistic, cheerful, believe the best about one another, have renewal of the heart and spirit? Can we dream again? ... So many of these realities are before us. ... Are we equal to the task? We'd better be because if we aren't, God will find a people who are."

**Jason K. Allen, president
Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary**

"Whatever we do — speaking, writing, relating — needs to be done in love (Eph. 4:15). It is a key, key verse for all of us. ... It helps us avoid two extremes in Christian life. ... Truth without love can become a cold-hearted legalism. Love without truth is warm and fuzzy but can lead them to hell. Whatever we say we need to speak the truth, tell the truth, but do it in a way that builds up the Kingdom and the Lord Jesus."

**Frank Page, president and CEO
Southern Baptist Convention Executive
Committee**

"Take time to learn everything you can about the assignment you have been given. Some of the key mistakes I made was to try to change some things before I really understood."

**Kevin Ezell, president
North American Mission Board**

"I'm not sure if our (Southern Baptist Convention's) vision ran dry first or our funding, but I am sure that when your vision runs dry your funding will as well."

**Jason K. Allen, president
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary**

Contact me at:

[jrash@
thealabamabaptist.
org](mailto:jrash@thealabamabaptist.org)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 1

Explore the Bible By Robert Olsen, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

GOD IS Nahum 1:1-8

The book of Nahum begins with a clear statement of God's anger toward Nineveh. You will remember that Nineveh is the city to which Jonah was sent to tell the Assyrian people to repent.

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrians who were enemies of Israel. They defeated the northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. and were set to attack Jerusalem when divine intervention thwarted their advance (2 Kings 19:35).

Once again the Assyrians were at odds with Israel and God spoke through Nahum to confront them. The Assyrians were puffed up with pride in their own abilities and God was going to lay them low.

Jealous (1-3a)

In the opening verses God reveals He is a jealous God and He is filled with wrath. In today's society people often do not associate God with these attributes. American society thinks of God only as love and believes that He really wants everyone to be happy.

However, this is not at all the biblical picture of God. Through both the Old and New Testaments we get the picture of God as being both loving and holy. Because God is holy He cannot stand to be in the presence of sin, and He must punish sin.

When we turn toward other things to worship — our country's power, our sports teams, our children, our job, etc. — God is jealous. Because God must judge sin He will pour out His wrath on sin.

We see the ultimate display of this at the cross where God's wrath is poured out on His Son who takes it on our behalf so that those who believe in Christ need not face eternal judgment. In the midst of God's wrath we see His provision and His love in Christ.

Sovereign (3b-6)

God is able to judge sin because He is sovereign. While this is terrifying for

those who oppose God, for those of us who love God and seek Him this is wonderfully comforting.

Because we know God is sovereign we know He is able to fulfill His promises and we can be certain God is able to punish the wicked. God's sovereignty gives us an assurance that His promise of salvation for us is true (John 6:37-40, Rom. 8:28-39).

Good (7)

In verse 7 we get a glimpse of God's goodness and provision. In the midst of God's declaration of justice and wrath we see a declaration of God's goodness.

This is a common theme throughout the whole Bible. God cares for those who trust in Him and He forgives them of their sin — even those who were once His enemies as we all were (Rom. 5:10).

Just (8)

Nahum 1:8 demonstrates God's judgment on His enemies. God states clearly that He is going to punish Nineveh and all of His foes. This came true as Nineveh was eventually destroyed completely by a coalition of its enemies.

Today the warning against God's enemies is still in effect. The world has always been opposed to God's people, as seen in the Old Testament, New Testament and modern times. We see this in our society and in other countries, especially in places like North Korea and the Middle East. But Christians can have hope because even in the midst of persecution we know God is just and He will bring justice.

As Christians we will be judged and counted as righteous because Christ's righteousness is ours (2 Cor. 5:21). Those who do not turn to Christ will be judged on their own merits, which means their sins will be counted against them.

This should encourage us to live lives dedicated to God, and also to do our best to make God known so that others can come to experience the new life that is in Him. 🙏

Bible Studies for Life By Michael K. Wilson, M.R.E. Director, Resource Center for Pastoral Excellence, Samford University

PROMISED LIKE NO OTHER Isaiah 53:2-12

Fabricated facts and questionable data, suspicious sources and outright untruths — it seems these days the challenge of separating fact from fiction is growing ever greater.

People in whom we place our trust and confidence let us down. Words and actions don't agree. Promises made are not promises kept. Is it any wonder many of us struggle to avoid becoming skeptics, no longer believing in people and organizations until we are convinced they can be trusted?

The central teaching of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, meaning God with us. What does this mean? On what do Christians base this belief? This unit of lessons explores these questions and invites us to celebrate a prophetic promise made and fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

God prophesied the Messiah would become one of us. (2-3)

Isaiah may be the most quoted Old Testament book. This could be because of messianic passages — promises — Christians identify in the book. We often think of prophetic sayings as foretelling future events. However, prophets were often forth-tellers, known for voicing a stinging "Thus says the Lord" in the presence of unrighteousness.

Another way of understanding a prophet's message is the idea of for-telling, or telling on behalf of others. In striking and obvious ways the messianic sayings recorded in Isaiah were for-telling, hopeful words told for the benefit of others. Christians understand these words were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Yet the prophetic words seem unbelievable. Who could imagine a Messiah like this? Surely the Messiah would not go unnoticed, would not be rejected, would not be considered unclean and untouchable. Sadly such was the case when Jesus walked and talked as flesh and blood, the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic, hopeful for-telling.

Ours is the task of living like Jesus today

so others notice and choose to live as Jesus did rather than reject Him.

God prophesied the Messiah would suffer for us. (4-9)

Isaiah 53 is 1 of 4 "servant songs" found in the book (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). The songs describe the servant (Isa. 42:1) whom God chose to bring justice to the nations and lead people back to God. The servant would be a "light" so that all could see God's saving power.

Verses 4-9 describe the servant as one who suffers for the sake of others. The "suffering servant" bears the sickness (grief) and sorrows (pain) of others — afflictions that come as a result of sin. The servant knows full well the needy situation of sinful people.

Several years ago one of our presidents used an expression to show empathy for the plight of a concerned citizen whose opinion was being ignored. Almost overnight, "I feel your pain" became a popular saying among both his critics and his fans. Though still spoken there is usually little sincerity implied. It is just a cliché. Not so when applied to Jesus, the fulfillment of prophetic Isaiah's suffering servant who truly "feels our pain."

God prophesied the Messiah would rescue us. (10-12)

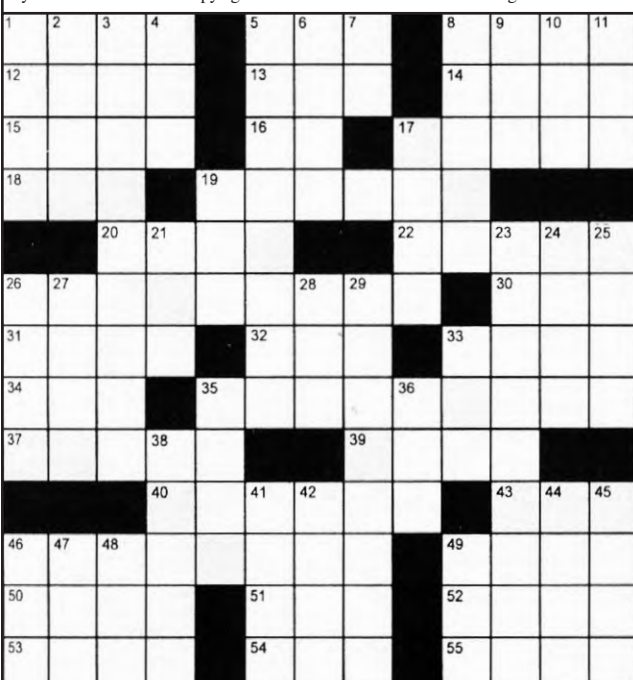
The description of the servant's career path seems like a tragedy. Why would someone choose to accept such circumstances? But was this really a tragic path?

Christians across the centuries have responded to the life of the servant by choosing a similar path. Answering the call to discipleship puts one on a journey of denying self, taking up a cross of obedience and service and daily following the Jesus way (Luke 9:23). This is not easy. Yet as in the case of the servant of Isaiah, the call has consequences that are ultimately anything but tragic. Jesus, the true servant, was "highly exalted" (Phil. 2:9).

Our lives have meaning through our faithfulness. We have hope for the future. 🙏

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Silas' cellmate. (Acts 16:25)
- ___ aloud, spare not. (Isa. 58:1)
- From whence come ___ and fightings among you? (James 4:1)
- Straight mark.
- Grassy meadow.
- Against. (prefix)
- Mine entrance.
- Each. (abbr.)
- Fork prongs.
- Longing.
- Documents.
- There is a ___ for the silver. (Job 28:1)
- Musical exercise.
- All ___ of God. (2 Cor. 5:18)
- Nothing.
- Ritual.
- Environmental watchdog. (abbr.)
- Buddies.
- Before. (poetic)
- Acceptable. (as a proposed law)

Down

- Can ___ well on an instrument. (Ezek. 33:32)
- Assistant.
- Not welcomed.
- ___ down your nets for a draught. (Luke 5:4)
- Immediately his leprosy
- Thou knewest that I ___ where I sowed not. (Matt. 25:26)
- Young adult. (abbr.)
- Beltline.
- Feminine name. (Isa. 61:1)
- A Great Lakes state.
- Thy ___ is like a tower of Lebanon. (Song of Sol. 7:4)
- Golfer's requirement.
- Display model. (abbr.)
- Raced.
- A Great Lakes province. (abbr.)
- Biblical garden. (Gen. 2:8)
- was ___. (Matt. 8:3)
- side. (John 20:27)
- Federal agents. (for short)
- Brethren, the ___ is short. (1 Cor. 7:29)
- Twelve o'clock.
- ___ and outs.
- He it is to whom I shall give a ___. (John 13:26)
- ___ hospitality one to another. (1 Pet. 4:9)
- Poem.
- Swine.
- Compass direction.
- Not embarrassed.
- A seasoning herb.
- Otherwise.
- Three. (Spanish)
- The laborer is worthy of his ___. (Luke 10:7)
- Military address. (abbr.)
- A police arrest record.
- Cushion.
- Air. (prefix)
- Child.
- They ___ upon me with their mouths. (Ps. 22:13)
- Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it ___ my





Photo courtesy of Provident Label Group

REAL connection

Innovative worship band I AM THEY emphasizes true identity in Christ

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

With a unique blend of contemporary worship songs, folk, pop music and inspiring harmonies, the Nevada-based band

I AM THEY is capturing the attention of audiences across the country.

However, it's the message behind their music that the group hopes will resonate most with audiences.

"We really want the stories in these songs to connect with people," lead vocalist and guitarist Adam Palmer said. "Our songs are little snapshots of moments we are going through captured in lyrics and melodies. Just because we are on stage, we are far from having it all together.

"These songs express real moments of our daily walk and journey of faith. There are times of feeling distant, when we feel like we don't have words to say in our prayers. Other songs express times of feeling jubilant and in celebration. With every song and emotion we are grateful that we are redeemed because this life is hard enough, but without a relationship with Christ it would be hopeless."

In addition to Palmer and his wife, Sarah, who plays drums, the band is comprised of Matthew Hein, vocals and guitar; Stephanie

Kulla, vocals and violin; Justin Shinn, keyboard; and Bobby Stiehler, bass.

The band's name is based on John 17 where Jesus was praying and refers to His disciples as "they."

"We were going through several names for the band and my wife came across this chapter," Palmer said.

"We thought it would be an amazing way to personalize the group name and to let people know that we are followers of Christ. The name is meant to be inclusive of the family of Christ, rather than pointing back to the band. The name was specifically taken from verse 16, where Jesus said: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.'"

At their concerts, band members emphasize how a relationship with Christ has radically transformed their lives by giving them a constant source of strength and identity.

During his childhood Palmer experienced the tragic loss of his older brother due to a drunk driving accident. Throughout his teenage years he battled severe depression and anxiety as his family tried to sort through their emotions in various ways.

Eventually his parents divorced and Palmer attempted suicide.

By sharing personal testimonies filled with struggles and stories of redemption, the band is able to reach out to audiences in an authentic and approachable way.

"We've gotten so many emails from

people who just pour out their stories and struggles to us. That is something we do not take lightly or take for granted. We consider it sacred. When people share their stories of how God has delivered them, that's a holy moment. Every single person has a different story. Our first priority is to be ministerial — that's our heart. It's what we know and want to continue."

Their music and message are being well received. With the release of their self-titled debut album the band made an impressive entrance into the Christian music scene while garnering a spot in the Top 10 on the Billboard Christian Chart.

"Our hope is that this album connects with people on a deeper level," Palmer said. "We want the listener to connect with the album in a way that feels like a journey of

faith — a realistic one of valleys, hilltops and mountaintops (with) all the turmoil, joys and struggles, everything in between."

The band is currently performing on the 23-city "Rock and Worship Roadshow" tour. This spring, I AM THEY will tour with singer/songwriter Matt Maher. During the summer the group plans to perform at several Christian music festivals and will join Casting Crowns on select dates of their tour.

"In our touring we want to have a relatable ministry where people feel free to talk with us and open up. We love interacting with people after shows and hearing about what God is doing in their lives."

Sharing struggles

"In every single concert someone comes up to me and shares that they are struggling with addiction, family problems or contemplating suicide. Because of my personal testimony a lot of people feel comfortable opening up to me. It's been amazing to let them know from my own experience that there is hope and redemption [through] Christ.

"If my story with its extremes can see the redemption of Christ then their story can too. Their story does not have to end with tragedy. It can begin with victory because Jesus can redeem their past, their choices and their decisions." ❧



'I want to be an influence'

Mississippi Braves' Kleinknecht's faith keeps him focused

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Barrett Kleinknecht has been a Christian all his life. After all, Christian is his middle name. But he was 15 when he became one.

"My youth pastor was preaching one Sunday. I felt the Lord moving in my heart and that is when I accepted Him," said Kleinknecht, who grew up in South Florence Baptist Church, Florence, S.C.

"I was always around church. I knew what it meant. Then one day I felt like something was missing."

After facing struggles in college, he was listening to the pastor of South Carolina's multi-campus NewSpring Church speak online.

"I felt like I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing. I think that was the key point in my life where it turned around."

A utility player in the Atlanta Braves organization, Kleinknecht points to Christ as why he is in the game.

"It's not to play baseball. It's not for my own success. It is a platform to be used to glorify God and let everybody know what God has done for me," he said.

When he was a freshman at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, Kleinknecht was away from home for the first time.

"That is when I decided I would see what the world had to offer and I hit that one spot a lot of people hit. I started getting drunk for the first time and started doing stuff I shouldn't have been doing. ... I (eventually) failed out of the College of Charleston."

Learning the real meaning

He went back home to Florence and enrolled in Florence-Darlington Technical College.

"It took me a year but I learned more in that one year as a Christian than I had in the first five years of being a Christian," he said.

While it has not been easy, Kleinknecht said he would not be where he is today had he not gone through painful experiences in Charleston. As he learned more about his faith he realized where he needed and wanted to be.

"I thought I was OK because my parents were Christians. Then I found out the meaning of being a Christian," said Kleinknecht, 26, who defines himself as being a strong and confident Christian.

His faith has enabled him to stay focused in the game he terms as a "game of failure."

"It takes a lot to be positive," said Kleinknecht, who played all but one week of the 2014 season with the Mississippi Braves, Atlanta's Southern League team in Pearle, Miss.

Mississippi Braves radio announcer Kyle Tait said Kleinknecht's attitude is unlike any other player.

"He's always upbeat, always jovial. He is a great presence in the clubhouse who keeps spirits high. Baseball is a hard life. ... It's easy to get frustrated or discouraged. But Klank takes the harder, less-traveled road. He's uplifting. He uses his faith to raise up those

around him. That is a rare blessing in a baseball clubhouse."

Kleinknecht knows all eyes are on him.

"You profess to be a Christian, you profess to be different. You run into a lot of guys who say they are Christians but the way they act, the way they talk, the way they carry themselves, it's not different.

"When you have 0-for-4 days with four strikeouts you have to keep your composure. I think that is the hardest thing because everybody has a breaking point. It's something that I pray about every single day, not for my successes but (for God to) use me to open a door and let someone see [His] love through me."

Desiring to be an example, he walks to the plate to Sidewalk Prophets' "These Are

The Words I Would Say." He signs autographs and adds Proverbs 3:5-6, his favorite verse.

"On player appearances I try to mention my faith," said Kleinknecht, who attends NewSpring Church, Anderson, S.C. Accountability partners, whom he describes as "huge," help him stay strong.

"I want to be an influence for someone, even if it is one kid that comes to a Mississippi Braves game. That one kid could be an influence. ... God doesn't want us to just be fishers of men. He wants us to be fishers of men that make fishers of men. That is my biggest goal."

During last season he was the Braves' top minor league utility player. He played first, second and third bases, catcher and left and right fields. He was a 2014 MiLB.com organizational All-Star.

Desiring to be a Christian who loves the Lord and "loves everybody the same," Kleinknecht said he wants to be a "light for Him; to be the man He wants me to be. I feel like I need to show everybody what He is doing for me." ☞



Barrett Kleinknecht Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Braves



World of
RELIGION
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Archaeologists uncover possible trial site of Jesus

JERUSALEM — The site where Jesus may have been tried prior to His crucifixion is now open to the public for the very first time.

Located in the Old City of Jerusalem the spot is within easy walking distance of the Christian Quarter and Church of the Holy Sepulchre where tradition holds Jesus was buried.

Discovered under an abandoned prison building that is part of the Tower of David Museum grounds, the trial site is one piece of a vast excavation undertaken by archaeologists from 1999 to 2000 but sealed off for the past 14 years largely due to lack of funding.

The excavations include what may be the foundations of the palace of King Herod. Many scholars and archaeologists believe it was here that the Roman governor Pontius Pilate put Jesus on trial.

Archaeologist Amit Re'em of the Israel Antiquities Authority said the palace was built at the end of the first century, according to Josephus, the Jewish historian and Roman citizen of the era.

The ruins uncovered by the Antiquities Authority were discovered in the area described by Josephus and included a complex sewage system.

While there is no concrete evidence that the trial took place in the palace yet, Re'em noted that "from early Christianity until Crusader times the Via Dolorosa" — the route Jesus took on the way to His crucifixion — "passed by Herod's palace. Only since medieval times did the route change." (RNS)

Atheists in England thrive as public figures

CANTERBURY, England — In marked contrast to the United States, public figures who disavow belief in God tend to win approval from a growing number of British people.

A survey of 1,500 adults released Feb. 12 by YouGov, a British market research firm, shows that as many as one-third of all Britons do not believe in God or any kind of higher power.

The poll found that Nick Clegg, deputy prime minister, and Ed Miliband, leader of the opposition Labor Party, were viewed positively because they state openly that they don't believe in God.

That's a stark contrast to the U.S. where the number of openly atheist politicians in Congress hovers around zero.

The survey shows that while atheists in England are ready to stand up and talk about their nonbelief in God, most Christians are reluctant to proclaim their faith.

And it shows a marked divide between young people — who increasingly embrace atheism — and older people who tend to identify with their religious upbringing.

Almost 1 in 3 under the age of 24 declare themselves to be atheists, compared with only 1 in 10 people over the age of 60.

Thirty-three percent of those surveyed said they did not believe in "any sort of God or spiritual power."

The proportion of people who denied belief in God rose to 46 percent among 18- to 24-year-olds. (RNS)

Group in Turkey to protest 'forced' Sunni course

ISTANBUL, Turkey — Turkey's largest religious minority, the Alevi community, is joining forces with atheists to protest mandatory religious education for students as young as 5 years old.

The Alevi comprise as many as 15 million people who adhere to a mystical branch of Islam that broke off from the main Sunni majority.

"This is a forced course about the Sunni sect," said Ali Kenanoglu, chairman of the Hubyar Sultan Alevi Cultural Association.

Christians and Jews are exempt from compulsory Islamic courses because Turkey recognizes them as religious minorities. But atheists, agnostics and Alevi adherents are unrecognized and therefore come under the state-sponsored Sunni umbrella, religious rights advocates say.

Technically Turkey is a secular republic. But since Recep Tayyip Erdogan became prime minister under the banner of the Justice and Development Party in 2003, the government has been implementing policies that critics say are designed to transform Turkey into a more conservative Islamic society. (RNS)