

# THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



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Joey Hanner (center) ministers to children at a school in the village of Angorero, Peru.

## Life-changing MESSAGE

Photo courtesy of Joey Hanner

### Gadsden's Union No. 3 vision team follows in missionary Jim Elliot's, others' footsteps

By Neisha Roberts  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**he region that three men from Gadsden recently traveled to in South America is a region that saw another visit turn tragic nearly 60 years ago.

In 1956 a missionary team of five men, including Jim Elliot, landed their plane on a small strip of land off the Curaray River in Ecuador. They were there to take the gospel to the Huaorani tribe, who lived near the river.

But without warning the Huaorani attacked and the men were speared to death.

It shocked the missionary world.

But it didn't stop the gospel from getting to the tribe. Elliot's wife, Elisabeth, and other missionaries continued their outreach to the Huaorani and today about 25 to 40 per-

cent of the tribe follows Jesus.

Despite the inherent danger and difficulty of the location, Union No. 3 Baptist Church, Gadsden, sent a vision team June 13-21 up the Napo River in the Amazon Basin to the village of Cabo Pantoja, Peru, just 50 miles from where Elliot and his team were found on the Curaray, a tributary of the Napo.

The team's goal was to see if that's where God was leading the church to work among Peru's unreached people groups, but along the way the men led more than 400 Peruvians to salvation in Christ.

According to Pastor Joey Hanner, one member of the vision team, that's the sort of thing that happens

"when God goes before you."

The vision team, comprised of Hanner and two church members, Phillip Blair and Jay Beggs, along with a missions team of 23 from the church, traveled to Lima together. The missions team went to share the gospel with the community and serve as an outreach for Renacer Church of Pachacutec, led by Pastor Alvaro Terrones.

While Terrones served as the leader for the missions team, local believer Arturo Diaz served as a guide and translator for the vision team.

Blair met Diaz during a missions trip to Peru in 2014. Diaz shared his desire with the team that year

For more information about "River of Life, Peru," email Phillip Blair at [philblair@gmail.com](mailto:philblair@gmail.com).

for reaching the "often-neglected people of the Napo," Blair said. That relationship led to the idea of the vision trip.

From Lima the vision team flew to Iquitos and promptly boarded their next mode of transportation — Mayor Pepe's boat.

#### A boat trip and a dream

During the initial planning stages of the trip the team thought they would take a plane from Iquitos to the Ecuador-Peru border, all the way to the village of Cabo Pantoja.

But the vision team decided it would be best to take a boat up the Napo River and stop at every village along the way. They asked if the mayor of the Napo River region would lend them his boat and he agreed. Mayor Pepe had a reason for lending his boat, along with a (See 'Door,' page 12)

Coming next week ...

Why discipline of **reading** is **important** for Christians



# COMMENT

## Serving You

The year was 1843. Alabama Baptists were gathered in an annual session at Siloam Springs Baptist Church, Marion, for the 20th anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. Earlier that year a new resource had appeared on the Baptist scene — a state Baptist newspaper called *The Alabama Baptist*.

In its report the convention resolutions committee celebrated the new publication calling it “an instrument of great power in promotion of the best interest of the denomination and in advancing the cause of Christ at large.”

The new publication was called “a welcomed visitor to our families,” and the resolution urged “strenuous effort to place the paper in every Baptist family in the state.”

The final paragraph of the resolution committee’s report established a link unbroken in 172 years of ministry. *The Alabama Baptist* was to “be employed by the officers of the convention as the organ through which they shall confer with the churches connected with this body.”

### ‘A welcomed visitor’

In 1919 the state convention purchased the state Baptist paper from private ownership and turned over its operation to a “committee of the brothers” that later became a commission and today is a board of directors. During all that time the state Baptist paper remained “a welcomed visitor” in Alabama Baptist homes and a trusted voice.

Today *The Alabama Baptist* continues to:

- ▶ inform for understanding and perspective
- ▶ inspire for Christian discipleship
- ▶ connect for missions and ministry

No other publication focuses on what God is doing in Alabama and around the world like *The Alabama Baptist*. No other publication provides biblically based insights into issues ranging from family life to national issues to global problems. *The Alabama Baptist* continues to inspire individual Christians, strengthen Baptist churches, encourage denominational causes and advance concerns of the global Baptist family.

The printed page remains the primary tool for



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

keeping the Christian family known as Alabama Baptists informed, inspired and connected.

Weekly readership of *The Alabama Baptist* is about 175,000 individuals, mostly members of about 2,000 churches across the state. However, at last count subscribers came from every state in the nation and more than 30 foreign countries.

Fifty times a year the state Baptist paper is mailed into the homes of subscribers. Readership studies indicate readers spend about twice as much time reading *The Alabama Baptist* as they do a regular newspaper. Perhaps that is because subscribers benefit from the many resources available in each week’s issue. Resources range from important news stories to Bible studies to faith and family helps to information about persecuted believers across the globe.

As more and more people have gone to digital devices for their news and information, *The Alabama Baptist* responded with electronic platform options. A digital edition of the paper is available for those who read primarily from computers, tablets or mobile phones. The digital edition provides an enhanced version of the printed paper featuring related videos, slide shows, audio clips and links.

Both the print and digital edition of *The Alabama Baptist* are subscription-based publications. Churches that provide the paper to active resident families get a significant discount from the individual annual rate of \$22.25. But even the individual rate is less than 45 cents a week, which is less than the cost of a single postage stamp.

*The Alabama Baptist* also offers several free resources. Every weekday a Top Story of the Day is distributed via email to all who request the blog news service. *The Alabama Baptist* staff scours news services and selects that day’s

most important faith-related story. The story is edited and updated before being posted and emailed. Generally the release provides a link where readers can find information beyond what the story contains.

Breaking news is reserved for major stories with immediate impact. These stories are quickly posted on the newspaper’s website. Twitter feeds and Facebook postings alert readers to the breaking news story. *The Alabama Baptist* relies on social media to interact with readers and to provide updates about news and resources. Currently *The Alabama Baptist* has more than 5,000 followers on Facebook and just under 3,500 Twitter followers.

*The Alabama Baptist*’s website is a resource center for Baptists. It is not a place where one can read the information printed in the state Baptist paper each week. In fact, only the lead story from each week’s publication is immediately posted on the website’s home

page. The other stories are posted a week later under a variety of categories.

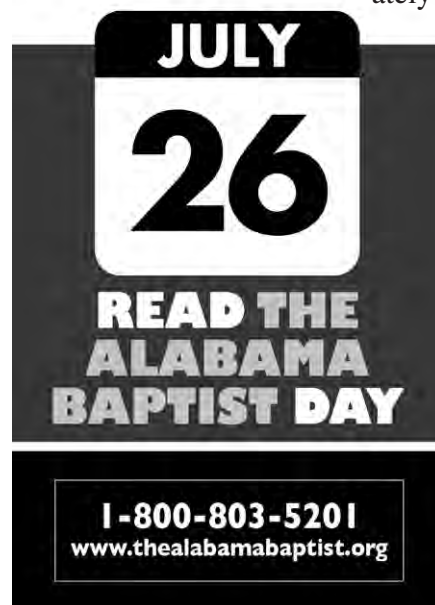
The website provides an invaluable archives for Baptists. There one will find all the stories published in the paper beginning in 2000. That is 15 years of stories. Using the search engine one can find all the stories about a country where Southern Baptists do missions work or all the stories about a social/ethical issue or all the stories about a denominational decision. Information about people, churches and entities are all available in the archives.

In June more than 12,000 unique visitors came to the *The Alabama Baptist* website and viewed more than 39,000 pages. Visitors came from all 50 states — with the majority of readers coming from the southeast — and 131 nations. Blog readers came from as far away as Indonesia.

### More than a printed newspaper

Today *The Alabama Baptist* is more than a printed newspaper. It is social media. It is regular news feeds. It is a digital edition and more services are on the drawing board. But the purpose of the paper has not changed since the first issue came off the press Feb. 4, 1843. We are still about inspiring believers, strengthening churches, encouraging Baptist denominational causes and “advancing the cause of Christ at large.”

*The Alabama Baptist* is still about serving you as a welcomed visitor and a trusted voice. 🙏



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"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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# Americans split on issue

## Survey reveals 9 key findings as Christians react to recent marriage ruling

**O**n June 26 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to legalize same-sex "marriage" in all 50 states. This landmark decision was met with both celebration and sorrow. A new Barna survey conducted in the wake of the ruling reveals nine key findings that will help make sense of where Americans stand — and what's next in this divisive conversation.

### 1. Americans remain deeply divided on the issue.

While there are plenty of demographic groups that lean heavily in one direction or the other, the general population remains divided in their support of legal same-sex "marriage." About half of the general population supports the recent Supreme Court decision (49 percent). Just over 4 in 10 Americans disagree with the decision (43 percent) and 7 percent say they don't know how they feel about it. Americans are split as well on whether legalized same-sex "marriage" will have a positive (37 percent) or negative (40 percent) impact on society. Divisions also emerge when it comes to whether legalizing same-sex "marriage" is morally right (52 percent) or morally wrong (43 percent). And similar proportions of Americans believe same-sex "marriage" is protected by the Constitution (52 percent) or say it is unconstitutional (38 percent).

### 2. However, most agree that legal same-sex "marriage" was inevitable.

Americans may be divided on how they feel about the decision, but most perceived the decision to be only a matter of time. Six in 10 Americans say legalization was an inevitability (62 percent). Evangelicals remain an exception: Just 3 in 10 say same-sex "marriage" was a foregone conclusion (31 percent), half that of the general population. Interestingly a slim majority of Americans reject the idea that the same-sex "marriage" movement could accurately be compared to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s (55 percent).

### 3. Practicing faith is a stronger indicator than religious identity.

Christians who qualify as "practicing" — those who say their faith is very important to their life and who have attended one or more church services during the past month — differ significantly in their stance toward same-sex "marriage" from those who self-identify as Christian but do not regularly attend church or prioritize their faith. In this instance, practicing Christians (28 percent) are far less likely than self-identified Christians (43 percent) to favor the Supreme Court ruling.

### 4. Evangelicals, more than any other faith segment, continue to strongly oppose same-sex "marriage."

Beyond faith identity and practice, Barna also defines some Christian groups such as evangelicals based on their theological convictions. Nearly all theologically defined evangelicals say they are not in favor of the Court's decision (94 percent) — more than twice the proportion among the general population (43 percent) and even significantly more than the practicing Christians segment (66 percent). Only 2 percent of evangelicals say they support the decision to legalize same-sex "marriage." They also are much more likely to say same-sex "marriage" will have a negative impact on society (86 percent vs. 40 percent among all U.S. adults).

### 5. Younger practicing Christians more closely align with older practicing Christians than with others under 40.

One-third of practicing Christians under 40 favor the ruling (35 percent), compared to 6 in 10 among all adults in their age cohort (61 percent) — a gap of 26 percentage points. By comparison, there is only a nine-point gap between younger practicing Christians and those 40 and older (26 percent). On nearly every question, deep divides emerge between these two groups of younger Christians. While only one-third of practicing Christians under age 40 (35 percent) are in favor of the Supreme Court's decision, three-quarters of nonpracticing Christians of the same age support the decision (73 percent).

### 6. Most people acknowledge a difference between legal same-sex unions and marriages performed by the Church.

Similarly the majority of Americans — including most religious groups — acknowledge this difference between church and state unions. More than half of Americans agree "Christians can support legal marriage for same-sex couples and also affirm the Church's traditional definition of marriage between one man and one woman" (54 percent). Only evangelicals (24 percent) and practicing nonmainline Protestants 40 and older (41 percent) are less likely than average to agree.

### 7. The majority of Americans — regardless of faith or age — believe religious institutions and clergy should not be forced to perform same-sex "marriages" against their beliefs.

Only one-fifth of Americans (19 percent) say they should be required to do so. Even among those with no faith, less than one-

quarter (24 percent) argue that such institutions should be required to perform same-sex "marriages." There is a substantial minority, however, among Americans under 40 (26 percent) who believe the law should compel religious institutions and clergy members to perform same-sex weddings.

### 8. Americans are more divided on whether for-profit businesses

should be required to provide services for same-sex weddings.

While Americans feel strongly that religious institutions should be protected against compulsion to perform same-sex weddings, they display more ambivalence toward for-profit enterprises. While a majority of U.S. adults disagrees that for-profit businesses should be legally required to provide services for a same-sex wedding, Americans under 40 (44 percent) are more likely than the general population (35 percent) to say businesses should be required to do so. Younger practicing Christians (33 percent) land between all adults (38 percent) and older practicing Christians (27 percent) on this question.

### 9. Older Americans and conservative faith groups are concerned about the future of religious freedom.

The majority of Americans — nearly 6 in 10 — say they are concerned that religious freedom will become more restricted in the next five years (56 percent). These concerns are heightened among older Americans: 62 percent of adults over age 40, compared to 45 percent of Americans under 40, say they are concerned about the future of religious freedom. Three-quarters of practicing Christians 40 and older (77 percent) and 9 out of 10 evangelicals (93 percent) say they are concerned that religious freedom will become more restricted in the next five years. (Barna)

**94%**

**of evangelical  
Christians do not  
support the decision  
to legalize same-sex  
"marriage." And 86  
percent say it will have  
a negative impact.**



# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

## BIRMINGHAM

▶ **Rich Hutchens** has been named the new associate pastor for missions and discipleship of **First Church, Birmingham**. Hutchens earned a bachelor's degree from East Texas University in Marshall, Texas, and a master of divinity degree and doctor of ministry degree from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He previously served as pastor of churches in Kentucky and most recently served with the International Mission Board for 27 years. He will retire from that role Aug. 1. He and his wife, Susan, have three children and eight grandchildren.



HUTCHENS

## DEKALB

▶ **David O. Cofield** is the new pastor of **First Church, Rainsville**. He will begin July 26. Cofield earned a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary. He is the director of the Huntsville extension of New Orleans Seminary. Cofield has served as pastor of churches in Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama and most recently served 10 years as pastor of



COFIELD

CrossRoads Church, Rogersville. He and his wife, Roxanne, have two children and five grandchildren.

## COFFEE

▶ **Zion Chapel Church, Elba**, will host revival services July 26–29. Sunday services will be at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday–Wednesday services will be at 7 nightly. Bo Weed will be the guest speaker and Greg Hughes will lead music. For a bus ride to the event call 334-447-2433. Cary Maulden is pastor.

## CONECUH

▶ **Bower Memorial Church, Evergreen**, will hold July Jubilee on July 26–29. Services will be at 6:30 p.m. Sunday and 7 p.m. Monday–Wednesday. Speakers will be: Bobby DuBois, Sunday; Herbert Brown, Monday; Phil Winningham, Tuesday; and Wayne McMillian, Wednesday. Jim Griffin is pastor.

## MARSHALL

▶ **Bethlehem Church, Boaz**, will host revival services July 26–30. Sunday service will be at 6 p.m. and Monday–Thursday services will be 7 nightly. Bailey Smith, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, will be guest speaker. Bethlehem's choir will provide special music. For more information call Cathy Morton at 256-593-3880. Wayne White is pastor.

## ETOWAH

▶ **Twelfth Street Church, Gadsden**, will host its 19th annual Cornutt Family Reunion Singing on July 26, 6 p.m. at Gadsden City High School Auditorium. For more information call 256-546-0471. Craig Carlisle is pastor.

## MOBILE

▶ **First Church, Axis**, will host a carwash fundraiser for its youth group Aug. 15. A pizza party will follow the event. For more information email Pam Lott or Royce Lott at [pamlott@att.net](mailto:pamlott@att.net). Justin Lott is pastor.

## NORTH JEFFERSON

▶ **Phil Allen** is the new pastor of **First Church, Brookside**. He earned an associate's degree from Christian Life School of Theology in Columbus, Georgia. He most recently served at House2Hope Ministries. He and his wife, Kristle, have five children.



ALLEN

## ST. CLAIR

▶ **Calvary Church, Odenville**, will host Ugandan Thunder Children's Choir in concert Aug. 2, 6 p.m. The choir is comprised of Ugandan orphans. Chuck Lackey is pastor.

## TUSCALOOSA

▶ **Mount Olive Church, Coker**, will host Ugandan Thunder Children's Choir in concert Aug. 3, 7 p.m. The choir is comprised of Ugandan orphans. For more information call 205-339-2529. Tim Tindle is pastor. ☞

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## in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders



## William E. 'Bill' Percy III

### Former Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 61



PERCY

William E. "Bill" Percy III, who served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died July 6. He was 61.

Percy graduated from Lake Charles High School in Louisiana and earned degrees from Dallas Baptist College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He served as pastor of Odena Baptist Church, Sylacauga; Central Baptist Church, Talladega; Five Points Baptist Church, Sylacauga; Cuba Baptist Church; and Thomaston Baptist Church along with

churches in Louisiana and Texas.

At the time of his death he was a member of First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, where he served as minister to senior adults, taught Sunday School and sang in the choir. He was an accomplished pianist and produced several CDs. Percy also served on the board of governors at Judson College in Marion.

Percy was preceded in death by his first wife of 17 years, Sissie, and is survived by his wife, Judy. (Neisha Roberts)

## James Roy Carter

### Former Alabama Baptist pastor, veteran dies

James Roy Carter, who served as pastor of two Alabama Baptist churches, died July 10. He was 87.

Carter graduated from Huntsville High School and then served in the United States Army during the Korean War. After his term ended he graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and earned a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Carter served as pastor of Gulletts Bluff Baptist Church, Monroeville, and First Baptist Church, Uriah. He also served for 25 years as a chaplain at Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon.

He was a member of Orchard Baptist Church, Mobile, at the time of his death where he had spent 49 years serving in different capacities as chairman of deacons, Sunday School teacher and member of the choir.

Carter is survived by his wife, Delores; four children; two grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (TAB)

# Ministry Tips



## BEING SUCCESSFUL

By Pastor Jeff Burns  
Trinity Baptist Church, Roanoke

**1. Never compare yourself to other pastors because we all have different callings.**

What is the definition of success in the ministry anyway? Is it the size of your church? Only 0.1

percent of United States churches have 10,000 in attendance each week. Does that mean the rest of us, the 99.9 percent, are unsuccessful? No. Abel was successful because he was a faithful giver. Enoch was successful because he walked with God. Noah was successful because he built a boat. Abraham was successful because he

obeyed. Rahab was successful because she hid the spies (that one was the coolest to me). They all had different callings.

**2. Never look at anything other than God's Word to describe the meaning of success.**

The definition of success is the attainment of wealth, position and honor. That's

according to the dictionary, but the dictionary isn't the inspired Word of God. Read Matthew 22:37–40. Follow this and your ministry will be successful.

These are tips from a man that has been in the "ministry" for 30 years. ☞

## Behind closed doors

Megan is one of the most popular girls in the church youth group. She regularly invites friends to church, and because she is friendly and outgoing lots of young people have joined the group. Lately, however, she has been asking to stay home from youth group events. She's had good reasons — not feeling well, a big project for school — but it's not like her to skip church. Megan's mother has noticed that even when she is at church, she seems to be withdrawn and quiet — not her usual self at all. Her mom is worried she is having difficulties with someone in the group, but when she suggested Megan talk to the youth minister, the girl burst into tears and begged her mother not to say anything to him. Megan is obviously disturbed by something going on at church, but she won't talk to her mother about it. What could it be?



123rf.com, edited by Lauren C. Grim

# Keeping children safe at church

Having good church policies, procedures in place helps protect children

By Rhett McKenzie, MAMFC, ALC  
Pathways Professional Counseling

In recent years, we have heard of too many cases where children have been victims of sexual abuse by someone at church.

Unfortunately abuse of children has been going on for much longer than we would like

to acknowledge. As a result parents and caregivers may be wary of trusting church leaders and volunteers to take care of their children.

Because I work with children who come from abusive and traumatic backgrounds, I have become hyper-vigilant about placing my child in the care of others.

The thought, "Is my child going to be cared for properly while he is out of my care?" crosses my mind when I consider child-care services.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice are quite sobering: 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls will be sexually abused before they reach 18 years of age. Despite these alarming and unsettling statistics, we can't allow our fears and concerns about the well-being of our children keep us from

activities that are life-giving and enriching, including church.

One of the best ways to protect our children from any type of abuse is to make sure our churches have good policies and procedures in place regarding child safety and security. As a parent one of the first things I look for when visiting a church are policies that require adequate

supervision and accountability measures for those who work with children, from the nursery babies to the teenagers.

As a church member I want to make sure my church is informed of the dangers that can exist even within church activities. All churches need to be aware of

potential dangers to children and have protocols in place for protecting them. Such policies are not only healthy for protecting children but they also will protect the church.

Child protection is a matter of excellence, which is why both church members and church staff should work diligently together to create and enforce safety policies. The greatest potential for church growth in most churches is from young

families, and we want those young families to feel very safe and comfortable with us caring for their children.

As a member of your church's congregation, you must be willing to let your voice be heard and call your church to a higher level of accountability and safety in order to ensure it is the safe harbor for our children that it needs to be.

### Worth the effort

Though implementing any new policy is challenging, the safety of our children is worth the effort.

There are some very simple protocols churches can put in place in order to protect the children and the church (see side-

bar, this page). We know from research and experience that the more hurdles a predator has to jump over, the safer our children will be.

While some might criticize such measures as demonstrating a "lack of trust," our children are worth this level of protection. Experts in protecting children at church know that these suggestions are actually very good ways to ensure accountability and safety.

Is there a chance someone in your congregation or on your church staff could take offense to these kinds of measures? Absolutely. However, it is far more important to prevent child abuse and its devastating long-term effects on a child. 🙏



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## Simple protocols churches can put in place in order to protect children and the church

▶ **Run a background check and hold an in-person interview** with every person who is going to be working with children.

▶ **Make sure there are at least two adults working** with children at any given time and there is at least one supervisor who is constantly checking in on the different children's programs.

This ensures greater levels of accountability and provides a witness should anything ever be questioned.

▶ **Have an organized system in place** where the adult picking up a child can be easily matched with that child. It is very important that a child in church care only be released to the appropriate person.

Source: Rhett McKenzie

# Importance of prevention efforts

## Screening, supervision of workers vital to keeping children safe from sexual predators

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

**A** church should be a refuge from the dangers of the world. Unfortunately we hear all too often about children who have been abused at church by those entrusted to guide and protect them.

Although many high-profile cases of sexual abuse deal with stranger abduction, molestation typically occurs within a long-term, ongoing relationship between the offender and victim, writes Laura Ahearn, executive director of Parents for Megan's Law and the Crime Victims Center.

"Sexual predators are smart, extremely cunning and often individuals you least expect would commit such crimes," Ahearn said on her organization's website. "Sometimes they are the well-respected pillars of the com-

munity. They develop elaborate schemes and go to great extents to do anything to get access to children."

That's why prevention efforts must focus on screening and supervision, said Chip Smith, an associate in the office of LeaderCare and church administration at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

### Background checks

Screening in the form of background checks is the first step churches should take when it comes to allowing any person to work with children. Before hiring staff members, churches should do a complete background check on the potential employee, including criminal, credit and motor vehicle records.

For volunteers, the process does not have

to be that extensive, Smith said. A Child Abuse and Neglect report from the Child Protective Services division of the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) will suffice. Form 1598, known as a CA/N ("can"), is available on the DHR website, [dhr.alabama.gov](http://dhr.alabama.gov).

"A DHR check can tell you if there have been any reports made on that individual," Smith said.

A DHR report is free and churches who have never done them can start with current volunteers, then do checks as additional volunteers come on board, Smith said. No one should be exempted, he added.

"The most common question I hear from pastors is do we have to screen everybody that works with children," Smith said. "The answer is yes for both staff and volunteers. Churches shouldn't grandfather anyone in either. If you do that, you've lost the effectiveness of the process."

Most people are going to be fine with the background check, Smith said. Failing to screen in order to avoid hurt feelings not only puts the church at risk of lawsuits, it puts children at risk of abuse.

"If something happens, parents are going to want to know if the church tried to prevent this from happening," Smith said. "Doing something is better than doing nothing."

Pastors also are mandatory reporters, which means if they receive a credible report of potential abuse or neglect, they must tell child protection services. If no concerns are found in an investigation, pastors are not liable. However, if a pastor fails to report a concern and the child is further abused, the pastor can be sued for nonreporting, Smith said. It's just something pastors and leaders who work with children must do.

"You're looking after the welfare of children," Smith said.

Supervision during church activities is the second key to prevention, especially in youth ministry, which is considered a high-risk situation for sexual misconduct allegations, Smith said.

"Youth workers are often closer in age to the teens they work with, they're often unmarried and they spend a lot of time with youth, sometimes off-premises or at overnight activities," Smith said.

Youth ministry teams can be helpful, as can

policies that prohibit spontaneous unsupervised outings, Smith said. It also is important that only adults be allowed to chaperone youth ministry activities. Chaperones should not be younger than 21 and ideally they should be 25 or older.

"In Alabama anyone under the age of 18 is considered a child, and anyone supervising them should be a legal adult," Smith said.

James Dew, vice president for undergraduate studies and academic support at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, also suggests the two-person rule. This policy states that two adult workers must be present during all children and youth activities, especially those that occur off church premises or do not take place during normal church hours.

"In best cases, at least one of these workers will be a woman, particularly

when changing diapers or assisting children with restroom breaks," Dew said. "Teens or preteens who help with the nursery, children's church or ministries like AWANA should not count toward the two-person rule."

Other simple steps churches can take to increase supervision of children's activities are to put windows in doors and to have someone walking through the children's area when children are present. Other simple steps, like strategically placing mirrors and video cameras and locking unused rooms, can be deterrents to sexual abuse situations as well.

### Strict policies

When activities take children's groups off-site, precautionary measures should include adequate adult chaperones, frequent roll calls and little unsupervised time.

Such strict policies may seem excessive but a church must do everything possible to keep kids safe at church, even if it means challenging the comfort level of the congregation.

"Precautions, individually or taken together, will not provide a 100 percent guarantee against child predators," Dew said. "However, these simple guidelines give practical and effective layers of protection to our children, our churches and to the name of Christ. All of us want our children to be safe, but that won't happen if we aren't deliberate and aggressive to pursue such protection. Our children and our mission are worth the cost." ❏

## 5 tips

### to ease concerns about child safety at church

**TALK:** Talk often with your child and set a tone of openness. Talking openly and directly will let your child know that it's OK to come to you when they have questions. If your child comes to you with concerns or questions, make time to listen and talk to them.

**TEACH:** Teach children the names of their body parts so that they have the language to ask questions and express concerns about those body parts. If your child is uncomfortable around a specific adult, pay attention to their discomfort. Teach your child that if someone ever touches them inappropriately, he or she should tell a trusted adult immediately.

**EMPOWER:** Your child should know that he or she has the right to speak up if they are uncomfortable or if someone is touching them inappropriately. Teach them that it's OK to say "no" even to adults they know, including family or church members. Empower them to have healthy boundaries and to understand that it is almost never okay for anyone to touch their private areas (any part that is covered by a swimsuit).

**IMPLEMENT:** Make sure there are safety protocols and policies in place to protect children both at home and church and that these policies are enforced. Protocols and policies are worthless if they are not implemented.

**EDUCATE:** Educate church members, staff members and yourself about the warning signs of child sexual abuse. Educate them about what to look out for and prepare them for the best way to respond to potential situations.

Source: Rhett McKenzie



BP photo

# Value and protect

## Parents, caregivers can find peace in protection that only Christ offers to those they love

By **Jonathan D. Six**  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**I**n the church we need to value our children and teach them to worship the Lord. This is why we put policies in place to protect them as well as to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. As a father I am particularly concerned for how the church approaches the next generation. It is always important to know the biblical and theological motivations we have to care for our children in a sin-broken world.

All of humanity is created in the image of God. In Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Being created in God’s image is special to humans, and all human life has value because they are created in God’s image.

Jesus cares for children. The clearest reference to Jesus’ value of children is found in the Gospels. Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18 recount the story of children being brought to Jesus and the disciples rebuking them. Jesus responds by telling the disciples to allow the children to come to Him. He continues to explain that the faith of children is the kind of faith believers should exhibit. Jesus is willing to stop all He is doing to demonstrate His love for children.

The Bible instructs us to teach children to worship God. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses explains that we are to teach our children that, “The Lord our God is one,” and that they are to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all

their strength (Deut. 6:5). Moses instructs parents that this truth is to be discussed at all times: “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6–7).

He is implying that the love of God is central to all of life. The reality is that God is to be the central focus of our children’s lives, and this is the greatest way we can value and protect our children.

Solomon also models how to impart wisdom to our children. In the first nine chapters of Proverbs, Solomon is teaching his son about the diverging paths of wisdom and folly. Solomon seeks to protect his

son by teaching him that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

### Trusting God

As our children grow and mature, we also must grow and mature in our trust that our Heavenly Father cares far more about their protection than we can imagine. This is only the beginning and we must learn to trust God with them now. When they grow up we will have to trust Him even more as they serve Him on mission in our communities and to the ends of the earth.

As a parent or caregiver consider the following ways to find peace in the protection Christ offers to those we love:

1. Consistently pray for your children’s protection.
2. Be vigilant.

3. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and discernment.

4. Talk to your children about proper behavior and educate them about safety.

5. Get to know child-care workers.

6. Advocate for your children by talking to church leaders and knowing their policies. If the church’s policies are not similar to the ones listed above, talk to leadership about implementing them.

The church also has a great responsibility to children in its care. What can the church do to protect children and “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4)?

- ▶ Create policies and procedures that protect children. Make sure the whole church knows the needs of caring for children and to be on guard for any suspicious activity.

- ▶ Put your best teachers and leaders with your kids, not adults.

- ▶ Teach children how to be wise.

- ▶ Ensure your church has ministries specific to the needs of children.

- ▶ Involve kids in the community of faith.

This calling to value, teach and protect our children should shape all of what we do in the church. The greatest way we can honor our children is by teaching them to worship God. Providing a safe and loving environment allows us to do just that. (James Dew contributed)

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Jonathan D. Six is director of alumni development and denominational relations for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. ☞*



SIX

## Helpful resources

- ▶ **Church Security** (booklet, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions)

- ▶ **Protecting Children and Youth from Sexual Misconduct in Your Church** (booklet, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions)

- ▶ **Reducing the Risk Leader’s Starter Kit:**

- ▶ **Keeping Your Ministry Safe from Child Sexual Abuse** (churchlawandtaxstore.com)

- ▶ **Child Safety for Nurseries, Daycares and Playgrounds** (booklet, GuideOne Insurance)

- ▶ **Essential Guide to Children’s Ministry Safety** (churchlawandtaxstore.com)



# Physical safety of children

123rf.com

## Protecting children's physical safety at church requires supervision, risk management

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

**P**layground injuries. Teens killed in van accidents. Babies left in hot vehicles. Drownings. Skiing accidents.

It's no wonder parents feel anxious about leaving their children in the care of others, even at church. But parents should not have to worry about their children at church, said Chip Smith, an associate in the office of LeaderCare and church administration at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

"Parents expect church to be a safe place," he said. "They want to know that their child is going to be cared for in all possible ways."

Still accidents do happen. Take playgrounds for example. Some 200,000 children ages 14 and younger are treated in emergency departments each year for playground-related injuries, according to data reported by the Centers for Disease Control. Though hundreds of thousands of children play on playgrounds without injury, those supervising children on the church playground must be vigilant to guard against risks like faulty equipment, falls or very hot play surfaces, Smith said.

### Church nurseries

Another danger many churches overlook is in the church nursery. A 2011 article in the journal *Pediatrics* reported that on average 10,000 children younger than 2 years of age were treated in emergency departments in the United States for injuries related to cribs, playpens and bassinets from 1990 to 2008.

In June 2011 updated federal safety standards went into effect that prohibited

the manufacture or sale of drop-side-rail cribs.

While only church nurseries that pay staff or charge a fee for child care are required to use compliant cribs, Smith said all churches should consider updating their equipment.

"Using cribs that do not meet the new standards may pose a danger to children and leave the church open to greater liability," Smith said.

Smith conducts workshops each year in associations around the state on church safety and security. The workshop and resources are made possible by gifts from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

One point he emphasizes is that church safety is primarily about risk management.

"Churches have to assess the risks around their facilities and in their activities and ask themselves, 'How am I going to manage that risk?'" Smith said.

Some risks require a minimal financial investment, like replacing outdated cribs. Some risks may require a more significant investment.

Fifteen-passenger vans are a good example. An Internet search of "rollovers" and "church vans" will bring up many stories of young people and leaders killed while traveling in the vehicles commonly used by day cares, churches and other organizations.

A 2004 study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that the odds of rollover for a 15-passenger van increased more than 400 percent when fully loaded, compared with a driver traveling alone.

**"Parents expect church to be a safe place. They want to know that their child is going to be cared for in all possible ways."**

**Chip Smith  
associate in the office of  
LeaderCare and church  
administration, SBOM**

Federal law now prohibits the sale of large passenger vans to day care centers transporting children to and from school, but a 2012 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reported that more than 670,000 15-passenger vans were still on the road in 2012.

While newer models come equipped with electronic stability control systems, automatic tire pressure monitoring systems, anti-lock brakes and other safety features that help address their risk of rolling over, most older models don't have this technology, according to Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.

Smith recommends that churches who provide transportation use buses or mini-buses, but churches who cannot afford to replace vans can take immediate steps to minimize the dangers of a 15-passenger van, experts say.

According to Brotherhood Mutual, "The quickest, most inexpensive way to reduce rollover risk in a 15-passenger van is to remove the rear seat. Doing so reduces the van's capacity to 11 passengers and dis-

tributes weight in front of the rear axle."

In addition, vans should not tow trailers or travel more than 60 miles per hour, luggage should not be put in the roof or in the removed back seat area, and all passengers should be wearing seat belts, Smith said.

Finally NHTSA says a common contributor to rollover crashes is improperly inflated tires or old tires, so any church using a 15-passenger van should regularly inspect the tires for signs of wear and ensure proper inflation before starting out on any trip.

### Keeping a watchful eye

Careful supervision by leaders also is essential for safety at church, Smith said.

Children do unpredictable things, like run into the street, roughhouse with each other, eat things they shouldn't and touch things they shouldn't, Smith said. And that's just during normal church activities.

Consider that many churches take kids snowboarding and swimming, both inherently high-risk activities. Even inflatables pose a significant risk. An analysis of data published in *Pediatrics* found that in 2010 a total of 31 children per day received emergency care for inflatable bounce house-related injuries, most commonly fractures, strains or sprains.

"Some activities are just high risk, so church leaders and volunteers have to carefully oversee all of that," Smith said.

"I joke that if you have a trampoline at your church, you're just waiting for something to happen. Churches have to use some good sense when it comes to assessing the risks of their activities and managing those risks to keep kids as safe as possible." ■

Famous Christians from previous centuries

# Heroes of the Faith

## 2015 marks 600th anniversary of death of religious reformer who influenced Martin Luther

**J**an Hus (1370–1415), a Bohemian religious thinker and reformer, was burned at the stake July 6, 1415, for heresy against the Catholic Church.

This year is the 600th anniversary of his death. Although Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation, it was Hus who influenced him.

Hus was born to peasant parents in Husinec, Bohemia, in today's Czech Republic. To escape poverty he decided to become a priest.

He earned a bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from the University in Prague (now Charles University in Prague). He became a teacher and then dean of the philosophy faculty in 1401. In 1402 he became a priest at Prague's Bethlehem Chapel.

During these years Hus changed. The

writings of church reformer John Wycliffe awakened his interest in the Bible.

Hus and his followers advocated the supremacy of the Bible, wanted more control for church councils and promoted the moral reform of clergy.

The University of Prague split between the ideas of Bohemian and German professors. The Germans labeled Wycliffe's followers heretics. In 1409 with the newly elected Pope Alexander V supporting Wycliffe's followers, the Germans fled. Alexander V, though, was then bribed to side with Bohemian authorities against Hus. They excommunicated Hus, but he continued to preach at Bethlehem Chapel.

When Alexander V's successor, Pope John XXIII (considered by many an anti-pope during the Western Schism in the early

1400s), authorized selling indulgences to raise funds for his crusade against a rival, Hus could no longer justify the Pope's moral authority. He argued that the Pope was exploiting the Bohemian people because their king earned a cut of the indulgence proceeds.

Hus lost the support of the king. His excommunication was revived, and an interdict was placed upon the city of Prague: no citizen could receive communion or be buried on church grounds as long as Hus continued his ministry.

To spare the city, Hus withdrew to the countryside in 1412. He spent the next two years composing a number of treatises. The most important was "De ecclesia" (The Church), which he sent to Prague to be read publicly. In it he argued that Christ alone is head of the Church.

In 1414 the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund asked Hus to attend the Council of Constance and give an account of his doctrine. Because he was promised safe conduct, Hus went. When he arrived, however, he was arrested. He remained imprisoned for months and was eventually hauled before authorities in chains and told to recant his views. He refused.

He was taken to the stake and stripped of his priestly garments one by one. He refused one last chance to recant and prayed, "Lord Jesus, it is for You that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray You to have mercy on my enemies."

It is said he recited the Psalms as the flames engulfed him.

His executioners threw his ashes into the nearby Rhine River so nothing would remain of the "heretic." ☩

By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M-Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).



HUS

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# Support hinges on vote

## Religious groups weigh Boy Scouts' endorsement of gay leaders

Are the days of religious groups' involvement in the Boy Scouts numbered or will a pending vote on gay leadership give those who oppose it a workaround?

Faith groups, some of which are key sponsors of Scouting troops, continue to mull next steps after the executive committee of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) unanimously adopted a resolution July 10 allowing its chartered organizations to choose adult gay leaders.

But BSA also said the change in policy would permit religiously chartered organizations to continue not doing so.

Some faith leaders said their continued support for BSA would hinge on that.

### Moral, religious principles

"As a chartering organization, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always had the right to select Scout leaders who adhere to moral and religious principles that are consistent with our doctrines

and beliefs," Mormon church officials stated. "Any resolution adopted by the Boy Scouts of America regarding leadership in Scouting must continue to affirm that right."

Southern Baptist Convention ethicist Russell Moore said he's not so sure how free faith groups will be to make leadership decisions after the upcoming vote.

"I don't believe the Boy Scouts when they say that religious groups will have freedom to choose their own leaders," he said. "The Boy Scouts have pursued an ongoing evolution — if evolutions can happen at break-neck speed — toward the moral priorities of the sexual revolution. At every point, the Scout leadership tells us that they will go this far and no farther."

Other religious groups liked the idea of dropping the ban on adult gay leaders.

Mike Schuenemeyer, the United Church of Christ's liaison with BSA, urged passage of the resolution by the full board, saying, "It is long past due."

And some gay rights organizations said

the resolution left religious groups room to discriminate.

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said, "(W)riting in an exemption for troops organized by religious organizations undermines the potentially historic nature" of the executive committee vote. "As we have said countless times, half-measures are unacceptable and discriminatory exemptions have no place in the Boy Scouts."

### Falling away

Moore predicted a continued falling away of autonomous Southern Baptist congregations from Scouting if the BSA executive committee resolution is ratified.

BSA voted in 2013 to permit gay Scouts but said it would not permit gay Scout leaders.

"I have seen a definite cooling on the part of Baptist churches to the Scouts," Moore said. "This will probably bring that cooling to freezing." (RNS)

## Want to know GOD?

By Pastor Phil M. Boyles  
3Circle Church, Midtown, in Mobile

According to a recent national polling service, 65 percent of Americans feel that our country is headed in the wrong direction. When asked what they think should be done to get America on the right track again, the answers are myriad and numbered.

Many individuals feel their personal life is headed in the wrong direction. They have an innate sense that things are not "right," and they will try almost anything to make things better. Jesus' 12 disciples probably had feelings like this when they agreed to follow Him. His words to those 12 speak to each of us today when it comes to how to put our life "on the right track." In Matthew 6:33, He tells His disciples, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

The answer to putting our life "on the right track" is to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ. His whole life on earth was to connect with mankind who were fatally flawed and separated from God because of sin. Jesus came to earth to share that life-giving invitation to all who would receive Him and to once and for all pay our sin-debt by shedding His blood on the cross. He did what we could never do in order to give us what we can never lose, if only we will accept Him as Savior.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Not only is Jesus the "Way" of life, but He also is the source of all truth. He leads and directs us throughout our life in the way that provides purpose, meaning and fulfillment. Not only does He make our life "right," but He gives us a "newness" of life. We don't have to go through life trying to find what is impossible without Jesus. He loves us, directs us and even provides for us. He really is what we have been looking for all along. 🙏

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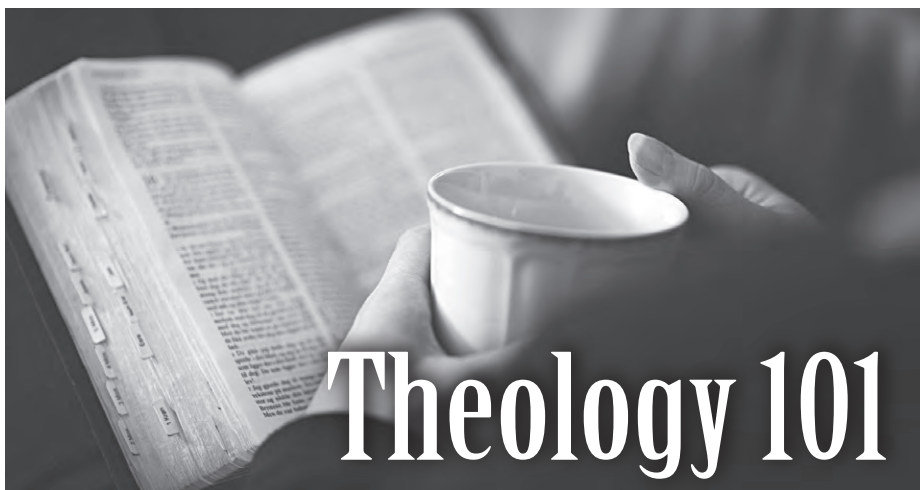
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# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Such a Great Salvation

### Forgiveness

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

Any discussion about Christian salvation must consider the importance and meaning of divine forgiveness. We previously considered salvation in terms of reconciliation. Since reconciliation implies a prior alienation, and alienation implies an offense that causes separation, forgiveness lies at the heart of true reconciliation.

This is true in reconciliation between humans. One party must forgive the offending one, or more likely both parties must extend forgiveness when fault lies with both of them. A person may be heard saying, "I'll forgive you, but I will never forget it."

At first glance it looks like real forgiveness has not been extended. However, on closer consideration we understand that perfect, permanent and willful forgetfulness is not a human possibility. Only God can willfully forget what He has forgiven. The best we humans can say about our ability to forgive is, "I may remember at times what happened between us, but when I do, it will no longer matter." But divine forgiveness includes divine forgetfulness.

#### Forgetfulness

The Bible makes several references to God's forgetfulness in forgiving our sins. Isaiah 4:25 says, "I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins." The prophetic promise of God about His new covenant is similar: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34).

Other images of God's ability to forget what He forgives include that of Psalm 103:12: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us."

As Christians who are perfectly forgiven we nonetheless sometimes remember times of sinful failure — things done and things left undone. When those memories crop up, we can

take heart. While we may remember, God for Christ's sake has chosen not to remember.

Forgiveness was a pervasive subject during Jesus' public ministry. In the course of that ministry He told a paralytic whom He healed that the man's sins were forgiven. Jesus' critics leaped on that pronouncement as if they had just heard blasphemy. They protested that only God is able to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12). While they were right about that, they failed miserably in recognizing that Jesus was God in the flesh and that He possessed authority to forgive sins.

#### Saving mission

In the course of His ministry Jesus called for His followers to practice forgiving others even, if need be, up to seven times in a day (Luke 17:4). Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus instituted the memorial supper making the shared cup a reminder of His blood that He would shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). At the very climax of His saving mission, Jesus famously called from the cross for the Father to forgive those who caused His suffering, contributed to His shame and secured His death (Luke 23:34).

The centrality of Jesus' saving death to our experience of God's forgiveness serves to remind us that forgiveness of sins is not a cheap transaction. While it flows to sinners without cost to us, it cost the Heavenly Father His only-begotten Son and cost the Son the agony of the cross. Because Jesus paid it all, all to Him we owe. ☩

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.



## Christians decry news of Planned Parenthood selling fetal parts

Christians took to social media en masse after news broke July 14 that Planned Parenthood allegedly sold baby parts gained through partial birth abortions.

The social media dustup was provoked by a video released by the nonprofit medical watchdog group Center for Medical Progress (CMP) showing Planned Parenthood Federation of America executive Dr. Deborah Nucatola discussing the fetal parts business with an undercover investigator posing as a potential buyer. Planned Parenthood claimed they donate the body parts for scientific purposes and do not receive monetary benefit, but CMP countered by publishing an advertisement delivered to Planned Parenthood abortion clinics by a biomedical company stating that supplying tissue is "financially profitable."

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore said the "horror of this story should be shocking to the consciences of all Americans."

#### More news to be released

And according to CMP, this is only the tip of the iceberg. The group's leader, David Daleiden, said that for about two and a half years it had been investigating the sale of tissue by Planned Parenthood. "We very quietly have been on this long-term investigation," he said.

Troy Newman, president of anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, served as a consultant on the investigation and said

the group has "thousands upon thousands of hours of video and notes" and plans to release more over the coming weeks.

And, Newman said, anti-abortion activists are still "embedded" at Planned Parenthood to feed CMP information, according to the *Boston Herald*.

#### 'Chilling' response

But Planned Parenthood says allowing women to "donate fetal tissue for lifesaving scientific research" shouldn't be "attacked and demeaned" and that the money discussed on the video had to do with transporting the tissue. The claims will eventually be "discredited" and "fall apart," a spokesman said.

But Moore called their response to the video "as chilling as it is unconvincing."

"Let's be clear about what is going on, it is not only that infants, in their mother's wombs, are deprived of their lives, but also that their corpses are desecrated for profit," Moore said. "This is not only murderous; it is murderous in the most ghoulish way imaginable."

Moore called the situation an "atrociousity" and said the government should investigate.

On July 15, U.S. House Speaker John Boehner and a group of other lawmakers expressed outrage at the video and called for hearings to investigate the abortion practices of Planned Parenthood. They also called for President Barack Obama to denounce them, according to CNN. (BP, TAB)

## Opelika's Liberty Baptist honors war veterans



Photo courtesy of Liberty Baptist Church, Opelika

Liberty Baptist Church, Opelika, dedicated its regular morning service May 24 to the observance of Memorial Day. After the morning service the congregation gathered at the church's cemetery for a remembrance of war veterans who are buried there. The ceremony included the laying of a red, white and blue wreath at the grave of Joel M. Bohannon, World War I veteran who was killed in action in France on Oct. 16, 1918. David Chappell was guest speaker at the Memorial Day service. Pictured here are veterans (l to r): John Thomas, Randy LeCroy and Gene Bearden.

# Door wide OPEN

## Short-, long-term plans in place for River of Life, Peru

(continued from page 1)

mechanic and a driver, but the team wouldn't find out the reason until later.

At each village on the river Hanner, Blair and Beggs met with different leaders, sometimes a police chief, a colonel in the army reserves or a school principal, and shared the gospel with them.

"It sounds unbelievable I know, but these men would accept the Lord," Hanner said.

Each new believer was given a Bible and before the team would move on it would meet again with the new Christians and show them how to study the Bible and begin their life as a Christian. At village after village the team shared the gospel. And at village after village several people came to Christ.

The team also shared the gospel at schools, and teachers and students came to know Christ. By the time the vision team made it up and back down the river, more than 400 adults and children had prayed to receive Christ as their Savior.

This all took place while the missions team, who served in Lima, saw more than 600 Peruvians come to Christ.

With so many new believers, the vision team senses an urgency to return for training and discipleship.

The church plans to reach out to the region both in the short and long term through its missions endeavor or "Rio de Vida, Peru" or River of Life, Peru.

The first short-term goal, according to the endeavor's leadership team — comprised of Hanner, Blair, Diaz, Beggs and George Watson — is to be intentional in establishing house churches in villages where there are new believers, specifically in the areas of Cabo Pantoja, Torres Causana and Elvira.

Union No. 3 plans to take three trips in the coming year and will use E3 discipleship materials in Spanish. The church also will provide financial and spiritual support for Diaz as he follows up with the

believers and church plants throughout the year. Diaz will again serve as a guide when Union No. 3 teams return.

Looking at the long term, Union No. 3 plans to help locate and train pastors and help construct church buildings when there is a need.

Blair noted how prayer was a critical component in the trip's effectiveness and how it will make the ministry effective in the future.

"We prayed regularly for months concerning this trip. We prayed specifically that God would send people from all around to hear the gospel. He did. We prayed that God would save people of influence. He did. Every person of authority who heard the gospel received it — an army colonel, principals, doctors, schoolteachers, chiefs. And I could go on and on. To God be the glory."

And as for Mayor Pepe?

While the vision team was preparing to return home, the mayor and his wife came to say goodbye. Mayor Pepe shared a dream he'd had prior to the team's arrival in which the Napo was like a jail and the people there were trapped. His boat was the only way to save

the people. When the team had asked to use his boat to bring a life-changing message to the people, the mayor immediately agreed, remembering his dream.

"We shared the gospel with [Mayor Pepe] and his wife and they were both saved," Hanner said.

When Hanner asked the mayor if the team could use the boat again in the future the regional leader said, "No. I'm going to buy you another one."

As Hanner recalled the unexpected things that happened before and during the trip, he was in awe at how God laid a foundation for the team, even in the form of dreams.

"There are hundreds who have never heard the name of Jesus in this region," Hanner said, "and now the door is wide open for the gospel." ❧



Photo courtesy of Joey Hanner  
Union No. 3 Baptist Church, Gadsden, member Phillip Blair (right) shares the gospel with two men.

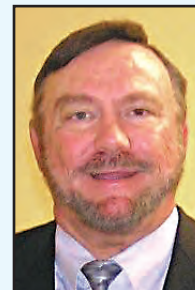
## ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

### McAllister celebrates 50 years in ministry

For 50 years Dicky McAllister has spent his time and energy serving God's people.

A longtime member of First Baptist Church, Slocomb, McAllister was recognized for his service by the church, Geneva Baptist Association and the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission during a special reception June 28.



McALLISTER

McAllister was called to the ministry in 9th grade, he said, but didn't surrender until he was a senior in high school in 1965. He was licensed by First, Slocomb, in March of that year and began preaching a week later.

He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. McAllister served as pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church, Slocomb; New Teamon Baptist Church, Slocomb; and two

churches in Mississippi.

In 1981 he was called to be the director of missions for Geneva Baptist Association, a role he's held for 34 years.

McAllister has two children and four grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

### Dawson gives past goal in Go Love Tell missions drive

The people of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, set their eyes on five missions projects recently — one local, one in Maine and three international. They called the whole project Go Love Tell. And then they set the bar at \$5.1 million for their members to pledge to accomplish it.

"The total five-year cost of the five projects is \$5.1 million, so that was the goal for our members to make commitments to give over and above their tithes and offerings to pay the cost of the five projects," said Tom Thompson, Dawson's minister of stewardship. But church members didn't stop there — they gave over and above the goal too. Currently the commitments total more than \$5.5 million, Thompson said. "With the extra we will be able to do even more missions work than was originally planned."

Ben Hale, evangelism and missions pastor, said the original projects included building a pediatric wing for a Baptist hospital in Tanzania, running a reading initiative in a Birmingham school and starting five churches in Maine over a five-year period.

To read more about Dawson's unique capital campaign for missions, see the Oct. 30, 2014, issue of *The Alabama Baptist* or visit [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org) and search for "Major Missions Project Initiative." (Grace Thornton)

### Beeson names former pastor as associate dean

Former Alabama Baptist pastor Grant D. Taylor has been appointed as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Birmingham.

A graduate of Beeson and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, he previously served as pastor of Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Adger, while at Beeson.

"Dr. Grant Taylor is ... one of our most able graduates and did superb administrative work as a full-time member of our staff for several years," said Timothy George, Beeson dean. "Deeply rooted in the Baptist tradition, he appreciates the explicitly evangelical and interdenominational character of our school and will help advance the kind of quality theological education for which Beeson is well known across the nation."

Taylor and his wife, Rebecca, have one daughter. (Kristen Padilla)



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# Human rights violations

## United Nations report on Eritrea references Baptist World Alliance submissions

**T**he Baptist World Alliance (BWA) was one of several nongovernmental organizations (NGO) whose findings were incorporated into a report issued by the United Nations (UN) on Eritrea in June.

BWA and other NGO findings were referred to in the UN report as “testimonies and confidential submissions” that were made to the UN on Eritrea. The BWA submissions were made during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the East African country by the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2014.

### Flagrant abuses

“For more than two decades the Eritrean regime led by President Isaias Afwerki and the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice has systematically committed flagrant abuses of

human rights,” BWA said in its complaint. “While violations are broad, perhaps no community has suffered more thoroughly and completely than the numerous adherents of religious communities deemed unacceptable by the illiberal government, most especially evangelical Christians.”

BWA alleged that there were between 2,000 and 3,000 religious prisoners in Eritrea, the majority being evangelical Christians. Religious prisoners, BWA asserted, are frequently beaten and tortured, denied legal recourse and medical aid and are held in deplorable conditions such as in underground cells and metal containers.

While evangelical Christians are especially targeted, BWA said other Christians also have experienced persecution. Abune Antonios, who is in his 80s, was removed from his position as

patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and has been under house arrest since 2006 without charges. The BWA submission to the UPR claimed that Muslims also were being persecuted.

### Widespread violations

After the UPR, the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Eritrea in June 2014 to investigate the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the nation, which gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1991 after a 30-year war for independence. The BWA report, which provided background for the UPR, was included in the bibliography of the COI report as a background piece.

In addition separate firsthand testimonies were used by the UPR. These testimonies were collected by Elijah Brown, a

member of the BWA Commission on Religious Freedom, who had made visits to refugee camps in Ethiopia that house refugees from Eritrea.

Brown, lead author of the BWA report to the UPR, was a professor at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, Texas, and is now chief of staff of 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, a Christian human rights organization. The most recent of these firsthand testimonies were presented in February 2015 as part of the COI process.

One of these eyewitness testimonies stated, “The prison officials treated the Christian community differently than non-Christian prisoners. For instance evangelical Christians in the prison were denied access to visits from families and friends. However, other faith groups were granted the privilege of seeing their family members and receiving food items.”

Another eyewitness declared, “As a follower of Christ, I was often not allowed to share a cell with another person. The guards were afraid I would proselytize.

I did not have a Bible during this period. In fact, possession of a Bible would result in a punishment of several additional years of imprisonment. The officials kept telling me that I could not interact with others because I would spoil them and that my only chance for freedom was to betray Christ.”

### Individual persecution

Karen Bullock said, “For two years the BWA Commission on Religious Freedom has been engaged on the situation facing persecuted individuals in Eritrea.” Bullock is professor of Christian heritage and director of the Ph.D. program at B.H. Carroll Theological Institute in Irving, Texas, and chair of the BWA Commission on Religious Freedom.

“It is clear that gross human rights violations have occurred and that some of these violations cross the threshold of crimes against humanity,” Bullock said. “This report is the most comprehensive and detailed account of the violations perpetrated by the Eritrean government.” (BWA)

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 26

## Explore the Bible By Miguel Echevarria, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

### LET THEM HEAR

**Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29;  
3:5, 12, 21**

#### Promise of Life (2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12)

John is a master of Scripture. He has studied it, breathed it and lived it. The Old Testament pours forth from his pen to the letter he addresses to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea). This is certainly evident when, drawing on Matthew 11:15, he writes, "The one who has ears to hear, let him hear." Rather than becoming dull and insensitive, the churches are to listen to God's admonition.

Those who have "ears to hear" know they are to overcome. This is a call to the churches to persevere in their commitment to Christ despite pressure to apostatize.

As in the first century, Christians today experience the pressure to succumb to culture's call to deviate from the teachings of Christ or face consequences. Who likes to be called closed minded or a bigot? Who likes to be ostracized to the margins of society? Who likes to endure unbearable fines for their obedience to Christ? Most of us would have a hard time answering yes to these questions. Even still, believers must hold fast to Christ at all costs.

John uses rich, biblical imagery to describe the reward for those who overcome. To these God will give "to eat of the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7) and on them will be written the "name of the city of ... God, the new Jerusalem which comes down ... out of heaven" (Rev. 3:12).

The image of the tree of life looks back to the Garden of Eden in which God's presence dwelled and from which Adam and Eve were separated because of sin (Gen. 2-3). Yet books such as Ezekiel (28; 36-37) look forward to the day when God

will once again dwell with His people in a new Eden (Rev. 22:2-4).

The image of the new Jerusalem also is found in Revelation 21:9-27. This is the place where God will dwell eternally with people from every nation, where He will share His eternal space with a diverse multitude of His followers.

Reconciling these images, we see that those who overcome will dwell in a city that will be a new Eden. Here God will walk with His people forever as He did with Adam and Eve. But unlike the original garden, there will be no end to fellowship.

#### Promise of Purpose (2:26-29; 3:21)

Those who persist in Christ also will rule with Him in the eternal city. This will be a shocking reversal of roles. The persecuted will become the rulers, and the persecutors will be crushed "as when earthen pots are broken in pieces" (Rev. 2:26-27).

Indeed the future looks bright for God's people. There is no reason for Christians to be discouraged about the future — for they will inherit a kingdom that stretches far beyond what they can presently imagine, one in which their enemies will face God's judgment (Ezek. 36-37; Is. 65-66; Dan. 7; Rom. 4:13; Rev. 21).

So although we face hostility and persecution from an unbelieving world, we must not waver in our allegiance to Christ. If we grow weary and fall away, then we have no eternal inheritance.

Let us take to heart the exhortation from Hebrews 12:1-2: "Let us run the race with endurance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who ... endured the cross, despising shame and sat down at the right hand of God." Like Jesus, we too have the joy of an eternal kingdom set before us. So let us "overcome," knowing an eternal city awaits where our enemies shall be crushed and we will reign with the King of Kings forever. 🙏

## Bible Studies for Life By Noel Forlini, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor of Biblical Perspectives, Samford University

### RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE Revelation 2:1-7

About a year ago I sat in the pews at my church's weekly communion service and I heard a word from God about my relationship with Him. Those who have had similar experiences of hearing the Spirit of God speak in an emphatic way can likely attest that a word from God is sometimes comforting, sometimes confronting. A timely word from the Word of God, a needed word, can christen our eyes with tears of relief.

But sometimes the message we hear is not comforting but discomfiting: "Go and say, 'you shall be ever hearing, but never understanding,'" and our skin is stained by tears of regret or scorn or fear of the message meant for us and our hearers. But a prophetic word from the Word of God can still comfort, even if its message confronts.

It is, in some sense, a comfort to hear a word from the Lord, regardless of the message, because it is indicative of God's great love that He speaks to us at all. It is God's kindness, after all, that leads us to repentance. When John relays his revelation to the church at Ephesus, it is just such a word.

#### Endurance in faith and adherence to right doctrine are good, but they are not enough. (1-3)

In the Book of Revelation, John is exiled on an island called Patmos (Rev. 1:9-11). John "sees" a word of God given to each of the seven churches. The book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, and it is set within a culture of persecution in the first century. Apocalyptic literature draws on rich symbolism and numerology and correlates what is happening on earth to battles taking place in heaven. Such literature posits that God will "right" all that is wrong on earth in heaven, those

who are persecuted will be vindicated and the mighty on this earth will one day be thrown down.

In the midst of this persecution, the churches at Ephesus had turned away from their first love, Jesus. True love for Jesus — and true wisdom — acknowledges that we are all broken bodies who need the broken body of the Christ at whose table we gather. From the first sigh of Creation to the final "Come, Lord Jesus" of Revelation, the desire of God is that His people find their home not in themselves and in what they can do for God but in God Himself.

#### Everything we do is to be motivated by a love for Christ. (4)

C.S. Lewis said, "Until you have given up yourself to Him you will not have a real self. But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away 'blindly,' so to speak. Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that." In the end, true love for God recognizes that one's true self is Christ in us, the only hope of glory (Col. 1:27). True love for Christ means returning to that center, that first love.

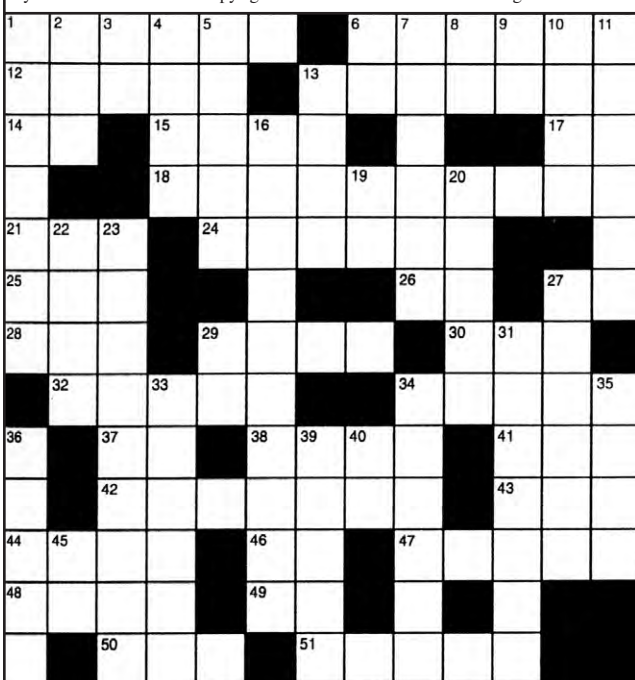
#### Return to a passionate love for Christ. (5-7)

Returning to our first love means identifying the Christ in us who completes His work not out of selfish ambition or envy or any selfish gain but so God is glorified and the Church is edified. It is not about self-aggrandizement or even self-protection, but about the aggrandizement of God.

True love for God is about embracing the love of God through the cross of Christ. It is about hearing God's confrontational word to "repent" and recognizing in it God's love for us and God's desire to be in relationship with us. 🙏

## Christian Crossword

By Debra Michaels Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



### Across

- Wood the ark was made of. (Gen. 6:14)
- A god in form of a dog-headed man. (2 Kings 17:31)
- Town of northern Palestine. (Josh. 19:37)
- A Benjaminite. (Num. 1:11)
- Northeast. (abbr.)
- One of David's guards. (2 Sam. 23:36)
- Symbol for chemical element thulium.
- A disease causing pain and swelling in muscles and joints.
- Short for sister.
- African fly.
- Anger, wrath.
- Hour. (abbr.)
- New Hampshire. (abbr.)
- Bread dipped in soup, milk and other liquids. (Ruth 2:14)
- Expressing disgust, impatience, relief.
- Mother of King

- Hezekiah. (2 Kings 18:2)
- Position of importance and honor among Hebrews. (Gen. 24:59)
- The musical sound of bells.
- French word meaning "the."
- Mexican food served on a tortilla shell.
- To attempt.
- North American reindeer.
- A tool for breaking ground.
- Where Samson slew the Philistines. (Judg. 15:9)
- Symbol for chemical element chromium.
- Frames of bars.
- Through faith she received strength to conceive a child. (Heb. 11:11)
- South America. (abbr.)
- Benjamin's son. (Gen. 46:21)
- Wise men presented to Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and \_\_\_\_.

### Down

- First book of the Bible.
- Greek word meaning "a song."
- Public relations. (abbr.)
- A person legally entitled to succeed to property or rank.
- One more than seven.
- Nickel. (abbr.)
- A Judahite. (1 Chron. 4:3)
- \_\_\_\_ ye holy; for I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 20:7)
- A word called out to get attention.
- Small insects. (Prov. 30:25)
- A Levite and the father of Joah. (2 Chron. 29:12)
- An adhesive.
- Principles determining beauty.
- Mountain. (abbr.)
- Father of Abraham. (Gen. 11:27)
- City of Naphtali. (Josh. 19:38)

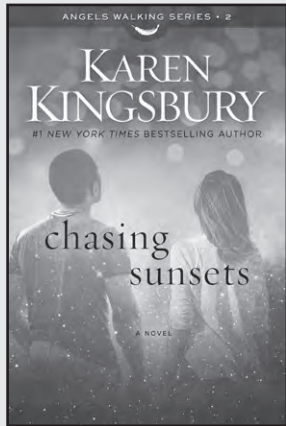
- Tomb. (Matt. 27:60)
- Son of Cush. (1 Chron. 1:10)
- Postscript. (abbr.)
- Daughter of Pharaoh. (1 Chron. 4:18)
- A Judahite. (1 Chron. 4:2)
- The puma, or American panther.
- I will lift up mine \_\_\_\_ unto the hills. (Ps. 121:1)
- Extremely light wood.
- Son of Terah. (Gen. 11:26)
- County. (abbr.)
- Each. (abbr.)



# TOP 10

best-selling books at LifeWay  
as of July 17

## FICTION



**1. Chasing Sunsets**

By Karen Kingsbury  
(Howard)

**2. The Third Target**

By Joel Rosenberg  
(Tyndale)

**3. The Harbinger**

By Jonathan Cahn  
(Frontline)

**4. The Love Letters**

By Beverly Lewis  
(Bethany)

**5. Taken**

By Dee Henderson  
(Bethany)

**6. Twisted Innocence**

By Terri Blackstock  
(Zondervan)

**7. Redeeming Love**

By Francine Rivers  
(Multnomah)

**8. Miracle at the Higher Grounds Cafe**

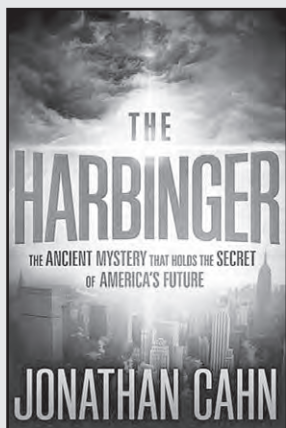
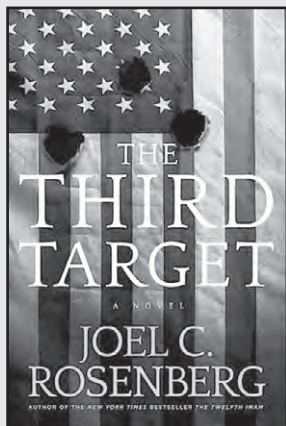
By Max Lucado  
(Thomas Nelson)

**9. Bridge to Haven**

By Francine Rivers  
(Tyndale)

**10. Angels Walking**

By Karen Kingsbury  
(Howard)



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

Jonny Diaz



Photo courtesy of jonnydiaz.com

# Called to new heights

## Diaz's new album challenges listeners to deepen faith

By Leann Callaway  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Christian recording artist Jonny Diaz hopes the songs on his latest album, "Let It Fly," will inspire audiences to reach new and unexpected heights in their relationship with God and others.

Although he earned a baseball scholarship to Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, Diaz felt God calling him to step out of his comfort zone and embark on a musical journey.

Desiring to help audiences grow in their faith journey, Diaz tries to stay focused on key goals when writing songs.

"Every time I sit down to write a song I kind of have three goals: to entertain, to encourage and to challenge the body of Christ," Diaz said.

"I write songs for the Church. During my concerts and on the radio, most listeners have already been introduced to Jesus. My goal is to help people take that next step in their faith journey by challenging them, encouraging them in their walk with Christ and helping them realize where they already are."

With well-known radio hits such as "More Beautiful You," "Beauty of the Cross" and "Scars," Diaz's powerful lyrics and heartfelt songs deeply resonate with listeners.

### The power of a song

"One of the most inspiring emails I've received came from a girl in Florida who was struggling with an eating disorder," Diaz said. "On three separate occasions, she tried to drive herself to rehab. But each time, she got too scared and pulled off the road and went home. On the fourth time, she was about to do the same thing. She sat there in tears, and then the song 'More Beautiful You' came on the radio. "She said that hearing the song gave her the en-

couragement and strength that she needed to keep on going. She actually wrote me that email from the rehab place, which was really neat. She said that hearing this song literally saved her life. I don't take any credit for that. ... It's definitely a God thing."

### Encouraged to do more

He said that email made him think about ways the song could urge people to go deeper in their faith journey.

"I saw the impact the song 'More Beautiful You' was having, which was bigger than I ever dreamed it would be," Diaz said. "I actually didn't plan on recording the song, but my wife kept encouraging me. She saw the need and the potential of what the song could do. ... I realized that if a song is going to bring about life change, it needs to encourage people to dig into Scripture and truth.

"My mom is a very talented author and amazing woman of God, so we came up with the idea of writing a Bible study for young girls. It goes through all the lyrics of the song and walks them deeper into that journey of self-perception and viewing themselves through Christ's eyes."

The opportunity to share his songs has been humbling, Diaz said.

"Sometimes I question the platform that God has given me," he said. "During those times I turn to Scripture and I'm reminded that God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called. If you are willing, God can use you in big ways.

"My prayer is that these songs will inspire people and bring hope into their lives," he said. "I realize that as God lifts my career forward and higher that I really can't take credit for it at all. It's all His doing. The minute He wants it to go away, it will go away. I'm just following wherever He leads." ❧



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# Gambling update

## Battle over legality of VictoryLand slot machines continues

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

A July 10 court document filed in the Macon County Circuit Court marks the latest effort to shut down all illegal gambling efforts in Alabama.

VictoryLand in Macon County and Greentrack in Greene County continue to push to operate electronic bingo gambling machines in their casinos, even though the Alabama Supreme Court has ruled electronic bingo illegal in Houston County.

The type of games currently operating at Greentrack could not be confirmed at press time, but VictoryLand's slot machine-type games have been shut down for more than two years. The bells, dings and multicolored lights echoing from the casino floor came to a halt when the state attorney general's office raided and seized more than 1,600 machines and more than \$220,000 from VictoryLand on Feb. 19, 2013.

Lawsuits, appeals, extensions and even a change in judges have kept the court proceedings in flux since the raid led by Attor-

ney General Luther Strange.

Strange wants the machines destroyed and the money turned over to the state, but VictoryLand owner Milton McGregor claims the electronic bingo machines that look, feel and act like slot machines are legal.

### Under review

The latest round of news coming from the case started June 25 when Montgomery Circuit Judge William Shashy ruled the state should release the machines and cash. In his opinion, the 2013 seizure violated equal protection because other electronic bingo operations have remained in business at various points during the past two years.

Shashy accused Strange of "cherry picking" and ruled that VictoryLand had been treated unfairly. Strange immediately appealed to the Alabama Supreme Court, which ruled in the Houston County Economic Development Authority case in 2013 that electronic bingo is illegal.

Strange said immediately following the ruling, "I am surprised at (Judge Shashy's June 25) court

order because it fails to address the key question posed by both parties which is whether the VictoryLand gambling machines are illegal. We're reviewing the order to determine how best to settle the issue once and for all."

In the meantime, attorneys for VictoryLand filed a motion July 7 asking Shashy to amend his ruling to include that the casino was operating legally. This type of amended order would shut down the appeal and require the state to return the machines and money to VictoryLand.

In response to the July 7 motion, the attorney general's office filed a request July 10 that outlined reasons why the ruling on unfair treatment was "erroneous as a matter of fact and law and should be withdrawn." It also asked the court to either deliver an amended order that "correctly condemns and forfeits all the seized items in this case" or deny the motion by VictoryLand's attorneys and allow the case to proceed to the state Supreme Court. If neither of these work for the court then the attorney general's office asks that the amended order entered "be stayed until the pendency of the appeal that is currently docketed before the Supreme Court of Alabama."

### 'Not' bingo

While several Alabama counties, including Macon County, have approved constitutional amendments to allow legal bingo, Strange said McGregor's slot machine-style games are not legal. Legal bingo includes numbers being announced, players marking their cards and a player claiming a win, he explained.

The aspects to the game of bingo that make it legal in Alabama were detailed by the state Supreme Court in 2013. The ruling says in part: "[T]he game traditionally known as bingo is not one played by or within an electronic or computerized machine, terminal or server, but is one played outside of machines and electronic circuitry. ... (It is a) group activity ... (with) a person ... responsible for calling out the randomly drawn designations and allowing time between each call for the players to check their cards and to physically mark them accordingly ... (on) actual physical cards." ❧

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### Baptist concerns greet order against bakers

WASHINGTON — A penalty of \$135,000 and a gag order against Oregon bakers who declined to provide a cake for a same-sex ceremony have evoked protests and concerns from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders.

An administrative law judge ruled in January that Aaron and Melissa Klein violated an Oregon law that protects civil rights based on sexual orientation. In April, Judge Alan McCullough proposed damages of \$135,000. Brad Avakian, commissioner of Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries, issued an order July 2 finalizing the compensation to the lesbian couple and prohibiting the Kleins from "publishing, circulating, issuing or displaying ... any communication, notice, advertisement or sign" that effectively indicates they will not provide services to a person based on his or her sexual orientation.

SBC President Ronnie Floyd called Avakian's actions "not only unprecedented, but alarming."

"This is a threat to every person's freedom in this nation, including our most precious freedom, religious freedom," Floyd said.

Russell Moore, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said, "Let's be clear: this family is being threatened with financial ruin not because they were impeding anyone else's freedom, but simply because they could not in good conscience participate in something they believe would be morally wrong for them to do. Such bullying is neither right nor American." (BP)

### Ten Commandments ruling may threaten other states

OKLAHOMA CITY — If allowed to stand, an Oklahoma Supreme Court ruling banning a privately funded Ten Commandments display on the state capitol grounds could lead to the removal of similar displays across America, a free-speech advocacy group has argued.

Despite the Oklahoma high court's ruling, Gov. Mary Fallin said a six-foot, granite Ten Commandments monument will remain at the capitol while Attorney General Scott Pruitt files an appeal and state legislators consider a measure to let Oklahoma residents vote on striking an amendment from the state constitution cited by justices as rationale for ordering the commandments removed. The American Center for Law and Justice warned in a news release that at least 36 other states have adopted similar constitutional amendments and could be liable to lawsuits challenging their Ten Commandments' displays.

In the past decade the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed some Ten Commandments displays on government property while prohibiting others. In separate 2005 rulings, for example, the court permitted a six-foot Ten Commandments monument at the Texas capitol but ruled framed copies of the Ten Commandments at two Kentucky courthouses were unconstitutional.

In 2003, Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore was removed from office after refusing to comply with a federal judge's order to remove a Ten Commandments display from the Alabama Judicial Building. He was elected chief justice for a second time in 2012. (BP)

### Episcopals elect Curry first black presiding bishop

SALT LAKE CITY — Episcopal bishops have made history again. On June 27 during a private meeting at St. Mark's Cathedral in downtown Salt Lake City, they elected Bishop Michael Curry as the first African-American presiding bishop of the 2.5 million-member faith. Curry won in a landslide vote in a race against three other candidates. The vote came nearly a decade after the bishops chose their first female leader. He will succeed Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, the faith's first female presiding bishop, who completes her term Nov. 1.

The U.S. Episcopal Church is a branch of the 80 million-member Anglican Communion, with churches across the globe and its origins in the Church of England. (RNS)

## REFLECTIONS

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