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NAMB/IMB conference equips Christians to live out their faith

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Parents are their child's first teacher. They have tremendous influence even before a child is born, so parental engagement is critical from the very beginning.



123rf.com

Positive reinforcement

Churches can help parents stay involved in their children's education

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Two years ago Principal Marta Plata of Manuel Jara Elementary School in Fort Worth, Texas, recognized her school needed help.

She realized her teachers could work tirelessly every year to educate students and empower them to be their best, but without positive reinforcement at home, many of the classroom lessons would not change student behaviors.

Partnerships

The school already had an established relationship with Primera Baptist Church, Fort Worth, a congregation that adopted the school two years earlier. So Plata enlisted

the help of Primera Baptist to launch Parent University, a 13-week program designed to help parents get more involved in supporting their children's educational success.

Parent University used Raising Highly Capable Kids, a research-based curriculum developed by Resilient Kidz, an organization that seeks to help families through stronger community and church partnerships.

While the curriculum is not overtly Christian, it was written with a biblical foundation and provides churches and Christian leaders resources to have a positive impact

on parents in their community, said Mike Haley, director of Resilient Kidz.

It's a partnership model that could work well in Alabama,

where approximately 15 percent of the population is illiterate and a quarter of all children live in poverty.

The Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum is based on 40 Developmental Assets, a guide developed by the Search Institute, an organization that studies student success. These assets compare closely to studies that link poverty to a lack of resources other

than finances, resources like literacy, a dependable and trustworthy support system, physical health and appropriate relationships and role models.

Important assets

The 40 Developmental Assets list includes school and community resources — caring neighbors, creative opportunities and religious participation, for example — as well as internal motivations like reading for pleasure and accepting responsibility. Church programs, such as after-school tutoring or literacy missions, can provide many of these resources, as well as encouragement to incorporate others into daily life, said Lisa Rose, director of church and community (See 'Proactive,' page 4)

More information about the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum is available at www.capablekids.com.

Coming next week

Enlisting AND training church workers



COMMENT

Could It Happen Again?

Today North Africa and the Middle East are strongholds for the Muslim faith. Most people think they always were. Not so. In the sixth century Christianity was the primary religion of both regions. Tertullian, an early Church father called the “first Christian theologian” by some, came from North Africa. So did Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential Christian thinkers of all time, and many other early Christian leaders.

In the sixth century the Christian Church stretched from the Atlantic Ocean along both sides of the Mediterranean Sea, across the Balkans, through modern-day Turkey, along the Black Sea and into Asia Minor. Afghanistan had a Christian bishop and some Christian groups sent missionaries as far east as China.

The Byzantine Empire from its capital in Constantinople in modern-day Turkey was the center of political power and the center of the Christian world. From cities like Alexandria and Carthage, North Africa was a stronghold of Christian faith.

All of that changed in about 100 years.

In the seventh century, following the death of Muhammad in 632 A.D., Arab armies gained control of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Syria. During the middle decades of that century, Muslims captured North Africa and burned Carthage and other cities to the ground. Farther east, Muslims invaded Afghanistan and conquered Kabul in 664.

The great churches of North Africa were destroyed and their libraries burned. Most Christians died by the sword or were forced to convert to Islam. In a few places Christians were allowed to live by paying “jizya,” a tax indicating subjection to the Muslim state. This helped Coptic Christians survive along with some Orthodox Christians in Asia Minor.

In the course of about 100 years the Christian faith all but vanished from North Africa and the Middle East. Only the ruins of that civilization testified to it ever existing.

Some believe the world faces a similar confrontation today. Islamic State (ISIS) and its



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

allies have become notorious for beheading and crucifying Christians and others who dissent from their agenda of establishing a new Islamic Caliphate to rule the Muslim world. Some say to rule the world.

The violent threat of ISIS is real. It has made enemies of nations that question its policies, killed Muslims who stood against its goals and labeled the Christian faith as enemy. Whether ISIS is the future of that faith or an aberration put down by more traditional Muslims remains to be seen.

Threat of indifference

In the meantime Christianity faces another threat so potentially dangerous that it could all but eliminate the faith in some strongholds during this century. That threat is indifference.

According to a study by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, Europe still has the largest number of Christians using a sociological definition — 562 million or 25.02 percent of the world’s Christian population. Unfortunately another study by the Pew Research Center indicates a dramatic drop of Europeans who will identify themselves as Christians in the next generation.

In the United Kingdom, Christians, the study says, made up 64.3 percent of the population in 2010. By 2050 a little more than a generation from now, that percentage will drop to 45.4 percent. “Unaffiliated” will grow from 27.8 percent to 38.9 percent.

In France the Christian population is expected to drop from 63 percent in 2010 to 43.1 percent in 2050 while unaffiliated grows from 28 percent to 44.1 percent. The Netherlands is forecast to have only 39.6 percent Christians by 2050 with 49.1 percent unaffiliated. The decline of Christians and the rise of unaffiliated is repeated in Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and other European countries.

Christians in Australia are expected to drop 20 percent — from 67 to 47 percent — while unaffiliated grows from 24.2 percent to 40.4 percent by 2050. In New Zealand, Christians will make up 44.7 percent and unaffiliated will be 45.1 percent by that year. In the United States, Pew

says Christians will decline from 78.3 percent in 2010 to 66.4 percent in 2050. Unaffiliated will make up 25.6 percent of the population.

Those numbers are for a 40-year period. Project them forward over four generations — 100 years — and the danger to the Christian faith is obvious. Nations that called themselves Christian nations, that served as the catalyst for missionary efforts around the world, that produced the most outstanding Christian institutions, authors, philosophers and ministers, could find the Christian faith all but vanished 100 years from now.

The Gordon-Conwell study on the status of Christianity in the world pointed out that in 200 years (1800–2000) the world population increased more than six times. The Christian population increased more than nine times in the same period.

Since 2000 the world population has grown at a 1.12 percent rate annually. The Christian population has grown 1.32 percent annually. Most of that growth has been in Africa and South America. Christian growth in Europe and the U.S. trails population growth. That is another disturbing trend for the future of the faith.

For Christians the implications seem clear. Another 100 years of business as usual and the gospel of Jesus Christ may be as foreign to Europe, America and other modern-day strongholds as it is in North Africa and the Middle East today. And the decline may have nothing to do with ISIS.

Intervention of God

What God will do in the years ahead is a mystery. Historian Martin Marty points out the 19th century in America witnessed the transformation of this nation from about 10 percent churchgoers in 1800 to nearly 70 percent in 1900. The last years of the 20th century revealed the miracle God performed in China where the Church grew from about 700,000 in 1949 to around 100 million today by some estimates.

As we emphasize taking the gospel to every nation, tribe and tongue, let us not forget the needs of our homelands. Unless exciting and effective ways are found to share the gospel where the Christian faith has historically flourished, indifference may overtake the urgent call for commitment to Christ. Before the embers of faith grow cold and dark, a fresh wind of God’s Spirit is needed to rekindle the flame of faith.

Join me in praying for another intervention of God. Without it, what happened a millennium and a half ago could happen again. That would be a historical shame. More importantly, it would be an eternal tragedy for all those who lived and died without a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. 🙏

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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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SEND North America

NAMB/IMB conference equips Christians to live out their faith

For Becky King, it was a refocusing — a change of mindset. "Right where we are, right now, every day we have a calling to make the gospel known," said King, a member of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea. "It starts at home with my children, and it bleeds over into every other aspect of my life. Every day I am on mission, right where I am."

King and about 850 other Alabamians joined a sold-out crowd of more than 13,000 from all 50 states and four Canadian provinces Aug. 3-4 for the Send North America Conference in Nashville, an event focused on equipping everyday Christians to live out their faith in every area of their lives.

Presented for the first time in partnership by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB), the conference gathered church members and leaders for two days of missions-focused teaching, worship and practical application for the sake of spreading the gospel to our neighborhoods and the nations.

David Platt, IMB president, emphasized to the crowd at the closing session that the call to missions is not for an extraordinary, exclusive group of people, but it is an invitation from the sovereign God of heaven for all Christians.

He implored every person present to join his or her life with God so it counts for the greatest purpose in all the world: for the glory of God's name and for the salvation of men, women and children.

"Do you realize that the sovereign God of the universe has reached down with His hand of mercy into your life?" Platt said. "He's taken and pursued you — He loves you so much He sent His Son to die for you — and He wants the best for you. He wants a relationship with you where you trust Him, where you enjoy Him, where you experience reward with Him every single day ... and where your life joined with Him counts for the greatest purpose in all the world. This is the invitation that lies before you."

Church planting

Other speakers during the main session included J.D. Greear, pastor of Summit Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, who discussed his congregation's vision to plant 1,000 churches in its generation. He shared his personal journey to embrace Summit's vision of being a sending church and challenged church planters and conference par-



NAMB photo by John Swain

International Mission Board President David Platt (right) and North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell (center) kneel in prayer at the Send North America Conference in Nashville on Aug. 3-4.

ticipants to reach outside church walls.

"Jesus' promises about the greatness of the Church were always tied to sending. He always focused on leaders being raised up and sent out, not an audience being gathered in and counted," Greear said.

A dozen breakout sessions at three venues also presented participants with topics on living missions in everyday life.

Jamey Pruett, pastor of Gilliam Springs Baptist Church, Arab, said NAMB should be com-

mended for partnering with IMB to put on the event.

"It was a very healthy thing to bring Southern Baptists together to focus on missions. The Great Commission has always united, excited and energized us," Pruett said. "Focusing on those things — Jesus saves, the Great Commission, living a missional lifestyle — made for a wonderful conference."

Also during the conference, Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, shared a message before moderating a public forum that included conversations with presidential candidates Sen. Marco Rubio and Gov. Jeb Bush.

The candidates were invited to be interviewed by Moore at the conference along

with the other leading candidates from each major party who were polling at 10 percent or higher in the Real Clear Politics national average up to one month before the event.

'Duties as citizens'

Moore faced some criticism for bringing politics into the conference, but he defended the move by explaining that "just as the gospel shapes us into the kind of people we are to be in our workplaces and in our families, the gospel ought to shape our consciences to carry out our duties as citizens."

Christians' mission includes both personal evangelism and public justice, he wrote at russellmoore.com.

"That's why we're having this conversation at a missions conference," he wrote. "We seek to engage our culture, and here have the opportunity to engage some of those who seek to lead our country regardless of where they fall on a religious or political spectrum." (TAB, NAMB)

**Exciting update to
The Alabama Baptist
newspaper coming soon.
Be sure to look for it
beginning in the Aug. 27 issue.**

**For complete coverage
of the conference, visit
namb.net/send2015.**

Proactive parents

Early learning experiences connect directly to child's formal education experiences

(continued from page 1)

missions for Montgomery Baptist Association.

Rose knows from experience that engaged parents lead to more successful students. She has seen the results in her own children, as well as in children she has tutored as part of literacy missions work.

"Both of my children have special needs, so we had to learn to get involved as parents to better equip our children to be more successful in school. In literacy training, I tell tutors that they need to encourage the parents of the children they are tutoring to be involved as well," Rose said.

First teacher

Parents are their child's first teacher, said Meredith McClendon, certified parent educator with Parents as Teachers, a nonprofit organization funded through the Alabama Department of Children's Affairs that provides free education support services to families with children as old as 6. Parents have tremendous influence even before a child is born, so parental engagement is critical from the very beginning.

"Parents meet so many developmental needs of their children in the first five years," McClendon said. "If

parents get involved when their kids are very young, they have a better chance of staying involved in their children's education once they start school."

Parent educators like McClendon work one-on-one with parents in the home to

help them incorporate learning experiences into daily tasks.

Parent educators also help parents learn ways to build strong relationships with their children.

These early learning experiences are important, and they connect directly to the child's formal education experiences.

"As kids transition into kindergarten, we talk to parents about being involved in their child's education," McClendon said. "You don't just drop them off every day and that's it. You volunteer. You join the PTA. You pin up what your child brings home from school. All of that keeps parents engaged with their child's school experience."

Parents also should stay in touch regularly with their child's teachers, Rose said.

"Parents shouldn't wait for the teacher to contact them. They need to be proactive from the beginning," Rose said.

Email is great because it allows the teacher to respond during planning time. If a teacher sends home a weekly folder or report, parents can write comments or questions on those as well. And anytime parent-teacher conferences are offered, schedule one. The key is to stay engaged, and churches who are ministering

to children have a tremendous opportunity to help both child and parent do just that, Rose said.

"We teach our tutors to incorporate hands-on, kinetic learning activities so the kids are not just sitting there hearing

For information on how to begin a tutoring ministry for children or adults in your community, contact state literacy missions associate Kristy Kennedy at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 311.

6 important tips for parents and caregivers to engage in their child's education

1. **Be aware** of your child's daily activities.
2. **Give** praise for accomplishments and efforts.
3. **Instill** in your child a sense of pride and responsibility for self, family and community.
4. **Know** normal behaviors for your child's age.
5. **Require** reading as a fundamental activity.
6. **Value** your role as a parent — the most important role you'll play.

(Source: "ABCs of Practical Parenting," a publication of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, by Jennifer Wells)

a lecture during a tutoring session," Rose said. "Then we encourage the tutors to share some of these ideas with the parents."

Face-to-face meetings

Rose also encourages tutors to have regular face-to-face meetings with the parents of the children they tutor. One-on-one is key in ministry, Rose said. Face-to-face meetings are an opportunity to encourage parents, but they also can help volunteers overcome any misconceptions they might have formed about the child's family.

"You don't know what the parent's background is or how educated they are. Parents have varying levels of busyness

and education, but even parents who are busy need to slow down and think about their child's needs," Rose said.

And for parents who may struggle to help their children with homework, tutoring activities can be repeated by the parent at home, which helps the parent learn as well.

"It's so easy to work with the kids because they're engaging and they love you, but it's harder when you have to talk to another adult. But parents have to be engaged and many don't want to. Even upwardly mobile, highly educated parents don't always have adequate parenting skills, so when we're working with children we're ministering to those parents as well," Rose said. (BNG contributed)

Ministry Tips



DO'S AND DON'TS FOR HOSPITAL VISITS

By Brian Hinton

Associate pastor
Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover

Hospital visitation presents a tremendous opportunity to encourage people with the hope of the gospel. Here are a few suggestions:

Do:

- ▶ Pray for the patient before the visit and pray the Holy Spirit will direct your visit.
- ▶ Wash your hands or use hand

sanitizer immediately before and after you visit.

- ▶ Silence your phone before entering the room.
- ▶ Knock before entering. Introduce yourself to all in the room.
- ▶ Listen attentively and shape the tone of your conversation from cues offered by the patient.
- ▶ Be brief — generally it is better to under-stay than over-stay.
- ▶ Excuse yourself when a doctor or

nurse enters the room unless the patient asks you to remain.

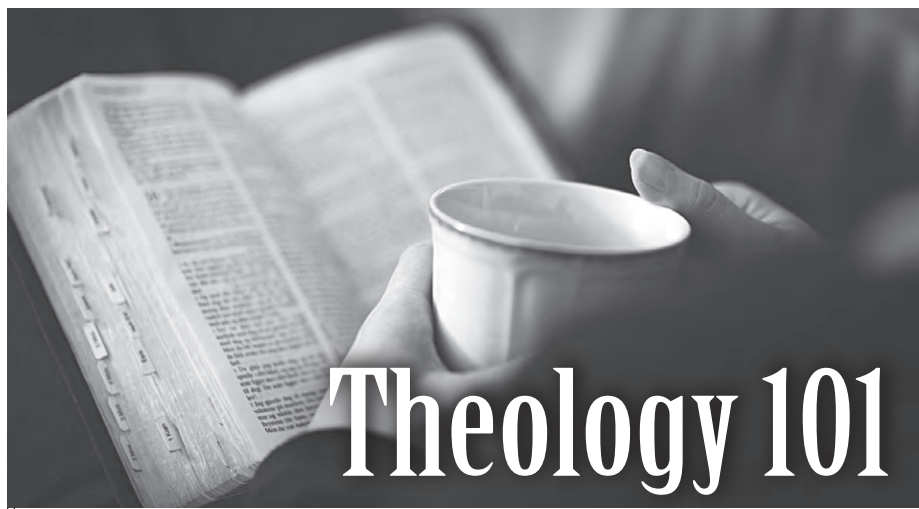
▶ Offer to pray with the patient and ask if he or she has specific prayer requests.

Don't:

- ▶ Don't make hospital visits if you are not feeling well.
- ▶ Don't sit on the patient's bed.
- ▶ Don't help the patient out of the bed, touch any equipment or give the patient food (call a nurse if the patient is requesting this assistance).

▶ Don't press for details (ask "How are you feeling?" instead of "What is your prognosis?").

- ▶ Don't make promises about outcomes or offer false optimism.
- ▶ Don't participate in criticism about the doctor or treatment.
- ▶ Don't whisper to others in the room or assume a patient under sedation cannot hear you.
- ▶ Don't share your own troubles; focus on the patient. ☪



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Such a Great Salvation

Conversion

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

Often when speaking of salvation in church circles, we speak of it as conversion. We use this term rather frequently; however, the word itself occurs only once in the New Testament — in Acts 15:3. The passage references instances where witnesses like Paul and Barnabas joined others to share how the gospel was flourishing among Gentiles. Subsequently the passage references Paul and Barnabas “being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles.”

However, although the noun occurs only once, we have strong biblical warrant for speaking of salvation as conversion when we consider the word used as a verb. With a little child as His object lesson, Jesus declared to His listeners, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). Another passage describes the preaching of the apostles as a straightforward and clear message: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19–20b).

In the Old Testament

It is not only in the New Testament — the Old Testament also makes use of the idea of conversion. Psalm 19:7 declares, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,” thereby relating conversion to the instrument of God’s revealed Word. In a similar way Psalm 51:12–13 gives part of David’s repentant prayer in these words: “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You,” thereby describing conversion as something sinners need.

Whether as a noun or a verb, the basic idea expressed by conversion is that of turning or changing. Several passages describe the idea of conversion without using the term itself.

One such passage is Acts 26, in which Paul gave to King Agrippa a summary of his ministry. He began by recounting his direct commission from the glorified Christ, who said, “I have appeared to you as a servant and witness” (v. 16). With reference to Gentiles, Christ continued, saying, “To whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (vv. 17–18). Having recounted his commission, Paul gave testimony to his response: “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God” (vv. 19–21).

Turning from darkness

Paul continued to describe the idea of conversion without using the term itself. He spoke of a change wrought by repentance and faith and of a turning from darkness to light, as well as receiving forgiveness and a place among all believers. This speaks of Christian conversion (vv. 17–18).

Similarly in his commendation of the Thessalonian Christians, Paul recalled with thanksgiving “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Then and now, Christian conversion is a matter of turning to God, which requires repentance (turning from sin) and faith (turning to God). ☩

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.



Full scholarships for seminary available for your pastor

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

For many pastors and church leaders, seminary education is a longing that sits just out of their reach. It may be the cost, lack of available time or the distance to the nearest classroom — or a combination of all three — that keeps men and women from being fully equipped through seminary.

That’s where New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s (NOBTS) Caskey Center for Church Excellence has stepped in.

Launched in spring 2014 the Caskey Center focuses on the needs of bivocational pastors, as well as pastors and leaders of smaller membership churches, those with less than 150 members. One way the center looks out for the needs of those leaders is through full-tuition scholarships.

In 2014 more than 100 scholarships were awarded to pastors in Louisiana. In January 2015, 50 scholarships were awarded to leaders in Mississippi, and for spring 2016, 50 scholarships are available to Alabama Baptist leaders.

To be eligible one must serve as a paid staff member (bivocational or full-time/part-time minister) of an Alabama Baptist church with less than 150 members. Applicants must already be admitted to the seminary, affirm the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, engage in personal evangelism, submit reports on evangelistic activity and be interviewed by the center’s director, Mark Tolbert.

Personal evangelism

Tolbert said one passion of the center is the need for more personal evangelism, which is why part of the scholarship requires taking an evangelism practicum each semester.

“It’s my observation that we never drift toward evangelism,” Tolbert said. “We tend to drift away from evangelism. It’s not intentional. It’s not a decision we make. We get focused on other activities and then we never drift back.”

Ricky Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said, “It is both interesting and refreshing that the eligibility requirements stipulate that scholarship recipients should be in-

involved in personal evangelism.”

And as for the scholarship money itself, Lance said, “We are grateful for the generous financial assistance provided through the Cooperative Program to all Southern Baptist students attending 1 of our 6 seminaries, and I am also thankful that special help will now be available for Alabama Baptists who are enrolled at NOBTS and serving one of our state convention’s churches.”

Alabama extension centers

Although the center is located on the seminary’s main campus, that does not limit the scholarships to students who take courses there.

The scholarship can be applied to online courses or to any course at any of Alabama’s extension centers located in Huntsville, Rainsville, Tuscaloosa, Birmingham and Montgomery, according to Teman Knight, the center’s assistant director for Alabama and pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery.

“Our goal at NOBTS is to make theological education available to the men and women serving our churches wherever God has placed them,” Knight said. “(With the extension centers) any student in Alabama is less than two hours away from seminary classes. Now that classes are accessible this scholarship will provide the financial means to allow these pastors to not only begin but to complete their degree.”

“God is already using these pastors and staff members but with education and training they become more effective tools that can be used to do even greater work to build the Kingdom. If we have healthier, better-equipped pastors and staff, then we will have healthier and stronger churches.”

Randy Harvill, former bivocational and now full-time pastor of Brushey Creek Baptist Church, Greenville, will be applying for the scholarship, he said.

“My passion is to be a pastor,” said Harvill, who noted he doesn’t have any seminary training but has earned a biblical teaching certificate. His background is in forestry.

“Anything that would help me to become a better pastor, better teacher and proclaimer of God’s Word ... would be something that would greatly benefit me and ultimately the church.” ☩

**Scholarship application
deadline is Nov. 15. For
more information, visit www.nobts.edu/CaskeyCenter/.**

“Anything that would help me to become a better pastor, better teacher and proclaimer of God’s Word ... would greatly benefit me.”

Pastor Randy Harvill
Brushey Creek Baptist Church, Greenville

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **Fairfield Highlands Church, Midfield**, will host Wade Hammond in concert Aug. 23, 11 a.m. Ed Cruce is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold a third Sunday night singing Aug. 16, 6 p.m. "Shepherd's Voice" will perform. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468. Randy Burtram is pastor.

BUTLER

► **Damascus Church, Greenville**, will celebrate its 175-year anniversary Aug. 16, 2-4 p.m. All former pastors and current and former church members are invited. Danny Duncan is interim pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Sheila Swann**, who served for 21 years as secretary at **First Church, Mount Olive**, retired July 31. The church held a lunch in her honor. Swann and her husband, Alan, have two children. Jon Ferguson is pastor.

SHELBY

► **Grace Church, Montevallo**, will hold a homecoming service Aug. 16, 10 a.m. Intermis-

sion, of Alabaster, will perform and Dale Huff, director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration at the State Board of Missions, will speak at 11 a.m. Covered dish fellowship will follow. Tim Driskell is pastor.

CHOCTAW

► **Spring Bank Church, Silas**, will host an open house and building dedication for its new sanctuary Aug. 15-16. Open house will be Aug. 15, 12-3 p.m. Worship service and building dedication will be Aug. 16, 11 a.m. The church also will host revival services Aug. 17-20 with guest speaker Tylan Blansit at 7 nightly. Justin Olvey is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► **Eden Westside Church, Pell City**, will host its second annual Give Me That Mountain Older Adult Retreat on Sept. 12. Speakers include Don Graham and Junior Hill with music provided by Wilburn and Wilburn and Jay Parrack and Vocal Event. For more information and to register visit www.edenwestside.org/?p=692. Jacky Connell is pastor.

ELMORE

► **Antioch Church, Titus**, will celebrate homecoming Aug. 23, 10:30 a.m. Lunch will

follow in the fellowship hall. Jim Jackson will be the guest speaker and Karen Carter and The Larch Family will provide music. Donny Barber is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP

► **First Church, Hayden**, will celebrate its 100th anniversary Aug. 14-16. An ice cream social and "Red Book" singing will be Aug. 14, 6:30 p.m. John Hambright is interim pastor.

SELMA

► **First Church, Selma**, is encouraging all churches in the Selma area to participate in its citywide "Return to Worship Week" beginning Sept. 13. For more information or to become your church's "captain," email Juanda Maxwell at lmxhouse@aol.com or Pastor Jerry Light at jligh@fbtselma.org.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Piney Grove Church, Tuscaloosa**, will host its annual Sportsman's Fellowship on Aug. 15, 5:30 p.m. Chris Wells, "The Bass Chaplain," will be guest speaker. Dinner will be served and T-shirts will be available for the first 100 people. For more information call Troy Brown at 205-454-2070. J. Steven Stamps is pastor. ☞

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Mattie Lee Edwards



EDWARDS

*Pisgah Baptist Church, Selma
Cahaba Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "Because He Lives"

HOBBIES: Playing Scrabble and dominoes, reading, working crossword puzzles

FAMILY STATUS: Widow for 13 years after 65 years of marriage to husband, Theodore; daughters, Nelda Epton, Shirley Ann Foster and Willie Jean Perry; sons, Howard Edwards and Harold Edwards; 14 grandchildren (one of whom is deceased); 24 great-grandchildren; nine great-great-grandchildren

Mattie Lee Edwards, of Marion, believes in being involved in family, church and community. She has many stories, for example, about Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) meetings in which she and other ladies made quilts for brides-to-be and individuals in need, and of making a mattress for her family during the Depression with cotton, needles and ticking from the government. During the years, she taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, helped in Bible school and was her church's WMU president. She also worked for years at a dress shop in Selma. At 98, Edwards reads, works crossword puzzles and is a serious Scrabble player. She was Mrs. Southland Nursing Home in 2009.

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

A: My grandparents and my parents took us to church regularly. We lived in Orville. I was 9 or 10 years old. One night at church there, I felt like the Lord was leading me to accept Him and join the church. It was wintertime.

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

A: I think by these women — WMU women. They would have different programs at their house. I think they had a lot of influence on

us and going to Bible school.

Q: What does your ministry work demand?

A: We have things all along during the day here.

Q: What do you get from your ministry work?

A: A lot. I've been studying the Bible.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: My children come up here at least once a week. The people here at the nursing home say I have more company than anybody here. They are always good to me.

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

A: Whenever we have something here, I go to it. I keep going. I'm very interested in the different things we do.

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

A: I can talk to other people about what I think. I keep interested in other churches too. We have a woman here who is 102 years old. She is a strong Christian and talks to people. She is smart in the Bible.

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

A: It has made me more interested in what the Bible says. ☞



Photo by Jennifer Blair Photography

Dothan's Ridgecrest Baptist holds 7th annual youth camp

WIRED 2015, the service-oriented youth camp of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, involved 1,150 participants from more than 40 churches in service projects around the community July 21-26. Students completed projects at more than 70 sites including backyard Bible clubs, work at local nonprofit ministries, light construction projects, partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and intentional ministries to Hispanic communities. Evangelism teams where participants pumped gas or provided free car washes to stimulate gospel conversations were an addition to this year's WIRED format. Ray Jones is pastor.

BACK OF CAMPUS



Online education bridges time, space gaps for students

By Christopher J. McCaghren
Special to The Alabama Baptist

When Bostonians opened their copy of the *Boston Gazette* one cold morning in 1728, they were greeted with the following advertisement:

“Persons in the Country desirous to Learn the Art [of shorthand] may by having the several Lessons sent Weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston.”

With that one-sentence advertisement, 48 years before the founding of our new nation, we were ushered into a new era of

education — at that time known as correspondence education, today collectively known as distance education.

Of the many forms of distance education that exist today — correspondence, online, video, competency, mobile and even virtual reality — online education is by far the most utilized and most discussed.

Advance in knowledge

Not since Gutenberg transformed the world with his printing press in the 1450s has any advance in knowledge dispersion received as much attention or created such impassioned discussion as online education. You don't have to watch TV for more

than 15 minutes before you come across an advertisement for an online program or degree. They all typically look the same: a student on a white background with the school's logo just behind them. The script is usually emotive or inspirational in nature, and the all-too-brief commercial flashes a phone number at the end to call and ask for more information.

Unfortunately this “fly-by-night” marketing approach has created many misconceptions about the value and integrity of online education, especially in the hands of established colleges and universities who take seriously their mission of higher education.

According to the latest statistics, more than 5 million students in the United States are enrolled in online courses, about 25 percent of the entire American higher education population. Finding its genesis in the early 1970s and only recently coming into its own, online education holds immense power for bridging time and space gaps to bring high-quality, individualized learning opportunities to students wherever they are. With readily available technology (such as tablets, laptops and even phones), a student can engage coursework and interact with their professor in any setting they choose — from the comfort of

(See 'Alabama,' page 10)

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JUDSON COLLEGE

Aug. 30 marks the 100th anniversary of Judson College's Rose Sunday ceremony. The campus-wide tradition began in 1915 to honor the legacy of the college's founders.

Judson continues legacy of service, celebrates 100th Rose Sunday

On Aug. 30, Judson College in Marion will celebrate the 100th anniversary of one of its most beloved traditions. Rose Sunday, a campus-wide tradition begun in 1915, will honor the legacy of the college's founders with a procession to Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, for a special worship service.

Rose Sunday's ceremonies commemorate the historic ties between Judson and Siloam, whose members were instrumental in founding the college in 1838. These Alabama Baptists, honored on Rose Sunday as visionary "builders," were missions-minded champions of service who desired to educate a new generation of leaders who would change the world by serving God and others. In addition to founding two institutions of higher education in Marion, Siloam hosted the organizational meeting of the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) in 1845.

These men and women named their first college after Ann Hasseltine Judson, a woman whose name had become synonymous with service in the 1800s. America's first female foreign missionary, Ann Judson spent her life serving the people of Burma (now Myanmar) with her husband, Adoniram, as a translator, itinerant evangelist and teacher for girls. She was celebrated throughout the 19th century in novels, essays and sketches as a woman who unflinchingly followed God's personal call toward "the greater good."

For Judson College's first celebration of Founders' Day in 1901, Marion poet John Trotwood Moore memorialized the



Photo by Mary Amelia Taylor

Judson College students participate in the school's 2014 Rose Sunday ceremony. The annual tradition begins with a procession from Judson's campus to Siloam Baptist Church, Marion.

founders' work with a poem called "The Builders." Moore likened the college's founders to architects and laborers and their college to a grand building with "pillars deep in earth," which they built for "the unborn century."

Moore was careful to note that these men and women built their college in service of something much greater than their own renown: the glory of God and "the brotherhood of man." Judson's founders invested their lives and fortunes in their college because they believed their young people, like Ann Judson, had both the potential and the responsibility to change the world. Their practice of trusting in and modeling their lives after the generosity and faithfulness of God yielded a vision that, according to Moore, would "[stand] the weight of time."

Following the call

Judson College is still building upon that heritage of missions and service years later. Because of its dedication to preparing students academically and spiritually for lives of purpose, the college has become a nationally recognized leader in community engagement.

Earlier this year, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching renewed Judson's Community Engagement Classification, a distinction awarded to only 5 percent of colleges and universities in the nation. Judson is 1 of only 4 colleges in the state — and the only private college in Alabama — to hold the classification.

Remaining true to the founders' mission of providing education that empowers

service to God and others, Judson encourages each of its students to combine her academic pursuits, her unique skills and talents and her desire to make a difference in ways that allow her to follow her calling in whatever discipline or career she chooses.

One recent accomplishment demonstrates how a Judson education, saturated with academic service-learning initiatives and missions opportunities, prepares students for success. After months of study, one-on-one tutoring sessions with faculty members and hours of hands-on clinical experience in nearby communities, each of the Judson nursing students who attempted the National Council Licensure Examination for registered nurses for the first time this spring received passing scores on the exam.

While a Judson education proves its value in preparing students for living purposefully in their future careers, it also equips them to "love their neighbors" through service opportunities during their college years.

From the time they arrive on campus each fall, students join Judson's ongoing commitment to service in its own Perry County and the surrounding area. For each of the past eight years, more than 80 percent of Judson students voluntarily participated in community service, working alongside faculty and staff members to meet the needs of their neighbors in tangible ways.

Though Judson's commitment to service begins in rural Alabama, it doesn't stop there. While a group of students and staff members engaged their neighbors in Perry

County over Christmas break 2014, others traveled to China and Ethiopia to minister to their global neighbors.

This summer, Judson students serving as summer missionaries took part in children's ministry, English as a Second Language outreach to internationals, housing repair and renovation, resort ministry, inner-city outreach and intensive discipleship training across the Southeast. Recent graduates have built intentional relationships in China, are teaching in Myanmar and are engaged in community development work in Washington. Other graduates are currently preparing to begin assignments with Teach for America, minister to Muslim women in New York City and participate in church planting efforts in Miami, Florida.

Building for the future

As it has for the past 100 years, Rose Sunday reminds the Judson community that there is no greater or more lasting legacy to leave behind than lives of service to God and to their neighbors — and to the "unborn century." It was that kind of legacy, left by Ann Judson, that influenced the founders of Judson College and continues to inspire faculty, staff, students and alumnae today.

Then let us build, and, building, know that grand as is our own, The tower of our age will be the next one's paving stone. Yet he who builds right earnestly, by faith through many years, Will rear a structure that will last — builds better than he knows.

(Final lines of "The Builders." The full version can be found at www.judson.edu/builders.) (Judson)

IMPORTANT FALL 2015 DATES

August 27

Fall classes begin

August 28

Marion Matters

August 30

Rose Sunday

September 19

September Preview Day

November 14

November Preview Day

For a full list of preview days, including athletic tryout days, visit www.judson.edu/preview-days.

BACK TO CAMPUS

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PRAY

across Alabama campuses
this month as fall classes begin

August is Back to School month. With that in mind, we want to encourage you to journey with us to one of the largest missions fields in Alabama — middle school, high school and college/university campuses.

than half of the students on these campuses across our state don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ. What a huge missions field.

Will you join us in praying across Alabama campuses? Will you prayer walk/drive across a campus in your area?

We would suggest that more

- **PRAY** for students to come to know Christ.
- **PRAY** for Christian students to be bold in sharing Christ.
- **PRAY** for faculty and administration and their relationship with Christ.
- **PRAY** for the many international students that study on campuses across our state.

May God begin a great revival on campuses across our state.

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Alabama Baptist schools offer online, distance education opportunities

(continued from page 7)

the kitchen table to the convenience of the lunch-break counter.

Indeed this increased access has brought about a new phenomenon in American higher education. When we say the phrase “college student,”

most of us think of that 18- to 22-year-old neighbor or church member who’s getting ready to move back to campus. In reality nontraditional students (those who are typically 25 years and older) now make up the majority of college students in the U.S. It certainly brings new meaning to the old adage, “It’s never too late.”

All three of your Baptist institutions — Samford University in Birmingham, Judson College in Marion and the University of Mobile — are engaging in online and other distance education efforts that are specifically built to serve students wherever they are.

When we first began discussing building robust online courses at Samford, we knew we wanted to be different. We sought to preserve the Samford distinction, even in the online environment: personalized interactions and mentorships with our world-class faculty, meaningful and lifelong relationships with other students and a true sense of connection with our community. We want students to learn how to think critically and communicate effectively, even if distances separate

them. I know our sister institutions in Marion and Mobile join us in creating engaging programs with a student-first focus that lift up the sacred act of learning as their primary goal.

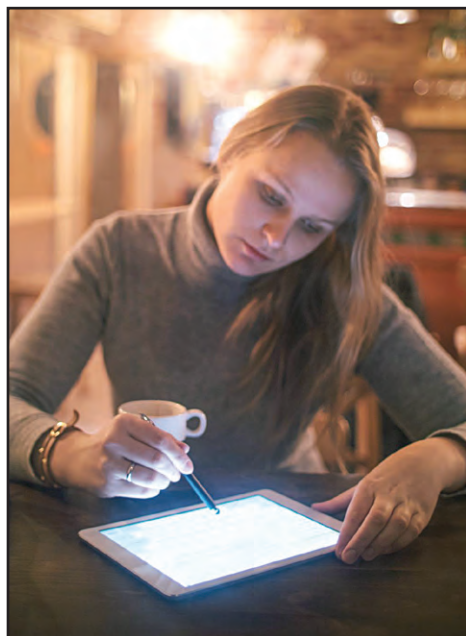
And in offering these types of programs, we are in some sense continually re-fulfilling our calling to Alabama Baptists to bring academically rigorous Christian higher education to our Baptist family and the world beyond.

All three institutions started with little more than a dream and a dedication to the cause of Christ, and now all three stand as beacons of light, serving not only those around us in our great state but students and populations all over the world.

Somewhat ironically our world seems a lot smaller today than it was in 1728, but our core mission remains the same. Shorthand has given way to text messages and emoticons, but the foundational truth of education has not changed. Education has the power to

transform and transcend, to bring hope and perseverance. It is a primary avenue for the gospel and a perpetual and vibrant thread in our storied Baptist heritage.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Christopher J. McCaghren, Ed.D., is assistant to the president for external programs at Samford University in Birmingham.



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Dana Graham
Summer missionary
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Future girls' basketball coach
Judson alumna, ca. 2017

JUDSON COLLEGE

Who are you going to be?

university of mobile

UMobile instructs, nurtures students' mind, body, spirit

Belief is the foundation of the University of Mobile (UMobile). Our Christian faculty and staff instruct and nurture mind, body and spirit so our students can achieve something they know and feel is meaningful and impactful through their education. It is because of the support of Alabama Baptists that UMobile is able to equip more than 1,600 students each year to be leaders in their careers, homes, communities and churches.

UMobile is recognized in America's Best Christian Colleges and America's 100 Best College Buys and is a Military Friendly School with Smart Ratings that are among the top in the state. The 2015–2016 academic year begins Aug. 14 with move-in day and Ram Rush, and classes start Aug. 17. This year the university has expanded programs, enhanced its focus on Christian service and is continually improving the university experience so that residence halls are again filled to capacity.

New to UMobile

This year the university has added junior varsity athletic programs in men's basketball and women's soccer, bringing

more students to campus. The university's new website, www.umobile.edu, makes it easier for prospective students and parents to learn about the school. A new UMobile app was launched this summer that students have been quick to adopt. It provides a direct link to the MyUM student portal, offers a campus wall discussion board and allows users quick access to campus contacts, course descriptions, event information and a campus map.

Theology majors in the School of Christian Ministries now have three new ministry concentrations. They are academic ministry, for students called to classroom teaching ministry; church ministry, for students called to church staff ministry; and community ministry, for students called to marketplace and community outreach.

Online degrees for adults

New fully online degree programs now provide quality Christian higher education for working adults who need a flexible format to further their education. These are completely online degrees taught by UMobile faculty and offered in an eight-week format, making it easy for students to enroll throughout the year.

Visit campus, earn scholarship

Our students say they knew from the first moment they stepped on campus that the University of Mobile (UMobile) was right for them. Visit Days are a great time for prospective students and their parents to check out the youngest Alabama Baptist campus located on 800 acres just an hour from Gulf Coast beaches.

Plus, students who attend a Visit Day and later enroll may earn a \$2,000 scholarship.

Visit Day includes a campus tour, academic meetings with professors,

information about admission and financial aid, a visit with current students and special performances by Center for Performing Arts ensembles.

High school seniors and potential transfer students have the option to stay overnight in a residence hall.

UMobile also provides prospective students with the opportunity to schedule a private campus visit Mondays through Fridays. In addition, group tours are available for prospective students from churches, schools and other organizations. (UMobile)

UPCOMING VISIT DAYS

Sept. 18, 2015 / Oct. 16, 2015

Dec. 4, 2015 / Jan. 29, 2016 / March 18, 2016

Register for a UMobile Visit Day or private tour online at www.umobile.edu/visit or call Enrollment Services at 251-442-2222 to arrange a group tour.



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

The first fully online degree program, the bachelor of science in marketplace ministry, started in January 2015. New for Fall 2015 are the online bachelor of business administration, the master of arts in education and the associate of science in general studies. UMobile is in the process of adding more online degrees that have the same integrity and high standards as programs held on campus, giving adult students options that are flexible, affordable and faith based. Information about the online degree programs can be found at learnonline.umobile.edu or by calling the university's adult and professional studies office at 251-442-2662.

Real-world experiences

As more than 22 ensembles in the Center for Performing Arts/School of Music and School of Worship Leadership travel locally and internationally, students spread the gospel message and gain experience that directly translates to their future careers. The summer tour by Voices of Mobile vocal ensemble included Cuba, China and the Philippines, and RamCorps has been invited to perform in October on the Duck Commander Cruise.

Opportunities for global internships and international service projects have expanded for intercultural studies majors

in the School of Christian Ministries. During the past three summers, intercultural studies students have completed internships in Europe, the Philippines, South Korea, Guatemala, Peru, Ukraine, India and Israel.

Interns have gained experience as logistics coordinators for church missions teams, urban ministry leaders for local multicultural programs and youth ministry coordinators overseas where they taught English as a Second Language.

Service opportunities

A common thread that runs throughout the more than 40 majors taught at UMobile is the concept of Christian service. The uni-

versity emphasizes this to students and the community through its annual Project Serve. Each September, the university cancels classes so teams of students, faculty and staff can serve with their academic areas at more than 60 locations in two Alabama counties. The emphasis on service continues throughout the year during school breaks as student teams work with church planters through the North American Mission Board or immerse themselves in a 48-hour inner-city missions experience. A new program in the School of Christian Ministries has established year-long ministry teams, which last year logged more than 22,000 volunteer hours. (UMobile)

Discover more about the University of Mobile and upcoming events at www.umobile.edu, sign up for our free University of Mobile Magazine at umobilemagazine.com or call us at 251-442-2222 or 1-800-WIN-RAMS.

**The University of Mobile
is recognized in America's Best Christian Colleges.**

Important tips for parents of students

By Jeffrey Reed
Director, LifeWay Kids Ministry

Maybe my kids are weird but I have been surprised to learn they can't wait to start school. In fact as soon as school ended back in June, they were already talking about the teachers they would have in the upcoming year and the activities in which they would

participate. I have kids in all age groups: elementary, preteen and teenagers. They all look forward to going back.

What does this look like for you? Are your kids anxious to return to school?

I believe school is another outlet to make disciples for Jesus. We want our kids to live missionally and shape the culture around

them. Having said that, we also want them to enjoy the process.

Here are five tips that might serve parents well in launching into the new school year.

1. Consider summer as a time to recharge for the real work ahead.

We all love vacation time, right? But we also know we need to get back to work when the school year rolls around. The work of sharing the gospel and being ambassadors for Christ is a year-round task but it's especially important during the school year because there are so many opportunities for our kids to interact with others. So be sure to regularly teach your kids to think and live missionally.

2. Keep a rhythm.

It's always good to establish some family routines. Our family aims for a regular mealtime together. We allow some flexibility for the occasional practice, rehearsal or event, but we're committed to at least five meals together per week. My wife and I intentionally use this time to start spiritual conversations with our kids.

3. Pepper in some fun.

I love fun but not just for the sake of fun. Even during the

school year we plan day trips on the weekends. At least once a month we do something together as a family. No smartphones. No iPads. No DVD entertainment in the car. We travel together and hang out together. Surprisingly my teens still love this. I was expecting to hear things like, "This is stupid," or "Why can't I bring my friends?" But our kids have now observed how little time their friends actually spend with their families and have come to appreciate our time together. They might complain a little, but press in and stick with it.

4. Go to their school.

Your teens might be a little freaked out by this. I'm grateful mine are not. When I worked close to their schools, I went to school and had lunch with each of our four kids at least once a month. My younger kids love it. My heart often breaks when I hear other kids say, "I wish my dad did that." In those moments, I want to be those kids' dad too.

5. Set them up well.

This might seem a little unusual, but stay with me. I want my kids to be all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19). I want them to fit in so they might connect with as many kids as



possible so they might share the gospel. However, I'm not concerned that they have the coolest clothes or most expensive shoes just so they won't feel left out. In fact we try to stay tuned in to what's popular so we can sway our kids from simply coveting those things. It's gotten to a point with my own kids that they actually make fun of silly trends. They are the kids who push back when a style of clothing or an accessory starts to trend. Having said that, we will usually let our kids pick out some (reasonable) clothes, backpacks and other school items so they feel comfortable and confident as they try to make new friends and gain influence for God in their new surroundings.

Seek to make every day of the year about Jesus and you're on the right track. (BP)



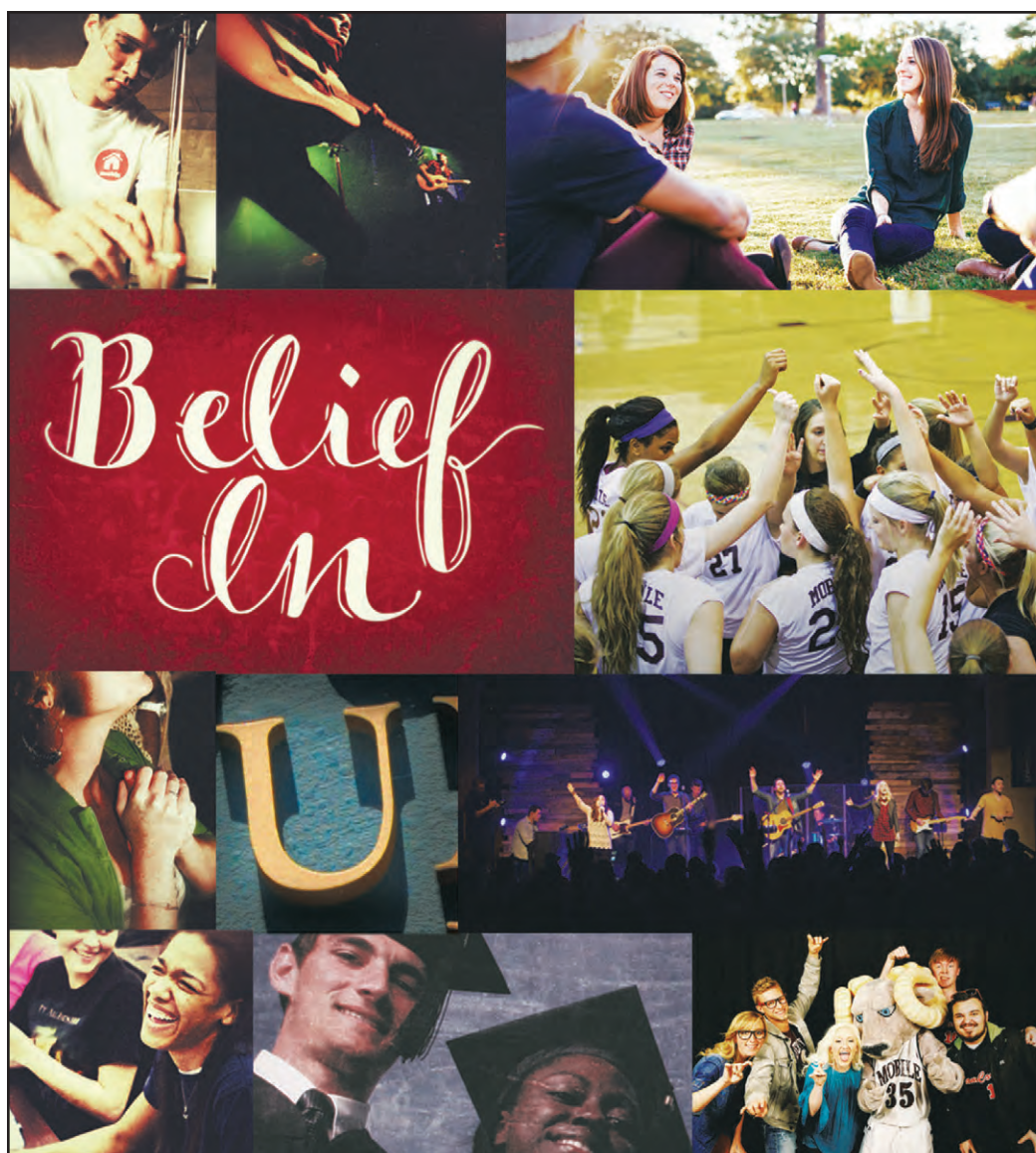
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*A \$2000 scholarship is available to new traditional undergraduate students who attend a UMobile Visit Day, apply for admissions, and enroll at UMobile. This scholarship awards \$250 per semester for up to 8 consecutive semesters, excluding the summer semester. Only one UMobile Visit Day Scholarship is available per person.

Parents should help children's focus be on mission of God

The beginning of the school year often comes with a variety of emotions from parents. There may be excitement, apprehension, fear, nervousness or even joy at the reality that the kids won't be home during the daytime hours anymore. If your student is in one of those big transition years — entering junior high or high school or beginning their senior year — you're probably working through all of those emotions at the same time.

You also want your student to excel academically, socially and in their extracurricular activities. This is the time when many parents talk about those things under the banner of helping "get them focused."

You don't mean to put additional pressure on your kids. You mean well. After all you just want them to be successful in those things. But is that what we're really called to do as parents — to help our kids become successful academically, socially, athletically and musically?

Those things are all good. The Bible doesn't speak against being successful in those areas. In fact it encourages us to do our best in

everything we do. But isn't there something in addition to those types of successes that we as Christian parents should be focusing our kids on?

As Christian parents we should be focusing our kids on the mission of God to take the gospel across the street and across the globe.

This school year try to help your student see the impact they can make for the Kingdom.

▶ Pray with them and encourage them to pray.

▶ Train them to be missionaries wherever they go, challenging them to look for opportunities to invite their friends to youth group, etc.

▶ Model for them what it's like to be a follower of Jesus all the time.

These are better than high achievement in every area at school — as good and as worthwhile as that is.

Yes, talk to them about the other stuff but don't make it No. 1 for them. After all, the other stuff exists partly to give them a platform to share the gospel and minister to the groups of people God gives them access to. (BP)

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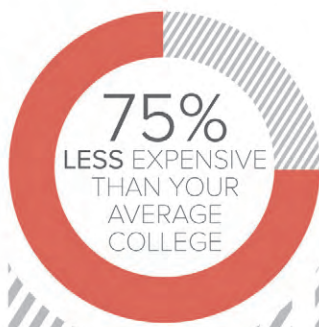
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Samford welcomes largest number of new undergraduates in school history this fall

The largest number of new undergraduates in school history, 1,000, will soon become part of the Samford University community in Birmingham. The number includes 810 entering freshmen whose credentials include an average ACT score of 26, a high school grade point average of 3.8 and a wealth of strong leadership experiences. They hail from 30 states and five countries.

Throughout the summer, Samford employees have prepared to welcome these new arrivals who will join upperclassmen and graduate students for a projected enrollment of more than 5,000. Fall semester classes begin for most Aug. 17.

As construction crews put final touches on the new four-story Brock School of Business building, College of Health Sciences personnel readied to welcome scores of students to new and expanded programs.

'Mission remains the same'

"While change, including enrollment growth and new facilities and programs, encompasses so much of our work at Samford these days, it is reassuring to know that the institution's mission remains the same," Samford President Andrew Westmoreland said.

"Our primary task is to put gifted, caring faculty members in regular contact with inquisitive, hopeful students, anticipating that the outcome will be a blessing to humankind through our witness of the love of God."

An early semester highlight for many will be the opening of the new \$25 million, 76,623-square-foot business school building.

The building includes classrooms with advanced audiovisual capabilities and a portfolio management room with Bloomberg data terminals. An academic programs suite includes personal counseling and advisement space for students, an internship office and employer interview rooms. The layout encourages both independent and collaborative learning,

with breakout rooms to foster team projects and case analysis by groups, and two instructional computer lab rooms.

A grand opening celebration will be Sept. 4 at 1 p.m. The public is invited.

The College of Health Sciences celebrates the addition of more than 10 new degrees, majors and programs including undergraduate majors in communication sciences and disorders, health sciences, public health and pharmacy studies. At the graduate level, the college introduced a dietetic internship; master's degrees in athletic training, public health, social work and speech language pathology; and a doctor of physical therapy degree.

New master of public health programs, coordinated with doctor of pharmacy and dietetic internship programs, will provide students expanded career opportunities after graduation. Additional programs are currently in development for the college, which includes Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing, McWhorter School of Pharmacy,

An early semester highlight will be the opening of the new \$25 million, 76,623-square-foot Brock School of Business building.



Photo courtesy of Samford University

Most Samford students will begin fall semester classes on Aug. 17.

School of Health Professions and School of Public Health.

Students and faculty in Samford's other academic units also anticipate another great academic year as many celebrate special summer accomplishments.

The School of the Arts looks forward to another year of stellar performances by students and visiting artists.

And this summer a group of recent interior architecture graduates gave a performance of a lifetime, although not on a stage, as they renovated the main assembly building at Camp Chacaucó, a large church camp in Ecuador's rural Andes mountains. As the final step of their senior project, they provided onsite leadership for the construction process and undertook demolition, wall and floor framing, furniture crafting, electrical wiring and other pursuits. While laboring alongside Ecuadorian coworkers, they learned to communicate across cultural boundaries and to appreciate distinctive approaches to tasks while also valuing new friendships.

Participant Anna Holt said that as a freshman she never thought she could share the gospel through interior architecture. "Now as a Samford graduate I'm confident that the Lord called me to study interior architecture in order to help others see the goodness of Christ's steadfast love and His plans to prosper all His children," Holt said.

New cohort

This fall the Howard College of Arts and Sciences will welcome its first cohort of academically talented and financially at-risk transfer students from local community colleges as part of a five-year National Science Foundation-funded program to help those students complete degrees in fields of biology, environmental science, chemistry and biochemistry.

The college will host several events of interest this fall. Celebrated archaeologist, professor and author Joan Breton Connelly will present a free public lecture Oct. 29 at 7 p.m. The Center for Science and

Religion will host a conference on "Transhumanism and the Church: Theological Reflections on Technology and Human Enhancement" on Sept. 24-26.

Beeson Divinity School's fall semester chapel series "Finkenwalde: In the School of Bonhoeffer" will focus on the worship of God and life together in the preparation of God-called people to serve as ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Finkenwalde Day

On Sept. 15, designated Finkenwalde Day, the Beeson community will observe a day of prayer, meditation, worship, singing, recreation, fellowship at the table and other activities arising from life together.

Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education will culminate its year-long 100th anniversary observance with a celebration dinner to recognize 100 of its graduates with the inaugural Learning for Life Award. The event will be part of Homecoming activities Nov. 7. Honorees will represent the field of teacher preparation as well as other academic areas that have been part of the education program since its founding in 1915. Proceeds will benefit education scholarship funds.

Cumberland School of Law enrolls its first cohort of students in the new master of science in health law and policy program this fall. The 20 students in the online program will develop marketable expertise in the areas of health law, regulatory affairs, public policy, insurance and health-care administration — with particular emphasis on health-care compliance. Faculty from Cumberland and the College of Health Sciences will guide the program.

Overall the university continues to celebrate the late 2014 completion of the largest fundraising effort in Samford history. Gifts and pledges totaling more than \$200 million arrived in amounts ranging from 36 cents to \$13.4 million. The campaign total includes \$33.7 million from the cooperative offerings of Alabama Baptist State Convention churches. (Samford)

Micah Fellows to support Samford mission

Recruitment is underway for prospective freshmen interested in Samford University's new Micah Fellows Program for Christian Service and Community Engagement. The program will enroll its first cadre of Micah Fellows in fall 2016.

Developed by the University Fellows office and the Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership, the initiative supports the university's mission to foster academic, career and ethical competency while encouraging social and civic responsibility and service to others.

Micah Fellows will commit to work-

ing in specific low-income Birmingham neighborhoods while at Samford and take recommended coursework in a variety of disciplines and a series of cadres that cover conceptions of justice, mercy and humility.

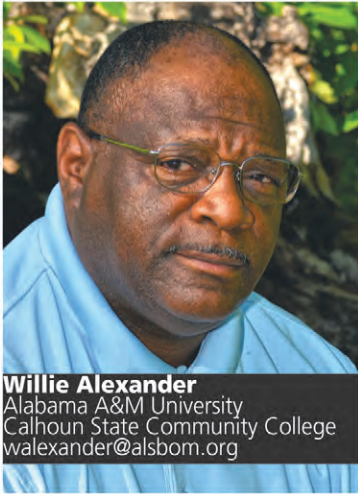
The four-year program is grounded in the wisdom of Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

For more information, contact the University Fellows office at 205-726-4203. (Samford)

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Battle plan of prayer

'War Room' focuses on importance of prayer within family

By Anna Keller
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

On Aug. 28 the makers of "Fireproof" and "Courageous" will release a new Christian film called "War Room." The film — directed by Alex Kendrick and produced by Stephen Kendrick — focuses on spreading a message of the importance of prayer within a family.

The film's main characters — Tony and Elizabeth Jordan — seem to have it all, but the movie soon reveals that the Jordans' marriage is crumbling. Tony begins flirting with temptation, and Elizabeth becomes more and more bitter. However, things take a turn when Elizabeth meets a woman who challenges her to set up a "war room" and a battle plan of prayer to save her marriage and keep her family together.

Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, saw the premiere of "War Room" with his wife at the Southern Baptist Convention in Columbus, Ohio, in June.

"We were really moved as far as its message of the power of prayer and restoring relationships, particularly marriage."

Cox was so inspired by the film's message that he's planned for his church to rent out a movie theater Aug. 30 to share the movie with both church and community members.

"With 'War Room,' we want married couples — especially young marrieds — to go to see the power of prayer and how prayer works," Cox said. "That's the war room where we battle not just (for) relationships, but (for) life."

Cox said Liberty Baptist's goal is to use this movie event as an outreach to couples in their community. The church will offer free child care (at Liberty) and then provide transportation from the church to Birmingham for the movie. He said they plan to distribute a survey form to participants while they're in the theater



Photo courtesy of AFFIRM Films/Provident Films

Clara (left, played by Karen Abercrombie) and Elizabeth (played by Priscilla Shirer) pray together during a scene in the upcoming movie 'War Room,' which is set to be released Aug. 28.

so they can get a sense of who was a part of the event and have a way to get in touch with non-church members afterward.

Rich Peluso, senior vice president of AFFIRM Films, said, "Churches nationwide are rallying

around 'War Room' as a movie that shows prayer can change lives and hearts. The response as we approach our Aug. 28 release date is phenomenal."

And this isn't Liberty's first outreach tied to a Kendrick Brothers film. They've hosted screenings for both "Fireproof"

and "Courageous" as well. With "Fireproof" the church rented out a theater like they're doing for "War Room," but with "Courageous" the church got the rights to show the movie in their church building.

'Good support'

Cox said, "We've had good support from our church family on turnout for these screenings, and certainly these movies have all been positively embraced. Hopefully this screening will lead to an invitation to worship with us. We like to reach out in our community and provide an opportunity for people to have a night out and let them go to a movie." ☺

For more information on "War Room," visit warroomthemovie.com.

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Compiled from Wire Services



Disputed cross memorial sold to private group

SAN DIEGO, California — One of the nation's longest-running conflicts between church and state may end in a win-win resolution with the sale of a 43-foot cross located on public land to a private association.

The U.S. Department of Defense sold the half-acre parcel atop Mount Soledad in San Diego, California, July 17 for \$1.5 million to the Mount Soledad Memorial Association, a nonprofit entity that has overseen maintenance and administration of the Mount Soledad Veterans Memorial since its inception in 1954.

Some observers say the property transfer, authorized in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 signed by President Barack Obama in December 2014, could finally resolve a 25-year legal dispute. In 2011 the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals determined the monument to be a clear violation of the First Amendment ban on government establishment of religion.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal, leaving the appellate court's ruling in place and sending the case to lower courts for resolution. A district judge ruled in December 2013 that the cross must come down within 90 days but stayed the order pending an appeal. The federal government said it would appeal the 9th Circuit ruling at the proper time but put it on hold when the land transfer was suggested in 2014. (BNG)

Court rules pharmacy owners must violate their faith

SEATTLE, Washington — Pharmacies in Washington State must provide emergency contraceptives such as the morning-after pill even if such services violate their conscience, according to a federal appeals court ruling July 23.

"Today's decision is unfortunate," said Luke Goodrich, deputy general counsel of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. "The government has no business punishing citizens solely because of their religious beliefs."

The decision in the case — which concerned Ralph's Thriftway in Olympia and two pharmacists — overturned a 2012 district court ruling that said the state's regulation violated the pharmacy owners' religious freedom. The regulation allows pharmacies to refer patients elsewhere for a wide variety of business, economic and convenience reasons — such as when a drug is unprofitable, attracts an undesirable clientele or falls outside the pharmacy's chosen business niche. But it makes it illegal to refer patients for reasons of conscience. (Becket Fund, TAB)



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With her walking stick at her side, Ahbee Orton joins other marching band members for practice at Florence High School after a summer that included a missions trip to South Dakota.

'Amazing moment'

Blind Alabama student teaches VBS for Lakota children

The Lakota children in South Dakota were rambunctious. School was out, and a team of teenagers and their leaders from Alabama had come to lead Vacation Bible School (VBS).

When Ahbee Orton positioned herself in front of the class at First Baptist Church, Eagle Butte, South Dakota, the children became quiet and attentive. The 15-year-old ethnic Chinese is hardly a master teacher or experienced in classroom discipline — she had never taught a Bible study before.

She opened a large notebook she had meticulously prepared long before arriving in South Dakota. With her fingers, she began to scan the coded bumps on the paper. Blind since birth, she was reading braille.

"It was an amazing moment," said Ryan Tyler, youth minister at Orton's church, Highland Baptist Church, Florence.

"They had gone from jumping off the walls to sitting down because this young lady is different.

They wanted to hear what she had to say and how she said it," Tyler recounted.

Ben Farrar, pastor of First, Eagle Butte, for four years, marveled at how Orton's teaching captivated the children. "They had never seen anything like braille in their life," Farrar said.

Listening well

Apparently the Lakota children listened well to Orton. When she posed various questions to the children, they were able to answer each one.

Orton's adoptive parents, Joy and Paul Orton, have no information about her birth family in China. When they adopted her at age 4, they only knew that the orphanage received Ahbee Orton after someone found her in a marketplace.

The Ortons named her Gabriella, but their new child was calling herself Ahbee, which is a derivative of her Chinese name. From the beginning, they could tell she was independent.

After arriving in Alabama, she began using a white cane. Later

the family arranged for her to get a seeing-eye dog, which she used for years until announcing one day that she was relying too much on the animal.

"I'm better off without the dog and using my walking stick," Ahbee Orton stated. "It challenges me more." The family returned the dog for re-training to serve another person.

The Ortons began to fall in love with their future daughter from the start of the challenging adoption process.

"If a family has a child who is born blind there is some grief," Joy Orton said. "But it was not a disaster or tragedy for us."

The Ortons helped their daughter learn skills that would make blindness more of a nuisance or inconvenience than a disability.

"She has chores at home. She is very trustworthy and responsible," Joy Orton said. "If that's her job to feed the dog or empty the dishwasher, she will do it."

Soon after adopting, the Ortons had two biological daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah, who are now 9 and 6. Ahbee Orton and her



Photo by Noah Tidmore

family had been on other missions trips together, but this was the first time she had gone without either parent. Even as Ahbee Orton was learning more about her capabilities and independence, the Highland Baptist youth group also was learning about her as a person and her challenges.

New knowledge

For Tyler, even with 25 years of experience as a youth minister, helping Ahbee Orton assimilate into the youth group brought new experiences. For instance the other students didn't immediately realize that Ahbee Orton could hear them.

"At first it was difficult," Tyler said. "They thought that because

she couldn't see them, she didn't know they were there."

If people ask her questions, Ahbee Orton said the inquiries are predictable. "What's that stick? What do you use it for? Why do you have it?"

"I prefer them to ask and come straight up to me," she said.

With a growing understanding among other Highland teens about Ahbee Orton's realities, Tyler had no hesitation about her venture to South Dakota.

"I've seen her and how she does things and how our group has learned to be aware of situations to head off so Ahbee doesn't have any major difficulty," Tyler said.

As Ahbee Orton puts it, "I think the other kids in the youth group have a better understanding of what I can do."

Joy and Paul Orton met at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, after Joy Orton had served one term as a Journeyman with the International Mission Board. Missions is central to their family.

While 15-year-olds rarely know definitively what their career choice might be, Joy Orton believes that the South Dakota trip will "strengthen (Ahbee's) interest in ministry."

She starts high school this fall in Florence where she will play the synthesizer in the marching band. She's near the top of her class academically, Joy Orton said, and her language arts skills are outstanding.

Ahbee Orton's birthday was during the missions trip, so leaders prepared a cake with candles for her to blow out.

Tyler told the youth, "The reason we get to celebrate this moment is that somebody thought that a blind girl was not worth keeping. But the Ortons brought her to us.

"She is not just surviving in our midst — she is thriving amongst us." (BP)



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New rules for faith-based service providers

The White House announced proposed rules Aug. 5 from nine federal agencies clarifying rights and responsibilities of faith-based and community organizations receiving taxpayer funds.

The proposals, which must pass through a 60-day period of public comment before being finalized, implement a 2010 executive order by President Barack Obama to reform the relationship between religious bodies and government entities. The order adopted recommendations made by the first President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships intended to strengthen the effectiveness, constitutional and legal footing of government contracts with faith-based providers of social services.

"The proposed rules clarify the

principle that organizations offering explicitly religious activities may not subsidize those activities with direct federal financial assistance and must separate such activities in time or location from programs supported with direct federal financial assistance," Melissa Rogers, director of the White House office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said in a White House blog post announcing the proposed rule changes. "For example if a faith-based provider offers a Bible study as well as a federally supported job training program, the Bible study must be privately funded and separated in time or location from the job training program."

Rogers, a Baptist who once worked for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, said the rules also clarify that people

who receive benefits supported by direct financial federal assistance cannot be discriminated against because of religious belief or be required to participate in any religious activities in exchange for receiving a social service.

Religious safeguards

They also include safeguards to ensure that religious organizations can compete fairly with secular nonprofits in qualifying for federal aid without surrendering their religious identity. Providers are entitled to use religious terms in their organizational names and include religious terms in their mission statements. The rules also set forth definitions for "direct" and "indirect" federal financial assistance, terms that have been a source of confusion for some providers in the past. (BNG)

Birmingham mayor visits Vatican, pledges action

Birmingham Mayor William Bell was 1 of about 60 mayors from around the globe who gathered July 21 at the Vatican to sign a declaration pledging action on climate change and human trafficking.

Mayors invited to the Vatican attended a two-day conference titled "Modern Slavery and Climate Change," following Pope Francis' environmental encyclical released in June.



BELL

"As mayors we commit ourselves to building in our cities and urban settlements the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reducing their exposure to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters, which foster human trafficking and dangerous forced migration," the resolution reads.

Bell said he was pleased to heed the Vatican's call for an end to modern-day slavery, according to al.com.

"Now is the time for us to heed the clarion call of Pope Francis to work together to end the universal [suffering] of individuals who are being victimized by human trafficking," he said in his remarks to those gathered at the Vatican. (RNS, TAB)

Human trafficking

The pledge specified bringing an end to "trafficking and all forms of modern slavery," including prostitution and the selling of human organs.

In addition to Bell mayors from nine other U.S. cities signed the declaration.

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ERLC's 'The Gospel and Politics' conference focuses on importance of evangelical political engagement

Christians often instinctively know that politics matter but don't know how to respond in a way that is faithful to the gospel."

That thought was part of the inspiration for the second annual Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) national conference held Aug. 5 at the Music City Center in Nashville with the theme "The Gospel and Politics."

More than 630 participants were equipped for gospel-centered political engagement after hearing from speakers at the one-day conference. ERLC's conference immediately followed the Send North America Conference, also in Nashville (see story, page 3).

The Church plays an important role in evangelical political engagement, speakers said.

'Shaped by Scripture'

Christians "speak from consciences shaped by Scripture," said Russell Moore, ERLC president. Those consciences are vital when engaging the political scene in a gospel-centered way. "If we are going to go forward in the 21st Century, we must understand that (the Church) is of paramount importance in our mission.

"The worshipping, sending community carries with it

a distinctiveness that gives us everything we have to say to the outside world."

A shift to a more gracious approach in political engagement does not equal a shift in convictions, said Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, who spoke at the conference.

"When I would meet with homosexuals or gay activists, what some Christian leadership accused me of was losing my principles," Daly told participants. "They had no clue what was going on in the meetings."

Seeds were being planted for gospel witness, Daly said. "And to have somebody rail against you because you're doing the gospel, there's something not healthy about that. ... We don't give up our principles to have a nice, kind, gentle tone."

J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, provided four myths younger pastors in particular must avoid in regards to political engagement.

"Secondary political ideals are matters of first importance," he cited as the first myth.

Greear said that he tells his church, "I might be wrong on my position about global warming, but I am not wrong about the gospel. And I do not want my opinion on the first thing to get in the way of my preaching

about the second thing."

The other myths to be avoided, he said, are:

▶ Christian truth does not apply to politics.

▶ There is never a time to take a controversial political stand.

▶ We see everything clearly.

Regarding when to address issues from the pulpit, D.A. Horton, church planter and national coordinator for urban student missions for the North American Mission Board, said, "Anytime the common good of humanity is under attack and human flourishing is

being oppressed, then I believe that's a red flag that we need to be addressing" from God's Word.

To view videos of "The Gospel and Politics" conference, visit www.erc.com/videos.

Jimmy Scroggins, pastor of Family Church, West Palm Beach, Florida, said, "We're not going to be able to speak to every single issue with the same force."

David Platt, president of the International Mission Board, applied the gospel to the human trafficking crisis.

Acknowledging there are no easy answers and no simple solutions to the epidemic, Platt

said, "Fighting slavery begins with believing in the gospel."

Jesus "is the pursuing Savior, and as men and women who are identified with Him we need to pursue the enslaved," said Platt, who added traffickers and pornography users also need the gospel.

Other speakers included Ross Douhat, columnist for *The New York Times*; author Rod Dreher; Erick Erickson, editor of RedState.com; Michael Gerson, columnist for *The Washington Post*; Jennifer Marshall, vice president at the Heritage Foundation; and Karen Swallow Prior, author and English professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. (BP, TAB)

Gov. Bentley defunds Planned Parenthood

Three days after a vote to defund Planned Parenthood failed in the U.S. Senate, Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley announced Aug. 6 he was terminating an agreement between Alabama Medicaid Agency and Planned Parenthood (PP).

The move came after the release of several undercover videos dealing with PP's use of fetal parts. The videos have garnered outrage from pro-life groups and individuals and amassed a swell of outrage on social media and in public rallies.

"As a doctor and Alabama's governor, the issue of human life, from conception to birth and beyond, is extremely important," Bentley said, according to al.com. "I respect human life and do not want Alabama to be associated with an organization that does not."

The letter Bentley sent to PP states that if the entity opposes the decision, it has 60 days to apply for a hearing.


In the national arena, the fight over PP's funding shifts to a must-pass government funding

measure this fall, according to CNN.com.

The Senate's move to defund failed Aug. 3, with the measure only getting 53 of the 60 votes required to bar federal funds.

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said, "I am disappointed that the Senate did not show the moral leadership to stop funding this violence."

He urged Christians to visit senate.gov to see how each senator voted. (TAB)






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Religious liberty

Recent survey shows atheists more welcome than Muslims in US

Americans believe firmly in religious freedom but think atheists are more welcome than Muslims in the United States, Nashville-based LifeWay Research finds.

More than 90 percent say people should be free to choose and practice religious beliefs. Nearly 7 in 10 call America a nation of many religions.

Yet Americans acknowledge the nation embraces Christians and Jews more heartily than atheists or Muslims. While 92 percent agree America is a welcoming place for Christians and 87 percent agree for Jews, the number drops to 67 percent for atheists. LifeWay released the study July 29 based on a survey taken in 2014.

Muslims are the least welcome, in Americans' estimation. Fifty-seven percent say America is a welcoming place for Muslims and 35 percent believe it is not.

"Americans are deeply committed to religious liberty, but they can look at today's culture and see America does not always welcome everyone," said Scott McConnell, LifeWay Research vice president. "Welcoming people of all religions means being open to both immigrants of other faiths and citizens who choose to change their beliefs."

In a phone survey of 1,000 Americans, LifeWay found nearly 9 in 10 (88 percent)

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America is a welcoming place for ...



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believe Americans have religious freedom.

Americans are uncertain whether the growing Muslim population will be welcome. Unease has surfaced in widespread disputes over mosque construction and in a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision that Abercrombie & Fitch could not refuse to hire a Muslim woman because of her headscarf.

Christians are more likely than nonreligious Americans to believe Muslims are welcome, according to the LifeWay survey.

Among atheists, agnostics and those with no religious preference, less than half (47 percent) say America is a welcoming place for Muslims. In contrast 6 in 10 Christians believe Muslims are welcome, a viewpoint held most strongly by Catholics at 68 percent.

As for atheists, two-thirds (67 percent) of Christians and 78 percent of those in other religions say America is a welcoming place for atheists, but that view is shared by only 62 percent of the nonreligious. (BP)

TELL US ABOUT YOUR MISSIONS EXPERIENCE



Photo courtesy of Marty Barber

Marty Barber ministers to children in Haiti.

25-year-old ministers in Haiti

My name is Marty Barber and I am 25 years old. I graduated from Liberty University in May with a bachelor of science in religion. I attend Iron City Baptist Church, Anniston.

I was called to preach in 2012 and called to missions in early 2013.

In July 2013, I made my first trip to Haiti, then again in September 2014 and most recently this summer.

During the trip this summer, we repaired a water well that was broken and helped with medical care. We held crusades three nights in Fontal and two nights in Jacmel City. We also held Vacation Bible School (VBS) for the kids of Fontal.

The defining moment of the trip was when I played soccer with the kids after VBS. That experience interacting with the kids on a personal level was not only good for the kids, but it also was something that changed the course of how I view missions work.

Relationships are very important in the ministry. The language barrier nor the race barrier matters when relationships are built. God breaks down those barriers and when He does, it is one of the most beautiful things you will ever see.

My life has been changed radically. The way I view missions and ministry has been forever changed. I am thankful God called me to Haiti. He has blessed me so much more than I could have ever imagined. I am so excited to see what He has in store in the future. 🙏

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Mount Enon Baptist Church, rural Midland City, Alabama, has an opening for bivocational pastor. Contact Lomax Kelly at 334-795-6679 and/or send resumé to: alexalee01@hotmail.com.

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County Line Baptist Church, County Line, Alabama, is looking for a bivocational pastor. We are a small church who loves the Lord who has been together since 1897. Send resumé to: 74 Smith Mill Rd., Attn: Pulpit Committee, Trafford, AL 35172.

WORSHIP PASTOR

FBC Mount Sterling, Kentucky, seeks full-time worship pastor. Preferred candidate will lead worship with guitar or keyboard. Ministry description is available at www.fbcmtsterling.com. Send resumé and worship video to: fbcworshippastorsearch@roadrunner.com.

Deadline for submission is Aug. 30.

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, accepting resúmes for minister of music. Email resúmes and hyperlinks to YouTube sites with samples to: secretarybellevue@gmail.com, or mail resúmes and DVDs to: 150 Noccalula Dr., Gadsden, AL 35904.

MINISTER OF YOUTH

East Highland Baptist Church in Hartselle is accepting resúmes for a bivocational youth minister. Send resúmes via email to: searchcommitteeehbc@gmail.com.

YOUTH/CHILDREN'S PASTOR

Nazareth Baptist Church, located in Rainsville, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a youth/children's pastor. Candidates for the position must have a passion for reaching and discipling the youth/children with a strong emphasis on reaching families through this ministry. Must also

be a strong leader and communicator, have excellent organization skills and demonstrate a faithful walk with the Lord being an example to the youth/children. Youth experience is preferred. Our church asks that you be in prayer for God's direction as we pray for the one He will send. Send resúmes to: nazarethoffice@farmerstel.com, or mail them to: Nazareth Baptist Church, P.O. Box 541, Rainsville, AL 35986.

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A Certain Trumpet

Sermons by Alabama Baptists

Psalm 23 series

Psalm 23:1 – Relationship With the Lord

Years ago I went to watch my favorite professional baseball team with a friend. The stadium was awesome. The box seats were the best. The food was out of this world. I was living it up. My buddy pointed to a huge diamond ring on his finger and mentioned the value of our box seats. Then he asked, “Do you know why I have these things?” I thought that was a trick question.

So I was stunned at his answer while I tried to choke down the last bite of my gourmet burger. “Because I can.” That was the punch line and the bottom line.

The rest of the night stunk. The fun was gone. I felt like it was Halloween and I had been tricked, not treated. I later concluded our time together was not about friendship-building as much as it was about impression-making. I have thought about that experience often and realized that I was much the same as my fellow baseball fan. I was just as driven to impress as he was. The difference was that I was not honest about it. After that night at the stadium, I began to inventory my heart more carefully.

The ageless bent of the human heart is for “something more.” More experiences, friendships, romance, cash, reputation, fame or achievement has been, and is, the insatiable longing of every person’s soul. These are mere samplings of countless life pursuits that capture hungry hearts and leave them that way — hungry and restless.

‘Something more’

Beyond the measurable is the inner-heart need to be unconditionally loved and protected. People are wired with the need for that “something more.” Span the culture gap from the celebrated to the forgotten, from the successful to the impoverished, and there is a commonality that unites the whole of humankind. It is the want to be loved and to be protected.

For many the means of satisfying the urge for “something more” has a deep heart origin but a surprisingly short shelf life. Whatever the gain, soul emptiness is the ultimate outcome. We’ve all been there. The lesson is hard to learn and the truth difficult to dismiss. We settle for the passing while longing for the permanent. We have no other recourse, it seems, but



By Bob Weber

Bob Weber is a former church planter and now serves as pastor of Valley Creek Baptist Church, Hueytown. He and his wife of 37 years, Charlette, have five children.

to continue living the cycle of frustration far from the elusive prize of true and lasting contentment.

Consider the most familiar of the Psalms found in your Bible. You have heard it plenty of times. You most likely can quote it without ever realizing that you have it memorized, especially that first verse, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1).

Without question, this is the pearl of the Psalms. It is the expression of the heart of a man who experienced the inner contentment that people everywhere pursue. By the way, he was a king. King David ruled a nation. He knew what it was like to succeed, but being king had its headaches just like your daily grind at the workplace or household does.

David knew about shepherds. He had been one as a boy (1 Sam. 16:11, 17:28). He knew sheep had a stubborn streak, straying off and unknowingly exposing themselves to danger for the sake of appetite. David knew the life and the wellbeing of each sheep required a shepherd’s constant attention. Sheep were familiar with the sound of their shepherd’s voice, drawn by a call or even the tone of a shrill whistle. It was common for shepherds to name each sheep of their flock and to comfort or correct any by hoisting them up and carrying them across their shoulders.

The shepherd took his responsibility personally and seriously. Each sheep was tended to with care, led to areas of lush pasture and refreshing drink and protected from vicious attack of predators. Shepherds commonly watched over their flocks during the midnight hours, ensuring their protection from thieves. The occupation of shepherding was hazardous and strenuous. But to the shepherd, his flock was worth every ounce of concern and toil.

The first five words of Psalm 23 illustrate what David knew to be true as he considered his own relationship to God. It was God who

provided for the king’s every need. It was God who protected David from his enemies. It was God who lovingly pursued David when he strayed. Those five words of this infamous Psalm describe the Good Shepherd’s love for His sheep. To be loved like that, who could ask or want for more?

Jesus commonly used the metaphor of the shepherd to describe His profound affection for His own: “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd sacrifices His life for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and they know Me. My sheep listen to My voice; I know them and they follow Me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish” (John 10:11, 14, 27).

Protector and provider

The shepherd imagery challenges the Western mindset. Shepherds were not weaklings, deficient of strength or skill. Shepherds were compassionate and courageous, committed to protecting and providing for their own flock at the cost of their own lives. That is exactly what Jesus did when He laid down His life for you. Willingly, lovingly and sacrificially, He offered up Himself to provide for your greatest need, to give you grace and to protect you from your greatest fear: death.

David personalizes this Psalm from the outset: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” There’s nothing abstract or fuzzy about that. You too can belong to the Good Shepherd. The first step is to admit what’s true. You know that all of your self-sufficiency has led you to dead ends, frustration, soul emptiness and even guilt. That is the reality of sin.

Then turn to Christ. Place your trust in the Shepherd who offered His life for yours so that your sin could be forever forgiven and your eternity forever secured. A sincere appeal to the Shepherd will be heard and responded to.

It’s true, when the Lord is your Shepherd, you will have all you need. Our most critical need is not for success, approval, things or experiences. Our greatest need is for the Shepherd’s love and protection. You know that. Deep in your heart you know that. Today do something about it. Entrust yourself to the Shepherd. He can be yours right now. He is the Shepherd who satisfies. That’s the guarantee of Psalm 23:1. 📖

25 years

First Priority continues to minister to students

The start of the 2015–2016 school year marks a milestone for First Priority, a Christian nonprofit that seeks to prepare and strengthen students to share the hope of Christ with others in their school. This year, it celebrates 25 years of ministry on public school campuses.

First Priority began in 1990 when Benny Proffitt, then minister of youth at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, realized that in order to reach teenagers for Christ youth ministers have to go where the students are instead of trying to get the students to come to them. Pair that with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding

students’ rights to begin student-led Christian clubs on campus, and First Priority was born.

Reaching students before they leave high school is vital, Proffitt said in a press release. “One in 145,000 comes to know Christ after high school. Now is the time to reach students.”

What started with six schools in the Birmingham area has grown to involve more than 200 schools and nearly 15,000 students weekly in Central Alabama alone. Statewide there are 184 schools involved. First Priority of America has thousands of campus clubs nationwide and First Priority Global has stretched to impact Europe, South America and Africa.

And the organization also has expanded to reach younger students through FPKids for elementary and intermediate students. In its third year, FPKids is in more than 45 schools in Alabama. (Maggie Walsh)

To learn more about First Priority, go to firstpriorityal.com.



“And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” 1 Cor. 14:8

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 16

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

REDEEMING JUDGMENT Revelation 9:1-12

Locusts Unleashed (1-3)

In Revelation 8:6-9:20, John bears witness to the seven trumpet judgments that will come upon the earth.

Most of them bear a striking resemblance to the plagues God brought upon Egypt in Exodus 7-11, but in Revelation 8:6-9:20 the plagues have been intensified.

The plagues on Egypt were types of judgments to come.

For example in Exodus 9:18-35, God sends thunder, hail and fire upon the earth, decimating Egypt's vegetation. But God did not harm the land of Goshen where Israel resided, for "God makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel" (Ex. 11:7).

Then in Revelation 8:7 the first angel blows his trumpet and hail and fire mixed with blood are hurled down to earth, burning up a third of the earth, a third of the trees and all the green grass.

This destruction is more widespread and severe than the judgment that came upon Egypt, thus showing that the former is a type of the latter.

In Revelation 9:1-3, John sees locusts coming out of a bottomless pit. This is similar to the plague of locusts that rained on Egypt and ate all the vegetation in the land (Ex. 10:1-20).

Although such damage was crippling, it only pales in comparison to what locusts in John's account will do to unbelievers.

Believers Protected (4)

Unlike the locusts in Egypt, the locusts in Revelation 9:4 will not harm the vegetation.

They will instead harm unbelievers (those not bearing the metaphorical seal

of God). But notice how they only target unbelievers.

Those that follow Jesus will be spared. This is similar to the way the plague of hail in Exodus 9 did not harm God's people, only the Egyptians.

In the same way the locusts of which John testifies will only harm unbelievers.

Death Sought (5-6)

The locusts were allowed to torment the wicked for five months. The torment they will receive will be like that of a scorpion.

Can you imagine being stung repeatedly by a scorpion over a period of five months? Do you think you would have desired relief?

Unbelievers who will come under this judgment will desire liberation from their anguish, but they will not find it. Their anguish will be so great that they will seek death, but it will evade them.

Judgment Administered (7-12)

These locusts will be like horses prepared for battle. They will have tails like scorpions, which they will use to sting people for five months.

But again such torture will be reserved for those who have not bowed to Jesus.

The vision of this trumpet judgment should make us all tremble.

Who would want to endure such torture? Who would want to endure so much agony?

The good news is that Christians, like the Israelites in Egypt, will be spared.

They will not endure the agonies that these scorpion-like locusts will bring upon those who refuse to trust in Jesus' substitutionary death for their sins.

But that should not make us proud or boastful. Instead it should move us to persevere in our faith and tell others of Jesus, whose blood will cover us (and can cover them) from this coming plague. ☞

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

RETURN TO UNITY Acts 4:31-37

On that evening of the first day of the week, the doors of the house where the disciples had met "were locked for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). As the Gospels come to a close, Jesus' 11 disciples huddled together in fear. They feared what would happen to them in the wake of Jesus' death — being associated with a crucified, so-called "failed" Messiah could have set them on the same path as Jesus. But the Gospels do not end with them hiding behind closed doors and failed promises. Rather each of the Gospels ends with a Great Commission.

Acts is written around the same time period as Luke's Gospel. In Acts 1:8, Luke links us back to the Great Commission — where the disciples are told to go into all the world. He also links back to the fulfillment of that Great Commission, which is made possible through the giving of the Holy Spirit. Luke envisions Pentecost as a reversal of the Tower of Babel. In Acts a tension exists between oneness, such as of vision, language and purpose, and multiplicity, or multiple groups, ethnicities and languages. Despite their differences these early believers were unified through prayer, through sharing with each other and through sacrifice.

Unity happens as we pray with the same focus and share with one another. (31-33)

These early believers were unified through their "koinonia," a Greek word that means "fellowship" or "communion" (Acts 2:42). Within this first-century community these early believers lived together, ate together, worked together and did life together. Possessions, personal property and personal wealth all went to the common good and they were

of "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32a).

Doing life together meant assembling in each other's homes, and the first churches were house churches. Meeting together in these shared spaces was just one way the Church demonstrated its unity.

Another aspect of koinonia was unceasing prayer. Acts portrays Peter and John praying at the temple at regular hours (2:46; 3:1; 5:12, 21, 42). The early prayers said by believers were likely not new prayers but rather prayers inherited from Judaism. These prayers would have included hymns and chants of the infancy narrative in Luke; these echoed the Old Testament from beginning to end. Gradually Christian prayer did center on recalling and praising what Jesus had done, reflecting increasing Christian distinctiveness.

Unity happens as we sacrifice for each other. (34-37)

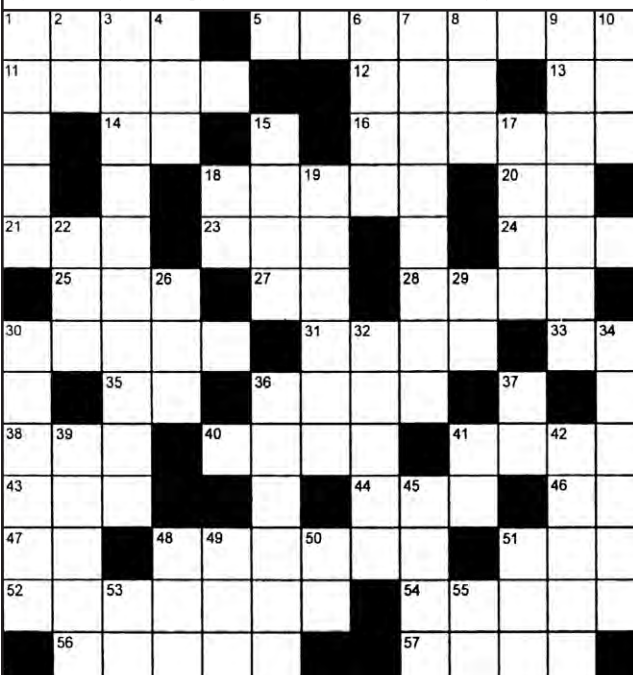
Another aspect of koinonia included the breaking of bread. From the Greek "Eucharisteo," meaning "to give thanks," the Eucharist was a sacred meal eaten only by those who believed in Jesus (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Recalling the Lord's death may echo the Jewish pattern of Passover, making present again the great salvation act.

This recollection shifted from the Exodus to the crucifixion/resurrection, and the "until He comes" reflects the eschatological outlook visible in the Lord's Prayer and the Maranatha ("Our Lord, Come") but now attached to a sacred meal. The risen Jesus showed Himself present at meals (Luke 24:30, 41-43; John 21:9-13; Mark 16:14) so that the disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:35).

Each of these aspects of koinonia was predicated upon the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection saved a people (Acts 2:29). It was Jesus' sacrifice, and their obedience to unity as a people, that helped usher the gospel into the whole world. ☞

Christian Crossword

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Across

- We ought to ___ God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)
- Son of Rachel. (Gen. 35:24)
- Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great ___. (Luke 4:38)
- Edible cereal grass.
- Fa, so, ___.
- Suffix indicating plural.
- Odorous.
- One of the 12 spies. (Num. 13:6)
- And hath raised up ___ horn of salvation. (Luke 1:69)
- Narrow beam of light.
- Rod for billiards.
- A time to rend, and a time to ___. (Eccles. 3:7)
- Pig pen.
- Los Angeles. (abbr.)
- Large rodents.
- Son of Jacob. (Gen. 30:13)
- Change direction.
- South Dakota. (abbr.)
- Give, and ___ shall be given unto you.

- (Luke 6:38)
- Simple.
- Light brown.
- ___ unthankful lepers healed. (Luke 17:17)
- Then shall the lame man ___. (Isa. 35:6)
- Or if he shall ask an ___, will he offer him a scorpion? (Luke 11:12)
- Cardiac Care Unit. (abbr.)
- Louisiana. (abbr.)
- North America. (abbr.)
- Put up thy sword into the ___. (John 18:11)
- Average amount.
- Reject.
- Come ye yourselves ___ into a desert place. (Mark 6:31)
- Loud.
- Inner surface of the hand.
- In ___ give thanks. (1 Thess. 5:18)
- Expression of affirmation.
- I put my hook in thy ___. (Isa. 37:29)
- Merry gathering. (Joel 2:1)
- Already eaten.
- Period of bad health.
- Negative vote.
- Pull.
- But many that are first shall be ___. (Mark 10:31)
- Cubic centimeter.
- Purge out therefore the old ___. (1 Cor. 5:7)
- And the Lord opened the mouth of the ___. (Num. 22:28)
- Nevertheless.
- Arkansas. (abbr.)
- ___ to the voice of my supplications. (Ps. 86:6)
- Build.
- To ___ from evil is understanding. (Job 28:28)
- Remember his ___ no more. (Prov. 31:7)
- Blessed is ___ that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matt. 21:9)
- Once more.
- Halle ___ jah.
- Sound an ___ in my holy mountain. (Joel 2:1)
- Roughen and redden.
- Science. (abbr.)
- Owens.
- Newspaper ___.
- Comrade.
- Do-re-mi-fa-___-la-ti-do.
- Ma and ___.

Down

- Let us ___ the sacrifice of praise. (Heb. 13:15)
- ___ ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Pet. 1:16)



“God promises that He will never leave or forsake His children. I want people to grab hold of that message and cling to that promise.”

Colton Dixon, Christian artist

Empty your cup



Photo courtesy of Sparrow Records
Colton Dixon

American Idol finalist Dixon encourages audiences to ‘work through noise,’ focus on God

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

After placing in the top seven on “American Idol” in 2012, Colton Dixon captured the attention of audiences as he used his platform for God’s glory.

Through it all, Dixon has remained unwavering in his commitment to shine the spotlight on Christ.

“When I was on ‘American Idol’ my goal was to show and spread God’s love,” Dixon said. “I learned it was so much more effective if I shared about what God had done in my life rather than telling people they weren’t living the right way.

“Most people already know they aren’t doing what is right, but they may be unaware of God’s redeeming love and forgiveness.”

Doors opened, flooded with responses

“God opened doors for me to share about my faith, whether it was through interviews or just not doing what everyone else was doing,” Dixon said. “It was so cool when people realized that I had something deeper and something they wanted in their own life.”

With his new album “Anchor,” Dixon desires to connect audiences to Christ as their source of strength and stability during life’s storms.

By sharing messages of hope and inspiration through his songs, Dixon has been flooded with responses from around the world.

“God promises that He will never leave or forsake His children,” Dixon noted. “I want people to grab hold of that message and cling to that promise. It’s a constant comfort during life’s toughest moments.

“My prayer for any album or any concert is that people would see Jesus in everything that I do. Yes my concerts are entertaining, but at the end of the night I

want people to have an encounter with God and leave different than they came. I want people to go deeper than they have before. I want people to grow closer to Jesus through these songs. That’s my constant prayer when I’m working on these songs and performing them.”

The successful release of “Anchor” follows Dixon’s 2013 groundbreaking debut “A Messenger,” which set the record for biggest first-week sales by a new solo Christian act and was the top-selling album of the year by a new Christian artist.

Dixon’s current single “Through All of It” points directly to God’s faithfulness in the midst of life’s trials.

As the song resonates with listeners around the globe, Dixon has created a social media campaign #ThroughAllOfIt. The campaign is designed to encourage people to share personal accounts of seeing God at work in the midst of trials and triumphs.

Dixon recently dedicated the music video for this song to the victims of the June 17 church shooting in Charleston. The video has reached nearly 2 million people on social media with countless testimonies of God’s unconditional love, forgiveness and grace.

While maintaining a busy touring schedule including Christian music festivals and tours such as WinterJam, Dixon performed concerts for more than 800,000 people in 2014.

Dixon’s music and message are being well received. In 2013, Dixon won a Dove Award for Best Rock/Contemporary Album of the Year. This fall he will join

Christian recording artists TobyMac and Britt Nicole on the “This Is Not a Test Tour.”

“During concerts I hope people are challenged to dig deeper and grow closer to God,” Dixon said.

“I was really inspired by an analogy that I heard from a youth pastor who used this illustration: imagine two cups of water. One cup represents you and anything you put before God — it could be entertainment, work or family. The water in the other cup represents God. What God wants to do with us is to fill us up with more of Him. God wants us to grow closer to Him and be stronger with Him.

“What I’ve realized is that if we truly want to experience the full potential of God’s love and

power at work in our lives, then we have to empty our cup first. We have to make more room for Him in our lives and surrender completely.”

‘He is worth it’

“This is something that I challenge myself with daily because I want to experience more of God each day. The only way that’s going to happen is if I direct all my attention on Him.

“Although there are distractions, you have to focus and work through the noise because He is worth it all.” ☞

“What God wants to do with us is to fill us up with more of Him. ... The only way that’s going to happen is if I direct all my attention on Him.”

Colton Dixon
Christian artist

10 years later

Aug. 29 marks decade since Hurricane Katrina forever changed New Orleans

By Joe McKeever
Special to Baptist Press

From the divine perspective, 10 years is a blip, one nanosecond in a timeless eternity.

For us earthlings, it's one-eighth of a life expectancy.

Even so, it's a convenient time to pull over and take inventory. Since Aug. 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina changed New Orleans forever, everyone wants to know: "What is God doing in this city? How are things now?"

For one day, New Orleanians thought they had "dodged a bullet" as the hurricane's primary damage lay to the east, along the Mississippi coastline where entire

communities were destroyed.

Then the levees protecting this sunken city broke under the strain in several places. Soon this great city was literally drowning.

One million residents were

evacuated voluntarily or otherwise from the hurricane's onslaught. More than 1,800 who refused to leave were drowned in their homes. Entire neighborhoods ceased to exist. Several church buildings were swept away by the floodwaters.

And now?

The old housing projects, breeding grounds for crime and human misery, have been razed and multi-income-level housing erected in their place. Columbia Parc, an amaz-



McKEEVER



Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, Louisiana

BP photo

ingly beautiful array of nearly 700 apartments, stands where St. Bernard Housing Development once stood. The landscaping is impressive, the architecture is award-winning, the interiors are luxurious.

Some progress made

The levees have been raised five feet, and a king's ransom has been invested in new pumping stations to keep the city from flooding in the future. Some neighborhoods are seeing new construction on every block, with the price of lots skyrocketing.

Columbia Parc, however, appears as an island paradise. Nearby large vacant areas indicate where houses were destroyed and nothing built in their place. Alongside Interstate 10 east, block after block of nothing indicates missing shopping centers. The Lower Ninth Ward appears snaggle-toothed from the occasional home rebuilt, surrounded by a weedy emptiness.

Drive through Gentilly not far from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and you will see an odd mixture of lovely new homes, vacant lots and old homes that have been rebuilt and elevated.

Crime still leads the nightly news. Politicians still try to enrich themselves at the expense of the taxpayer and to the shame of the electorate. The New Orleans Police Department keeps rotating superintendents in search of someone who can weed out the corruption from within and safeguard the city.

The city's population is down 75,000 from 10 years ago while the larger metro area is at pre-Katrina levels. African-American numbers are slightly down; the Hispanic population

has increased dramatically.

When the Living God undertakes something everlasting, He loves to start small, use unexpected means and take His own good time. Thus much that He is doing today will be known only in eternity.

Over the last decade the Lord has shuttered many churches and given new life to others. After Katrina, many seniors moved away. In their place came large numbers of young professionals who love this city and are planting their lives here. Many churches are filled with young adults and growing families. The unity in these congregations tends to be a pastor's dream.

Jack Hunter, executive

director of New Orleans Baptist Association, leads an aggressive program of church planting and ministry. A community health outreach has been established in the Ninth Ward, staffed with a medical team called by God and supported by our churches. Start-up churches are being sponsored by multiple churches around the country, replacing the former system of one mother church birthing one mission.

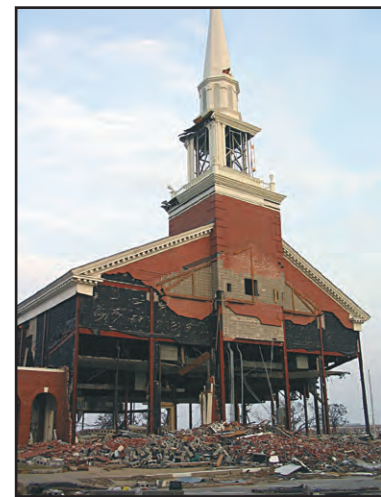
Hailed as heroes

Baptists are still hailed as heroes by many. Following the storm, churches from across the country sent hundreds of missions teams to rebuild this city.

Fresh-faced teens and collegians blanketed the city, sharing the love of Christ. Friendly seniors went door-to-door offering kindness, supplies and a paintbrush.

A typical comment was voiced recently: "When we evacuated, we were taken in by Baptists in Texas. And when we returned home, the Baptists were painting our house."

Throughout this 9th summer, God's churches continue to send teams to share the gospel and bless our people. The seminary's MissionLab and Baptist churches like Oak Park, Williams Boulevard and Gentilly host a relentless stream of missions teams who travel here to serve people in Jesus' name.



BNG photo

FBC Gulfport, Mississippi

Chuck Kelley, our seminary president, used to say, "The churches of New Orleans want to reap a harvest in a field they have not sown." Since Katrina, he says, "No city on earth has been so thoroughly sown with the gospel as New Orleans." We are praying for the promised harvest.

We are eternally grateful to all who have ministered to us, who still believe God is with us for revival, who pray for New Orleans and who continue coming to share His love.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Joe McKeever is the former director of missions for New Orleans Baptist Association. (BP)

REFLECTIONS

HE IS ABLE TO DO EXCEEDINGLY MORE THAN WE ASK OR EXPECT...

DEAR LORD, PLEASE RETURN NEW ORLEANS TO NORMAL.

OH, I THINK WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT, DON'T YOU?

