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Photo by Kelly Wilkinson, courtesy of USA Today

Supporters cheered speakers and waved signs during the Indiana Pastors Alliance rally at the Statehouse on Nov. 17.

Change in cultural tide

Christians tired of being called 'bad guy' for moral standards

It's bigotry! It's hatred! It's discrimination! That's the tenor of the talk these days as powerful advocates try to write protections into law for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) people. Those advocates, battling against conservative Christians who are staunch in their beliefs of right and wrong, wonder why anyone would deny others their rights.

But some Christians say they're tired of being made into the bad guys. They're tired of being called the bigots, the haters.

Because they feel the same way: It's bigotry, toward them. It's hatred,

directed at them. It's discrimination, against them.

Feeling abandoned

They are the ones being bullied, they insist. In a country where the cultural tide seems to be moving away from hard-and-fast biblical prohibitions, they feel the government is abandoning them. Once at the core of American politics, some Christians feel increasingly relegated to the fringe, betrayed by their own conservative lawmakers as their cultural dominance is usurped by a smaller group wielding the heft of the media and corporations.

It is they, many argue, who are

the army of freedom fighters in this debate.

The LGBT rights that others see increasingly as a matter of civil rights, some evangelical Christians see as a moral wrong. Expanded protections, they fear, would create "special rights" for LGBT people that could supersede their right to speak out against homosexuality.

To those Christians — and this is an issue that divides many Christians — LGBT rights represent the threat of government deciding where their right of religious expression "ends" so others' rights can begin, said Arthur Farnsley, associate director of the Center for

the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

"There's a certain degree to which people are going to be told, 'You can have your religious beliefs and opinions. And you can practice them in your churches, synagogues and mosques. But in the public sphere you're going to have to deal with ... diversity and recognize civil rights laws,'" Farnsley said.

Draw the line

But where will the line be drawn between religion and the public sphere?

(See 'How far,' page 10)

Coming next week...

Faith and Family
Aging well
as a **Baby Boomer**



COMMENT

The Grace Gift of Giving

All of us who love the church have a deep commitment to financially support her mission. That is true of the local congregation where we worship each week and true of the great Church of God sharing His glory and grace to the ends of the earth.

We pray the apostle Paul's words about the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:7, "You do not lack any spiritual gift," also will be true of our church. That includes the grace of giving, which Paul reminded the Corinthians of in 2 Corinthians 8:7 when he wrote, "But just as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us — see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

In 2 Corinthians 8:1–8, the apostle outlines four reasons why Christian believers should excel in the "grace of giving." Because Baptists believe what the Bible teaches, it behooves us to remind ourselves of what those reasons are.

First the passage assumes familiarity with the apostle's first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:1, Paul had given specific instructions about "the collection." The collection was for the poor in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10). One reason for giving has always been to serve one's fellow man.

Jesus teaches giving

Throughout His ministry, Jesus stressed giving to serve others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stressed giving to the needy (Matt. 6:1–4). In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) Jesus commended the Samaritan's spontaneous giving to care for another. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus taught that giving to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked and the imprisoned was giving to the Lord Himself.

As the apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to "bring also to completion this act of grace" (v. 6) he was reflecting the teachings of Jesus and the emphasis of the early church to give to serve one's fellow man.

Second giving reflects the interconnectedness of the Christian Church. The collection coming from the churches of Macedonia — churches like Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea — were primarily Gentile churches as was the church at Corinth. The collection was going primarily to Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem.

Gentile Christians were indebted to Jewish Christians through whom came the message



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

of God's grace revealed in Jesus. The offering illustrated recognition of that debt. At the same time, the offering reminded the Jewish Christians of their indebtedness to the Gentile Christians for assistance in their time of desperate need.

Different cultures, different ethnicities, different races united in a common Christian faith; each helped the other as opportunity arose. The collection illustrated that various groups of Christians had much to offer one another and each group could benefit from the other. That is still true today as Christian believers from every tongue and tribe and nation come together as members of the same family of God.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive," said our Lord. Sometimes one is able to give. At other times one may need to receive. That is how a family works. We depend on one another.

Third, Acts 16–17 describes some of the persecution inflicted upon Macedonian believers. Property was seized and goods plundered. Still these impoverished believers gave to help others. Their giving reflected self-discipline based on priority decisions: "but first they gave themselves to the Lord" (v. 5).

'Overflowing joy'

It was placing God first that provided the discipline that allowed them to give out of "their overflowing joy." Helping others became more important than their own poverty. That attitude reflected the teaching of Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it." God is the owner of all. We are the stewards or managers. We give an account to God about how we use all entrusted to us. Self-indulgence will be punished. Self-discipline will be rewarded because it reflects giving one's self first to God.

The Christian faith teaches believers to be

tender-hearted toward the needs of others and open-handed in sharing resources. One noted Baptist leader explained it this way, "One's ease in giving is an accurate barometer of his sense of values and of his degree of self-discipline."

The apostle Paul brings this section to conclusion with the greatest motivation of all for giving — the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ — the fourth reason for giving.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had described the richness of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 8:6, he wrote, "There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live." In that early Christian hymn recorded in Philippians 2:6, Paul expanded that idea by writing, "Though He was in the form of God ... He took the form of a slave."

The difference between divine life and human

life is infinite. Just by becoming man, Jesus became "poor." But Jesus did more than that. He became obedient "even to death on the cross" for us. He paid the sin debt for all who will believe in Him. Those who believe move from the poverty of death because of sin to the richness of life through the forgiveness of God.

None can understand this truth without a grateful heart. As Jesus became poor to make us as believers "rich," so believers model that behavior through stewardship of time, talent and treasure.

Believers give because they have first given themselves to God. Believers give to serve the needs of others. Believers give because of the interdependence of the Church. Believers give as an act of self-discipline.

The Corinthian Church had been distracted from demonstrating this grace gift by controversy. The apostle had to pointedly remind them to "complete this gracious work" (v. 6). He even sent Titus to lead the effort. Christians are still distracted from developing the grace gift of giving. Christians still need a reminder to develop this gift along with all the other gifts of the spirit.

That means pastors have to preach about stewardship. Churches have to teach stewardship. Publications like this one have to write about stewardship. Hopefully church members will not skip the Sunday School stewardship lesson or complain about the pastor's sermon on giving.

Because we believe the Bible, we want to teach what the Bible says about giving. More importantly we want to obey what the Bible says about the grace gift of giving. 🙏

Have you tried it yet?

TAB augmented reality is here.
Check out page 12 for more details.



"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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'Foot in the door'

Alabama Baptists help bring Bible classes to public high school students

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Stan Davis faced three major medical issues last year. They kept him at home in front of the TV for four weeks.

And those four weeks changed his life.

And maybe the lives of a bunch of others too.

"I watched too much news during those weeks," said Davis, a member of Valleydale Church, Birmingham, noting that everything he saw was "full of lawlessness and godlessness."

"And the one thing that hit me during that time was that I can no longer say 'somebody has to do something.' I'm going to find something that I can do that I can make a difference," he said.

A couple of weeks later, his pastor, Jason Dees, mentioned a new ministry that was trying to get its feet underneath it in Alabama — a program that would bring Bible classes to public high school students.

"God had been preparing me to be willing to really hear what Jason was saying," Davis said.

And it seems he'd been preparing others too. Because School Ministries of Birmingham is starting its first class for students at Spain Park High School in Hoover this January.

The way it works is that students who opt to take the classes will be "released" from school for that hour to take the class at a nearby church as an optional elective.

It's an idea that has seen hundreds of lives changed in South Carolina.

Movements happen

And Paige Dees, wife of Jason Dees and secretary of School Ministries of Birmingham, hopes the same will happen in Alabama.

"This could radically change the public school system," she said. "When students who are not Christians come with their

Christian friends to learn about how God's Word can apply to their lives today, it's changing their whole life and then their parents are seeing their lives look different and parents are coming to Christ too."

And movements happen, she said.

Starting with Spain Park is "a huge foot in the door, and with Spain Park being one of the top schools in Alabama, we hope this will give us credibility to get into other public schools," Paige Dees said. "Our plan is to have such an excellent program that a few years from now, public schools from all around the area will be knocking on our door asking us to please have this program at their school."

For more information about School Ministries of Birmingham, contact Paige Dees at paige.dees@schoolministriesbham.org or visit www.schoolministriesbham.org.



A few other places — such as Sylvania Baptist Church and Ruhama Baptist Church, Fort Payne, in north Alabama — have successfully run this type of ministry in the state for years already.

Dees, Davis and others are hoping that more people will come forward and spearhead similar efforts in their own communities as part of School Ministries of Birmingham.

The ministry is looking for financial partners, but they also are looking for volunteers who have a vision for using the classes to attract students to their churches.

Building relationships

"If a student in our program is not connected to a local church and they start building relationships with the volunteers, it makes an easier transition for the student and hopefully their family to start coming to church," Dees said.

Davis agreed that the classes are great inroads to a spiritual harvest.

"We envision groups of people and other churches and cities being touched like we were to start something like this in their own community," Davis said. "It's so compelling. And God's putting all the pieces together." ❏

Ministry Tips



HOW TO FIND 'PROSPECTS'

By Chip Warren
Minister of education, FBC Albertville

For any church that wants to grow (and I am convinced the Lord wants all churches to grow no matter how small or large), discovering and maintaining good prospect information is essential.

From time to time I hear churches say they can't find many prospects, but in fact there are many right under their proverbial noses.

Here are two tips:

1. Go over any and every list of church and Sunday School members and any other ministries your church may have with a fine-tooth comb and discover their family members. If you are not sure who their family members are, ask them in an appropriate manner. Most of them will be excited that you care about their family members who are not saved or in church.

2. Be sure to follow up on those who attend any church outreach event, i.e. Vacation Bible School (VBS), fall carnival, Christmas musical, etc. Remember, "One is never just one." For example the kids who participate in your VBS have friends, parents, siblings and grandparents. A phone call or doorstep visit is best if possible so you can meet other family members. (chipwarren@bell-south.net) ❏



FBC Union Springs serves as an Operation Christmas Child relay center for rural Bullock County, collecting 583 gift-filled shoeboxes this year.

Sharing GOOD NEWS

Photo courtesy of Mona Crawford

Operation Christmas Child provides Alabama Baptists with a way to do missions around the world

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Amazing. Exciting. Life-changing. The words used by Alabama Baptists to describe Operation Christmas Child (OCC) shoeboxes are dynamic. They aren't passive or everyday descriptions.

"[This ministry] is so worthwhile and simple — missions from your hometown to around the world," said Katie Dalton, a member of First Baptist Church, Abbeville, and OCC area coordinator for Henry County.

OCC is an outreach ministry of Samaritan's Purse, an international relief and Christian evangelism organization that collects and delivers gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 150 countries.

Since its inception in 1993, OCC has

collected and delivered more than 124 million shoeboxes to children, with 10.4 million of that total collected in 2014 alone. In 2015, OCC hopes to collect 11 million shoeboxes.

Why gift-filled shoeboxes? Because OCC focuses on impoverished regions and populations, placing gifts in shoeboxes that children can keep "demonstrates God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world," according to its website.

'The least we can do'

Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Northport, Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) director Susie Freeman said, "When you think about [a shoebox as] a child's only Christmas, you realize that's the least we can do for them."

A small church, Arbor Springs Baptist

collected 155 shoeboxes this year, which is more than the number of church members and is the most it's ever collected.

One reason for the peak collection is

the legacy of Gayle Andrews, Arbor Springs' former WMU director who passed away in April.

"She was really passionate about the shoeboxes," Freeman said. "I think a lot of people contributed more in honor of her."

And that passion can be seen all over the state.

First Baptist Church, Wedowee, also collected shoeboxes and took up an offering for shipping costs. Jamey Walls, youth and children's minister at First, Wedowee, said the blessings that come from participating in OCC are unmatched.

"The joy that we get to see (through videos) and hear about in these kids as they receive their shoeboxes makes it

completely worth any sacrifice we can make to give to OCC.

"Through the giving of shoeboxes we are able to give not only a material blessing but also an eternal blessing of the opportunity to know Jesus."

The reality that a shoebox can change a child's life hits home for children who help collect and pack shoeboxes too. Linda Keown, OCC coordinator for Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, which serves as a collection center for Chattahoochee Valley, shared a story about a young boy at Golden Acres Baptist Church, Phenix City, who helped pack shoeboxes. At the end of the day, he said, "This is the best



Photo courtesy of Jamey Walls
FBC Wedowee children's worker Stephanie White (right) helps Bella Creed (left) pack a shoebox.

day of my life. ... It was fun to pack toys and things for children who don't have anything — and then they get to learn about Jesus. That makes me feel good."

Keown said hearing such stories con-

"Through the giving of shoeboxes we are able to give not only a material blessing but also an eternal blessing of the opportunity to know Jesus."

Jamey Walls
youth and children's minister, FBC Wedowee



Photo courtesy of Linda Keown

Volunteers at Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, load up 18-wheelers with shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child, a Samaritan's Purse ministry. Lakewood Baptist serves as the collection center for Chattahoochee Valley.

firms that “God is on both sides of the shoebox.” As a collection center, Lake-wood Baptist collected 24,370 shoeboxes, almost 5,000 more than the 2014 total.

Meghan Parker was 16 when her church, Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville, started collecting shoeboxes in 2011.

“I will always remember my dad say- ing [when we started] that even if we only collected one shoebox we will be making a dif- ference, because that one shoebox would mean the world to a child.”

As the church’s collec- tion total has grown each year — from 36 shoe- boxes in 2011 to 321 this year — Parker said they try to remember the im- pact of just one shoebox, not only on a child but also on a child’s family and community.

A First Baptist Church, Union Springs, member who leads the church in shoebox col- lections sees OCC as her missions field. According to church sec- retary Mona Crawford, she said, “I’m not going overseas ... but when I send a shoe- box I’m sharing God’s message around the world.”

‘Be ready’

This church member, who requested anonymity, shops year-round for shoe- box items so she can “be ready” when it comes time to pack shoeboxes. The act of shopping for items can even be a gospel opportunity, Crawford said.

“As we shop for OCC items ... we have the opportunity to tell folks why we’re buying 10 flashlights or toothbrushes —

that it’s going into a shoebox to be given to a child overseas and to tell them that Jesus loves them.”

First, Union Springs, served as a relay center for Bullock County and collected 583 shoeboxes.

Regional sites

Serving in the Atlanta processing cen- ter, 1 of 9 regional collection sites in the United States, is another way to participate in OCC.

Jerry Koster, pastor of Community Baptist Church, Moundville, sees the impact that serving in Atlanta has on church members.

“I see those that go and come back so excited because they have someone who speaks to them and shares their story and that really ignites them to do more,” he said. This year a team of 12 from Community Baptist served at the pro- cessing center Dec. 6.

Serving as a relay center, the church also collected 1,063 shoeboxes.

Many other churches in the state served as relay centers, including First, Abbeville; Evergreen Baptist Church, Vance; and Southside Baptist Church, Fayette. First, Abbeville, collected 680 shoeboxes, Southside Baptist collected 1,311 and Ev- ergreen Baptist collected 2,526.

These churches are representations of countless individuals, organizations and churches in Alabama who are making a difference this Christmas season through OCC.

As Walls said, “No greater gift can be given.”

“As we shop for OCC items ... we have the opportunity to tell folks why we’re buying 10 flashlights or toothbrushes.”

Mona Crawford church secretary FBC Union Springs



Photo courtesy of Meghan Parker

Members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville, separate and orga- nize by age and gender items such as crayons, glue, small toys and cloth- ing (pictured above and below) for Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes in preparation for a church-wide “packing party.”



Photo courtesy of Meghan Parker

Right: FBC Union Springs uses OCC to focus on the children and countries the shoeboxes will reach.

Below: Youth and children organize shoeboxes along the front of the church during a dedication service at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville.



Photo courtesy of Meghan Parker



Photo courtesy of Mona Crawford

American megachurches 'getting bigger by getting smaller,' new study finds

Change is coming to American megachurches — those behemoths for believers that now dot the religious landscape.

There are more participants in megachurch worship than ever.

"Last weekend 1 in 10 adults and children who went to a Protestant church went to a megachurch — about 5 million people," said Warren Bird, director of research for Leadership Network and co-author of a megachurch study released Dec. 2. The study examined megachurches (2,000 people in weekend attendance is the basic qualifier) in comparison with other, smaller congregations.

Similar struggles

Sociologist Scott Thumma, the study's second co-author and director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, said, "We found many of these large congregations still have many of the same challenges of smaller congregations. Everyone is trying to attract new people and hold on to them and make them disciples. But today, people are seekers and shoppers looking for a temporary experience of worship, not a long-term commitment."

This perspective may be an overstatement, said Gary Fenton, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham.

"I am not sure that when people

went to the same church week after week and year after year, they were more committed," he said. "I think some of them were just long-term spectators."

And megachurches are still being built. But the study finds the new churches are constructed very differently.

Congregations are "getting bigger by getting smaller," said Bird. They're building smaller main sanctuaries but holding more services on more campuses. Five years ago 46 percent of megachurches had multiple locations. Now it's 62 percent. And the number of their sites bumped up too — from an average of 2.5 sites to 3.5.

If churches are seeking to be intergenerational, Fenton said, then this is a good approach.

"The multiple worship services in smaller venues is partially driven by a desire for smaller, more intimate services, but I think much of it is the result of people wanting and needing different (service) times."

71 percent 'evangelical'

The report also found a shift in how these churches describe their religious self-image.

Every year since the study began in 2000, the percentage that describe themselves as "evangelical" has gone up and is now 71 percent.

Service to others outside their own congregations is an emerging focus of megachurches. Thumma said that "for a very long time, the focus of megachurch programming was inward. ... Now there's a huge shift to outreach: 43 percent said global missions were a specialty of their congregations, and 44 percent said it was community service and helping those in need."

'Go' make disciples

This uptick is encouraging, according to Mike King, executive pastor of First Baptist Church, Opelika.

"Jesus gave us the command to 'go' to the world rather than invite the world to come to us," he said. "This shift in focus is not a change in strategy for growing larger but rather a challenge for the church to be more intentional to take the gospel to their world."

Ultimately a church's size isn't what believers should focus on, said Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

"If a believer is part of a big body or a little body it doesn't make much of a difference as long as they are a vital and functioning part of the body of Christ.

"A house church or a megachurch is a beautiful expression of the body of Christ if it authentically pursues God's ultimate command to go and make disciples." (RNS, Maggie Walsh)

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Former Auburn archivist retires from SBHLA role

NASHVILLE — Bill Sumners, director of Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives (SBHLA) since 1988, will retire from his post next July, he recently announced in a letter to the Council of Seminary Presidents (CSP), which governs the organization.

Since the 1997 reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), SBHLA has been governed by CSP, comprised of the six SBC seminary presidents. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, also is CSP president.

"We are very thankful for Bill Sumners for his many years of service," Mohler said. "He has been a key figure in bridging the Southern Baptist past to its present and future."

CSP is now looking for Sumner's successor. Nominations will be received through Dec. 31 and can be mailed to: R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, Council of Seminary Presidents, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

Before becoming SBHLA director and archivist, Sumners was archivist of the Dargan-Carver Library of LifeWay Christian Resources of SBC (formerly the Sunday School Board of SBC) from 1983 to 1988. Previously he was assistant archivist at Auburn University and held library and research positions in Alabama and Texas. Sumners holds degrees from Samford University in Birmingham and the University of Texas at Arlington. (BP)

Southern Seminary partners with ERLC to offer degrees

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky — Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, is partnering with the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) to offer doctor of ministry and doctor of educational ministry degrees in Christian ethics, beginning with the upcoming winter semester.

Applications are being accepted for the summer semester for the degree programs.

Randy Stinson, senior vice president for academic administration and provost at Southern Seminary, said Southern Baptists "have proven themselves well-equipped to apply God's truth to a changing cultural climate. With this partnership between Southern Seminary and ERLC, we can ensure a greater number of pastors and ministry leaders get the training they need to shepherd and equip their congregations to live faithfully and winsomely in a world of increasing ethical challenges."

ERLC President Russell Moore said he hopes the new degree programs "will be a service to the church in raising up a corps of future leaders trained to be a gospel-focused voice in their ministry contexts on the pressing issues of the day."

Classes will be held on Southern's campus as well as ERLC's locations in Nashville and Washington. Moore and Barrett Duke, ERLC's vice president of public policy and research, will join with Southern's ethics department as instructors. (BP)

CP contributions 2.35% above projected budget goal

NASHVILLE — Contributions to Southern Baptist national and international missions and ministries received by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) through the first two months of the fiscal year were 2.35 percent above the projected budget goal and 0.46 percent below last year's year-to-date gifts, according to a news release from SBC EC President and CEO Frank S. Page.

November's receipts of \$15,764,689.37 were slightly less than the \$15,940,178.11 received in November 2014. The year-to-date total of \$31,813,129.29 was \$729,795.96 above the \$31,083,333.33 year-to-date allocation budget projection to support Southern Baptist ministries, and \$146,229.67 below the \$31,959,358.96 received through November 2014.

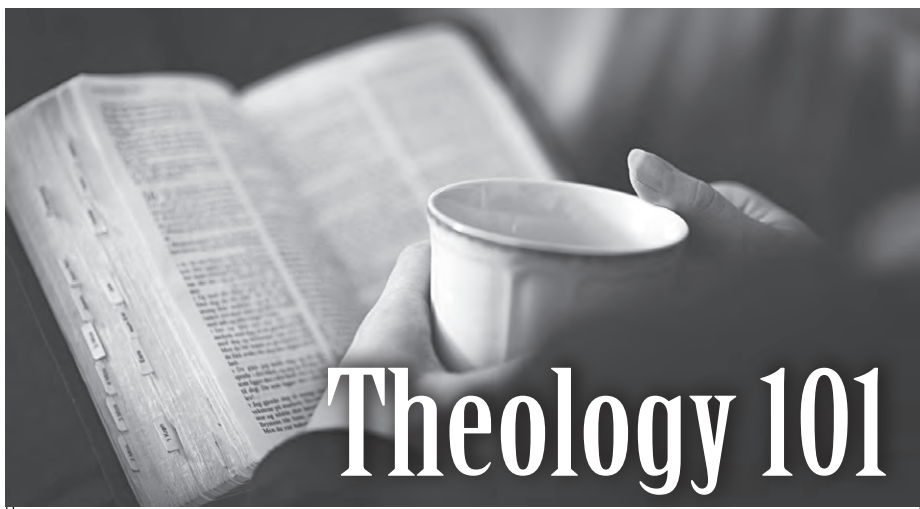
Year-to-date designated giving of \$7,225,651.09 was 1.23 percent, or \$89,780.65, below gifts of \$7,315,431.74 received through November 2014. (BP)

TAB Talks interviews Lovvorn



Photo by Maggie Walsh

During the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 17–18 at Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne, *The Alabama Baptist* debuted its TAB Talks, live-interview conversations with ministry leaders throughout the state and nation. Here, Bob Terry (right), editor of the paper, interviews Traylor Lovvorn, founder of Route 1520, an Undone Redone ministry that provides counseling, group therapy support and resources for men and women who are affected by sex addiction and sexual sin. Lovvorn discusses the need for churches to create a culture of authentic community.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Name Above Every Name

Savior

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

Interestingly Jesus did not refer to Himself as Savior even though others did. As part of the Christmas story, Luke 1:46–55 contains Mary's song, which she uttered at the time of her visit with her kinswoman, Elizabeth. Her song opened with the confession, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (vv. 46–47). This very term that Mary applied to God came to be applied to His Son. It has come down to us as a frequent way by which to speak of Jesus.

Spirit-inspired song

Another of the Christmas "songs" was that of the father of John the Baptist. His Spirit-inspired song of praise opened with the words, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David" (Luke 1:68–69). "Horn of salvation" was a way of speaking poetically of a powerful or mighty salvation. This great salvation would require a great Savior. Jesus came to be that Savior.

When the angel of the Lord announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds the announcement was, "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).

The apostle Paul spoke of Him as "our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13) and as "Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:6). Somewhat unexpectedly the people of Samaria in their response to the testimony of the woman who met Jesus at the well confessed, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

The early preaching of the apostles included references to Jesus as Savior. Acts 5:29–31 reports, "Peter and the

other apostles answered and said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. God has exalted this man to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.'

In like manner the missionary preaching of Paul referred to Jesus as a descendant of David, saying, "From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior — Jesus" (Acts 13:23).

What are we to make of this title? A savior can be thought of as one who in a physical sense rescues from danger or delivers from bondage. Such was Peter's need when he began to sink in the sea and called out, "Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30). A person's most urgent danger and greatest bondage is spiritual in nature. Our rescue from the consequences of our sins and our deliverance from guilt's bondage requires a mighty Savior. Jesus is just such a Savior.

God's saving work

Christians often think of the saving work of Christ in three dimensions. When we look back, we understand that He has saved us from the penalty of sin. When we look around, we find He is saving us from the power of sin as we grow in grace. When we look ahead, we rejoice to know that He will ultimately save us from the very presence of sin. The approach of another Christmas is a perfect time to praise our Savior and celebrate His saving work. 🙏

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



Tennessee pastor teaches reason for the season through yard signs

Pastor Jimmy Terry of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Clarksville, Tennessee, continues his mission to make the entire month of December a celebration of Jesus. He has printed thousands more yard signs that read "Christmas is all about Jesus," and he plans to distribute them across all of Tennessee's 95 counties.

Terry was joined by Tennessee's Pastor Bobby Kail, of Fairview Baptist Church, Dover; Pastor James Shepherd, of New Faith Baptist Church, Palmyra; and Dwight Dickson, a deacon at First Baptist Church, Clarksville, for a discussion on the importance of this mission.

Terry said, "This year we are asking Christians throughout the state of Tennessee to help us spread our message across the state. We are praying for such an impact this year that we can start to influence others around the country."

Desecrated holidays

Terry believes that the way the broader culture celebrates Christmas and Easter is inappropriate.

"The two holiest days in human history have been desecrated. At Christmas we have given our children a man in a red suit, and at Easter, a bunny and some eggs."

He also wonders why so many issues have an entire month devoted to their cause,

but the birth and resurrection of Jesus get only one day each.

"I just drove by the Christmas light display along Riverside Drive," he said. "They have all these trees lit up and a beautiful outline of a riverboat, but not one manger scene. We have let Satan dethrone Jesus Christ. There has already been a great response to these signs. ... Our goal is for every home to have one."

Dickson said Christmas has become more about shopping than celebrating the birth of Christ.

"We have let these holy days become commercial holidays," he said. "It has just turned into a way for merchants to make money, we have lost the meaning of Christmas."

Terry's goal is to put 100 signs in each of Tennessee's counties. The signs are free, but donations are welcome. He has helped in about 20 counties so far, and he urges his supporters to help him make this program known across the state.

"As Christians we must lift up the name of Jesus, we cannot be timid," Terry said. "We can't be bothered with political correctness. We can't be afraid. We must be bold when we talk about Jesus."

Terry also said Christians should recite the Christmas story in as many ways and as many times as they can during December. (RNS)



RNS photo

Samford hosts Student Ministry Leadership Workshop



Photo by Debbie Campbell

Charles 'Poker' Boyd (left), founder of Student Ministry Essentials, shares with youth ministry leaders at the Student Ministry Leadership Workshop hosted by Samford University in Birmingham on Dec. 3. Boyd said a youth minister, or 'willing shepherd,' may not reach his or her full potential because of burnout, unmet expectations, lack of proper training or failure to mobilize lay ministers (volunteers). He said the key to a healthy youth ministry is developing a strong lead team concept and equipping others to lead rather than only coordinating activities or events for youth.

Palestinian government calls for 'decrease' in Christmas festivities in Bethlehem

Amid escalating violence between Palestinians and Israelis, the Palestinian Authority, which normally hosts Christmas festivities in Bethlehem, has asked municipalities to tone down their public Christmas celebrations again this year. Christmas 2014 also was a tense holiday season.

Typically crowds of tourists, Christians, Palestinians, Muslims and more gather in Manger Square for Christmas celebrations, but as in 2014, this year bodes of having fewer people gather there because of political unrest.

Clashes with Israelis

Hana Amireh, who heads a government committee on churches in the West Bank, confirmed the Palestinian Authority is requesting "a certain decrease" in festivities following the deaths of dozens of Palestinians since mid-September. The majority of

them were killed during clashes with Israeli forces or carrying out terrorist attacks, according to the Israeli government.

Despite the unrest, Bethlehem Mayor Vera Baboun said, "Bethlehem is the city of peace" and with all the violence that is taking place "as we approach Christmas, we pray, we pray for peace."

Amireh said the government has asked the municipality of Bethlehem, the town where Jesus was born and where official Palestinian celebrations of Christmas take place, not to set off holiday fireworks this year and to limit the festive lights and decorations that traditionally adorn the town to two main streets.

Although Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah will light the towering Christmas tree in Manger Square he will not participate in a festive post-lighting dinner hosted by the Bethlehem municipality, Amireh said. The colorful annual Christmas proces-

sion, which includes the heads of churches and drum-beating Palestinian scouts will be held as usual.

Believers in Bethlehem

News of the limitations upset Palestinian Christians, who comprise less than 2 percent of the population in the West Bank and Israel.

"I'm truly disappointed," Ekram Juha, director of the Bethlehem mayor's office, said of the Palestinian Authority's plans.

Juha, who described herself as a "Christian and a believer," said Palestinians "have a difficult situation but we've lived with this situation for many years and celebrations have gone on. This is the place where Jesus was born and if you limit Christmas celebrations here you are limiting something spiritual and holy. I can understand limiting celebrations elsewhere but not here in Bethlehem." (RNS, TAB)

Prison church accepted in La. Baptist assoc.

It may be the first time a local Baptist association has accepted a prison church into its fellowship.

Louisiana's Washington Baptist Association now counts among its members Grace Baptist Church of the Main Camp in Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

Grace Church is five years old and is the only Southern Baptist church among the prison's 28 inmate-led churches. Its 65 or so members meet five times a week in the Main Camp's Education Center and twice a month in the Main Camp's Tudy Chapel.

Inmate pastor

The church is led by inmate pastor Paul Will, 42, a 2007 graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's extension program at Angola. Like most of the men at Angola, Will is serving a life sentence.

Andrew Voss, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Franklinton, where Will was ordained in 2014, facilitated the association's vote during its Oct. 5 annual meeting at First Baptist Church, Franklinton.

"To our knowledge this is the very first fully recognized Southern Baptist church ... located inside a penitentiary," said Voss, who also is an NOBTS professor. "The vote was unanimous." (BP)



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George W. Sinquefield

Former Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 95

George W. Sinquefield, who served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches, died Nov. 10 at the age of 95.

Sinquefield served at Friendship Baptist Church, Danville; Paint Rock Baptist Church; and other Alabama Baptist churches for a total of 50 years. He also served in Illinois, Ohio and Michigan for six years planting several churches.

Sinquefield was an Air Force veteran of World War II and received the World War II Victory Medal, Good Conduct Medal and the American Service Medal.

He held a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and a master's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He was a member of Eastview Baptist Church, Shelbyville, Tennessee, at the time of his death.

He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Evelyn "Virginia;" four sons; and two grandsons. (Hannah Muñoz)

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Tim Cearley (left) greets worshippers as they leave FBC Chimoio in Mozambique on a Sunday morning in December 2012.



Photo courtesy of Matt Cearley

Coming home

IMB missionaries take retirement incentive, vow to continue evangelism stateside

Tim Cearley is considering driving for Uber or substitute teaching — anything to continue meeting people from other lands, people like those who have been the focus of his missionary work in Africa.

His wife, Charlotte, who felt called to the missions field at age 5, will continue her prayers for “the unreached peoples of Africa” from the United States.

The Cearleys have been missionaries together for 33 years. But the couple now plans to take a voluntary retirement offer. As of Nov. 8, the number of Interna-

tional Mission Board (IMB) missionaries stood at 4,707.

Fewer dollars

Southern Baptists join other Christian denominations in facing fewer dollars along with smaller numbers of people in their pews.

For IMB to balance its budget, 600 to 800 missionaries and staffers must be cut. In December, IMB will determine how many missionaries over 50 with at least five years of service have opted for the retirement incentive. On Nov. 2 eligible person-

nel indicated whether or not they wished to receive or reject the retirement incentive but that decision was not official until personnel signed an agreement the first week of December. That agreement can still be rescinded up to Dec. 11.

The Cearleys moved across Africa, learning four languages and living in five countries. They’ve helped start churches, converting Muslims and those of Africa’s tribal religions to Christianity.

“I arrived in Rhodesia during the civil war and had to fly into the bush on a smaller prop plane,” Tim Cearley recalled of his start in the 1970s. “I stayed two years anyway and took my family back five years later to the country after independence.”

They became a family of five during the 11 years they were in what is now called Zimbabwe, working in towns and sometimes, he said, “pretty far out in the bush, 100 miles from people that were speaking English.”

They lived in Mozambique for 10 years, after a stop in Portugal to learn Portuguese. And then Botswana, followed by South Africa, where he was a strategy associate for

IMB missionaries. Their final stop was Senegal, where he oversaw 600 missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa.

“It’s just overwhelming to see the difference in the need, the need for the gospel,” he said, “and not just to get the gospel there but to establish churches that are healthy in leadership.”

Passing the torch

At 61, the Cearleys said it was not an easy decision to come home. The couple expected to serve at least another five years. But they see it as a way to let younger missionaries take their place.

They plan to move in early 2016 to a house provided by Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery, but they have no intention of losing their missionary zeal.

They expect to connect with internationals wherever they find them stateside — from the Muslim woman they met at a CVS Pharmacy to a Pakistani service station attendant. They want others to do the same noting there are reports that at least 75 percent of international students never visit an American home. (RNS, TAB)

TAB augmented reality

Watch your complimentary Ministry Training Institute leadership lecture here



Photo by Chris McCaghren

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you will receive a complimentary eight-minute lecture taught by Samford University President Andrew Westmoreland for the next six weeks. Use your Aurasma app to watch the second lecture on Christian leadership from Romans by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted on page 12.

REFLECTIONS



How far will religious rights erode, some wonder

(continued from page 1)

At the Indiana Statehouse in November, Ron Johnson Jr. of the Indiana Pastors Alliance addressed a roaring crowd of rally participants: "We're not here today because we're angry. We're not here because we hate people. We're actually here because we love Jesus."

How can government, Johnson said, force people to act against their religious consciences — against an unshakable belief that marriage is between a man and a woman?

From his worldview the Supreme Court's ruling to recognize same-sex "marriages" doesn't change his traditional definition of the institution.

Expanding state civil rights law to include sexual orientation and gender identity, something Indiana's Chamber of Commerce is trying to accomplish, would grant a special right to same-sex couples, he said, while resulting in fines and other punishments for Christian business owners who don't want to violate their beliefs.

"We're the ones who need a special protected-class status,

Traditional values could cost you your job

A tenured Southern Baptist professor could face dismissal over support of traditional marriage.

Robert Oscar Lopez, an associate professor of English and classics at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in Los Angeles, learned that university officials had spent eight months investigating him after students complained about being exposed to a "hostile learning environment" during a 2014 optional conference organized by Lopez. The conference emphasized the importance for children of having both a mother and a father.

CSUN found no fault with Lopez during its investigation into complaints about the conference's supposedly "anti-gay" and "anti-female" agenda. However, in October the university charged Lopez with "retaliating" against a student who brought complaints about him.

Charles S. Limandri, president and chief counsel of the Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund, wrote in a letter to CSUN Provost Yi Li that Lopez neither retaliated against students nor interfered with their attempts to bring complaints before CSUN.

"We have no choice but to

conclude that the disposition of this investigation is a purely political and ideological attack on Dr. Lopez for holding ideas about children's rights [to a mother and father] which are apparently unpopular," Limandri wrote.

A member of a Chinese Southern Baptist church, Lopez was raised by two lesbians and identified as bisexual as a teenager. He came to faith in Christ in 2008 and is the father of two children with his wife.

Lopez said, "If we as a society are going to prohibit certain ideas, we're on a road to a totalitarian society." (BP)

because we're the ones that are being attacked by everybody," Johnson said.

Josh Boss, who attends Johnson's Living Stones Church, Crown Point, Indiana, said, "The truth is the Bible. If we have no right or wrong, what are we?"

"It's not that we want to force

our truth onto others. We want to be able to tell [the] truth to others without being chastised for it," Boss, 29, explained.

Freedom of religion — the freedom to practice it and to express it — is guaranteed to all in the Constitution.

For some Christians, expanding

state civil rights law to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes would effectively feel like a betrayal of constitutional rights.

If evangelicals give an inch on this, what will happen next? How far, they wonder, will their religious rights be eroded? (RNS)

Want to know GOD?

By Justin Nelson
Associate and youth pastor
Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa

How do you define success? In education, success is determined by grades; in sports, by wins and losses; in band and theater, by awarding roles and chairs; at work by raises or evaluations. Individual or corporation, big or small, everyone has some definition of success.

The common denominator in these areas is personal performance. If one meets or exceeds the standards given in a particular area, that person is said to have success. While that can be a good thing, personal performance creates a misunderstanding when it comes to a person knowing and having a relationship with God.

In every area of life people are told to do their best, perform well and they will achieve much. God does not work on this standard. His standard is perfection. Because God is holy and perfect, He cannot allow imperfection or sin. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Everyone is guilty of breaking God's law. With God personal performance will never merit favor. A person can never be "good enough." The punishment for breaking that law and not being "good enough" is an eternity in a place of punishment called hell.

That seems to be harsh, unyielding and probably gives a negative connotation concerning God. But wait, hear the rest of the story. Because God knew people would never measure up He provided a way for people to have a saving relationship with Him. God sent His perfect Son, Jesus, to die on a cross and be raised again on the third day and then offer His success over death, hell and the grave to mankind as a free gift. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We don't have to be "good enough," we have to rely on Jesus' goodness and His success. What a relief that heaven or hell is not based on an individual's personal performance, but on Jesus' performance. ❧

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Hollywood Baptist Church, a cooperating Southern Baptist church, is seeking God's will in finding a full-time pastor who has a heart for people and is evangelistic and missions-minded. Please send resumés to: Hollywood Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 1400, Cornelia, GA 30531, by Friday, Jan. 8, 2016. Resumés may also be sent as attachments via email to: timneamp@windstream.net by the same date.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Small country church seeking bivocational pastor. Average weekly attendance 25-40. Please send resumé to: 1186 Pineapple Hwy., Greenville, AL 36037 or email to: ebenezerastbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & EDUCATION

First Baptist Church of Mount Olive is seeking a minister of music and education to lead a growing congregation in blended worship and discipleship programs. Bachelor's required and two to five years experience preferred. Send resumés

to: Stephanie@fbcmo.org.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Faith Baptist Church, Moulton, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational minister of music. If you are interested in this position, please submit your resumé to: Faith Baptist Church, 3979 County Rd. 434, Moulton, AL 35650, ATTN: Personnel Committee. The church phone number is 256-974-9351.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood is seeking a part-time music minister. Send resumés to: RABC, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 309 Raleigh Ave., Homewood, AL 35209 or jeantowry@rabc.org.

STUDENT PASTOR

Mineral Springs Baptist Church, near Jemison, Alabama, in Chilton County, Alabama, is currently accepting resumés for a full-time student pastor. Five years experience in proven, healthy student ministry is mandatory. Only emailed resumés will be accepted. Please send resumés, ministry philosophy and a cover letter to: pastorjasongreen@yahoo.com.

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ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

SBOM's Huff to retire after 47 years of ministry

After 47 years of ministry service in Alabama, Dale Huff is retiring as director of the office of LeaderCare and church administration for the State Board of Missions (SBOM). Twenty-five of those years have been with SBOM.

Huff holds a bachelor's degree from Belmont University in Nashville; a master of divinity degree and a doctor of ministry degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky; and master's degrees from Troy University.



HUFF

Before transitioning to SBOM, Huff served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Eufaula, and First Baptist Church, Montgomery. He also served as interim pastor in 16 churches. While with SBOM, Huff's primary ministry was working with conflicted churches.

"I want my legacy to be that Alabama Baptists strive to manage their conflicts in a way that is honoring to the Lord, biblically correct, showing respect to one another [and] not dividing the fellowship nor diminishing the church's ministry to the community," he said.

Huff plans to remain in Montgomery and minister in whatever capacity God provides. He and his wife, Lanelle, have two sons and four grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)

Alabama Baptist marks 75 years in ministry

Imagine being in ministry for the length of a lifetime — 75 years. Seem impossible? For some maybe, but not for Sam Jones, a member of Pine Grove Baptist Church, Centre.

The 89-year-old was recognized in September for marking three-quarters of a century in ministry.

Jones was called to ministry at the age of 14 and began preaching at his church, Gum Springs Baptist Church, Ashville, one month after he accepted Christ, he said.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College in Birmingham (now Samford University) and a master's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was ordained to preach at Gum Springs Baptist.

Jones then served as assistant pastor

of Gum Springs Baptist, and pastor of Pleasant Valley Baptist, Rainbow City; Bethany Baptist Church, Attalla; one other church in Alabama; and a church in Louisiana.

Jones was in full-time evangelism for two portions of his ministry, once for 11 years when he preached overseas in places like Zimbabwe, France, England, Russia and Germany, and once for six years, preaching mostly in the United States. Throughout that time he preached at 700 revivals and saw many people come to know the Lord, something he was privileged to see, he said.

When asked about his many years in ministry, Jones said, "It passed rather quickly. I feel like I could go through it again. I've always enjoyed talking about Jesus. That's been my subject throughout all these years."

He and his wife, Betty, who died in 2008, have three children (including one son that died 35 years ago), eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

Autauga Association DOM Morgan to retire in January

After participating in a Royal Ambassadors camp in Arkansas at the age of 12, Bill Morgan felt a call to ministry.

Morgan, who has served as Autauga Baptist Association's director of missions (DOM) since 1998, will retire Jan. 1, 2016.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and his doctor of ministry degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

He served as pastor of Goshen Baptist Church, Goodwater Baptist Church and First Baptist Church, Glencoe, for 24 years altogether before becoming DOM. He also served with the Alabama Army National Guard for 30 years.

Morgan, a member of First Baptist Church, Prattville, said throughout his years in ministry he's learned that "God can handle anything and it's not dependent on me but dependent on Him."

He and his wife, Dianne, plan to spend their retirement doing long-term missions projects. They have opportunities to teach in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and to help restart a Baptist association in Puerto Rico.

The couple has three children and nine grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)



MORGAN

Walker Association DOM Teague retires after 16 years

When Reuben "Lucky" Teague became director of missions (DOM) for Walker Baptist Association in 1999 he had one goal — to see the churches of Walker Association become Great Commission churches winning the lost and making disciples. After 16 years of "happy and fruitful ministry," Teague will retire Dec. 31.

"It has been very easy to love and cherish the people who make up the congregations in our county," he said, calling his years as DOM "a blessing."

Teague earned a bachelor of arts degree from Athens State College (now Athens State University) and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS).

Ministering in various bivocational and student pastor roles while receiving his education, Teague has served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenhill, in Killen; Flint Baptist Church, Decatur; First Baptist Church, Shady Grove, in Adamsville; and Flatwoods Baptist Church, Northport. He also served as director of church-minister relations and alumni affairs for NOBTS from 1993 to 1997.

While Teague and his wife, Connie, plan to begin retirement in Decatur, the couple is prepared to serve "in whatever capacity the Lord opens for us."

The couple has two daughters, one of which is deceased. (Maggie Walsh)

Russell Association DOM Burns retires after 21 years

Wayne Burns has spent 51 years of his life serving the Lord in some form of leadership — 21 of those years were spent serving as director of missions (DOM) of Russell Baptist Association before retiring Nov. 30.



BURNS

Burns earned his bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham and his master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

He began to serve as pastor of his first church, Cherry Hill Baptist Church, Russellville, in 1964. He also served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Hanceville; Mignon Baptist

Church, Sylacauga; and Eastdale Baptist Church, Montgomery, prior to serving as DOM. During seminary he served as pastor of a church in Indiana.

Burns said one main thing he learned during ministry was that a person must be "open to God's leadership everywhere you go."

He and his wife, Kay, have two children and two grandchildren and the couple plans to move to Southside. (Neisha Roberts)

Sulphur Springs' Robbins retires as DOM

After three years as director of missions for Sulphur Springs Baptist Association, Joel Robbins is retiring effective Dec. 31. However, he's "not looking to quit" Kingdom work.

"Anything I can do for the association or for any church — any way I can help — I'm willing," he said.

Robbins, 76, said it's time to step aside and allow someone who is young and energetic to "love the congregations and their wonderful people."

A former personnel sergeant for the Army, Robbins earned an associate's degree from Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham. He has served as pastor of several churches including First Baptist Church, Oakman; Bethel Baptist Church, Dora; and Wegra Baptist Church in Walker County, which has since disbanded. Robbins also served as moderator of Winston Baptist Association and as pastor of a church in Wyoming.

In his years of ministry, Robbins has learned the value of following God's calling. For those in ministry, he advises, "Pray hard and make sure that's where God wants you to be."

He and his wife, Freida, have three children, nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. (Maggie Walsh)



ROBBINS

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New programs & faculty

Samford trustees take significant actions around academics

Samford University's board of trustees took several significant actions around academics and facilities during their regular winter meeting Dec. 1 in Birmingham.

Three new academic departments were approved in the College of Health Sciences: department of health administration and department of health informatics and information management in the School of Public Health, and department of cardiopulmonary sciences in the School of Health Professions. The departments are part of the university's growth plan to meet market demands for health-related professions.

In the Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education, two new departments were created from the former department of curriculum and instruction: department of teacher education (undergraduate) and department of curriculum and instruction (graduate). The Division of Professional and Continuing Studies and the Office of Professional Studies in the education school were renamed to better reflect current program initiatives.

Veterans bachelor's

A new Veterans bachelor of science in nursing was approved to provide "quality nursing educa-

tion" to military veterans interested in nursing careers, according to university officials. The university recently received a grant to help fund the new program.

New doctor of nursing

Also approved in the Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing were three new doctor of nursing practice (D.N.P.) degree programs — a bachelor of science in nursing (B.S.N.) to D.N.P. and an RN to D.N.P., both with concentrations in family nurse practitioner, leadership across the continuum of care, and leadership in legal and ethical health care; and a B.S.N. to D.N.P. in nurse anesthesia.

Andrea Bowens was approved as assistant professor of physical therapy. She currently is a physical therapist with Encore Rehabilitation in Birmingham and earned her doctorate from the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Names for five spaces in the university's new Art Lofts were approved by trustees, including Hazel Boren Faculty Office, Rickie and MaryAnn Moon Glazing Room, Trevelyn Grace Campbell Student Lounge, Eschol and Sarah Taylor Senior Studio and Forstall Art Center Senior Studio. The new Art Lofts opened for the fall semester and provide classrooms, studio and offices for sev-

eral of the art department areas.

Samford's endowment value as of Oct. 31 was \$267 million. Gifts to the university through the end of October totaled \$13 million and are ahead of the same period in 2014. As of Nov. 30, admissions and deposits are ahead of the same date in fall 2014.

New officers were elected by the trustees and Birmingham business executive Tim Vines was elected as chair.

Vines is chief administrative officer for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and has served as a Samford trustee since 2011. He has been serving on the

board's executive committee and as chair of the student affairs and enrollment management committee. He is an Auburn University

graduate and has served in several senior leadership roles. He and his wife, Toni, have three children and are members of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.

Other new board officers elected are educator and community volunteer Beth Thorne Stukes, vice chair and

executive committee chair; Birmingham banking executive Vic Nichol, secretary; and Birmingham businessman Warren Bailey, assistant secretary. (Samford)



VINES



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- 4 You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.
- 5 Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist (TAB)* marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
- 6 If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.
- 7 Each week when **TAB** arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.



Westerners watch from afar as the Middle East continues to be torn apart by violence, pain, fear and untold human suffering. The situation seems overwhelming, possibly even a lost cause. But is it possible a film could be the key to change everything? Possibly so because "nothing is impossible for God" (Luke 1:37). An extraordinarily fresh film directed and acted by Palestinians — *The Savior* — offers a new revealing of Jesus.

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Christian leaders speak out against violence in the name of pro-life

Most people who saw the recently released undercover videos of Planned Parenthood (PP) officials who agreed to sell fetal parts for profit were appalled. Pro-lifers called for governmental action against the organization and many states, including Alabama, fought to cut Medicaid funds to PP clinics. Protesters held rallies outside of clinics across the country and Christians held prayer vigils. These were peaceful, but bold, acts of opposition — far removed from what took place in Colorado Springs, Colorado, when a gunman shot and killed three and injured nine outside of a clinic Nov. 27 in the name of anti-abortion.

Called to stand

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), said of the tragedy, “Vigilante violence against abortion clinics is not the way that Christians are called to stand for justice.”

What caused Robert L. Dear, 65 and a self-proclaimed Christian, to act out and kill?

Police have not commented on Dear’s motive but when he surrendered, he reportedly talked about “no more baby parts,” a possible reference to the undercover videos. That comment was

one of many topics Dear alluded to, but it was uncertain what part it played in his actions, NBC News reported.

Some news sources reported that extreme anti-abortion rhetoric feeds domestic terrorism like Dear’s.

Power of words

But Christians, if anyone, should recognize the power of words to bring both good and ill, according to Karen Swallow Prior, English professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and ERLC research fellow.

She said it isn’t “inflammatory rhetoric” to call for defunding of PP or “yellow journalism” to secretly record PP officials speaking self-defaming words.

“On the other hand,” she said, “referring to abortion providers as ‘abortion ghouls,’ clinic volunteers and workers as ‘death escorts’ or ‘bloodworkers’ and women who obtain abortions as ‘murderers’ is worse than inflammatory: it is unchristlike.”

Moore said, “pro-life (or any other kind of) rhetoric should never dehumanize or encourage violence against anyone.”

At the same time, he continued, “We in the pro-life movement cannot avoid speaking of what abortion is and the injustice of it.”

“We must have a word for those who have aborted, or who

have paid for abortions, a word even for those who practice abortion. This word doesn’t minimize the violence of abortion, and it certainly doesn’t seek to combat this violence with more violence.”

Prior said the truth about abortion “needs not the props of exaggeration or distortion” and “demands no inflammation or embellishment.”

She said it’s important for Christians to use temperate language when it comes to the abortion debate “because Scripture teaches that temperate words are good in and of themselves.”

Other Christian leaders agreed. Mike Routt, a Colorado Springs pastor and president of the state’s Baptist convention, said, “Peaceful dissent and the political process are the correct methods of articulating our convictions. Violence has absolutely no place in this public debate. In spite of this tragedy, (Colorado Baptists) will continue our efforts to support life for all — including the unborn.”

Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, said, “In the pro-life movement we know that the violence of abortion can never and will never be ended with more violence. And even if the madman murderer in Colorado is proven to have entered the Planned Parenthood facility with intent, he wasn’t pro-life.”

Dear’s actions were the mark of someone “irrational and unstable,” according to *Washington Post* commentator Dana Milbank. Regardless, his murdering spree leaves a tainted streak on all who are pro-life.

Sanctity of life

Despite the indelible mark on the pro-life movement, Denny Burk, professor of biblical studies at Boyce College, the undergraduate arm of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, said, “Pro-lifers are not going to be cowed by (Dear’s actions). We will continue to shine the light on the sanctity of every human life — both those inside and outside the abortion mills.”

Killed at the clinic were Garrett Swasey, 44, a police officer, father of two children and elder at an evangelical church; Jennifer Markovsky, 35, a stay-at-home mother of two; and Ke’Arre Stewart, 29, an Iraq War veteran and father of two.

Swasey responded in the line of duty and Markovsky and Stewart had accompanied friends to the clinic. (TAB, BP, BNG, RNS)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 13

Explore the Bible By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D. Dean, School of Christian Ministries, University of Mobile

THE KING ARRIVES Matthew 1:18-25

Matthew begins his Gospel in a manner reminiscent of the genealogies in Genesis, Numbers, Ezra-Nehemiah and the Chronicles. Bible students must be aware of the careful way in which he crafts the opening portion of his record. By including David and Abraham in the initial line, Matthew indicates he is presenting Jesus as the King of the Jews. The royal line of Judah's kings affirms this (7-11), and the inquiry of the magi (2:2) clarifies his intent.

The unique features of this genealogy are the names of women and the inclusion of Gentiles in an otherwise very Jewish testimony of Messiah. Even in the genealogy the reader has lessons to learn. Every name has a story. Every man is a sinner. Every woman needs a Savior. Every child is conceived with a sin-nature. Only Jesus brings salvation, for He is the fulfillment of God's promises.

As a tax collector organizes his coins in even piles, Matthew stacks the generations in three level sections: Abraham to David, King David to the Babylonian exile and the exile to Jesus. Though certain kings' names are omitted from the list, it seems that Matthew's intent was to lay the royal framework and foundation for the conception and birth of Jesus, rather than providing an exhaustive list of every monarch of the southern kingdom.

Supernatural Conception (18-21)

The narrative begins with Joseph. Upon learning of Mary's pregnancy prior to consummation of their wedding, Joseph planned to divorce her quietly rather than bring shame upon her family by public humiliation and possible execution for adultery. An angelic visitation, presumably from Gabriel (Luke 1:26-33), instructed Joseph about the supernatural conception

of the child, Joseph's need to remain with Mary, the child's God-given name and His role to be the salvation of His people.

Reading Luke 1 alongside Matthew 1 provides additional information regarding this event. Gabriel hails Mary explaining to her that she will conceive the Messiah. Both Mary and Joseph are told that the conception is supernatural and that the child's name will be Jesus (Hebrew "Yeshua," meaning salvation). Rather than finding contradiction here, we learn that God instructed both players in this divine drama what their responsibilities would be.

Promised Messiah (22-23)

Seven hundred years before the Messiah's nativity, Isaiah the prophet spoke of a supernatural event that would take place in which the virgin — with the definite article "the" in both Isaiah and Matthew — would bear a Son who would be characterized as "God with us." Although modern scholars argue over the intent and interpretation of the prophecy, Jewish scholars before the time of Christ clearly understood the original Hebrew word to mean "virgin" when they translated the Septuagint.

Matthew points out that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's word through Isaiah. In fact fulfillment is a recurring theme throughout Matthew's Gospel. Here the apostle acknowledges the authority of God's word through the prophet, as well as the affirmation of the prophecy's fulfillment in Jesus the Christ.

Obedience Required (24-25)

After Joseph awoke from his dream, he obeyed the vision, taking Mary to himself as his wife. The final words of this passage are reminiscent of Jesus' words in John 14:2-3 when He says, "I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also." ☞

Bible Studies for Life By James R. Strange, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Religion, Samford University

FREED BY GOD'S FORGIVENESS John 8:2-11

The full passage for today is John 7:53-8:11. Some ancient copies of the Gospels include the passage here (after John 1:52), some at the end of John and some after Luke 21:38. As a result many translations indicate (with brackets, italics or footnotes) the passage may have been added after the Gospel of John was completed. None delete it.

Even though its authenticity is in question the passage has served as Scripture for two millennia. Through it God has much to teach us about our own tendencies to leap to judgment, to be stingy with mercy, to take advantage of those with little power and to conceal our prejudices. He also has something to say about grace.

During this trip to Jerusalem some Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus but He teaches openly in the temple. This is important for two reasons. First, Jesus will indeed be killed in Jerusalem but only when His "hour has come." Second, in 7:50-51 we overhear a discussion about rendering judgment without evidence. Having caught the woman in the act, some scribes and Pharisees apparently have all the evidence they need. Jesus handles it differently.

God's law calls for the punishment of sin. (2-6)

In verse 2, Jesus returns to the temple. The language, "all the people [i.e. Jewish people as opposed to Gentiles] came to Him" and the presence of a woman in verse 3 suggest that Jesus taught in the Court of Women, within the Court of Gentiles but outside the Court of Israelites (i.e. Jewish males), which excluded women. By teaching there Jesus includes women among those who may learn directly from Him (compare Luke 10:38-42 and Mark 15:40-41). That stands out given what happens next.

It isn't clear what charge(s) these leaders wish to bring against Jesus: to accuse Him either of flaunting the Torah or of advocating for capital punishment which the Jews themselves probably couldn't carry out under Roman rule.

Notice that verses 4-5 reveal the leaders' abuse. By "the law" and "Moses commanded," they refer to Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22, which hold the man responsible for initiating adultery and say that both the man and the woman are to be executed. But these leaders brought only the woman. Where is the man? The most reasonable answer is that they have let him go, publicly humiliating only the woman and bringing her alone to face death.

None of us is without sin. (7-9)

This is probably what Jesus refers to when He says, "Let him among you who is without sin [literally, 'who is blameless'] throw the first stone at her" (v. 7). In Jesus' male-dominated society the leaders favor the one with power (the adulterous man) and exploit the one without it. We ourselves have a tendency to blame women for male sexual sins: for lust, for objectification of the female body, even for rape. The accusers cannot stand up to such confrontation and leave.

God forgives us out of His grace. (10-11)

These verses flip the standard way we think about forgiveness: confess, repent, receive forgiveness, follow Jesus. Here Jesus forgives before the woman confesses or repents. We don't know if she follows Jesus or obeys His injunction, "Go and sin no more," but we like to think she does both. We call this "preventive grace:" grace that precedes a person's coming to Christ. It is this grace that enables sinners to repent.

God offers it to all — even to the accusing men — regardless of what we have done. Thanks be to God. ☞

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Massachusetts cape.
- ____, a servant of Jesus. (Rom. 1:1)
- Not only for wrath, but also for conscience _____. (Rom. 13:5)
- Born.
- "My people." (Hos. 2:1)
- Ye shall see heaven _____. (John 1:51)
- And ____ also the Jairite was chief ruler about David. (2 Sam. 20:26)
- Rich soil.
- Neither ____ your clothes. (Lev. 10:6)
- He shall take other ____ and plaister the house. (Lev. 14:42; modern sp.)
- Money earned on account. (abbr.)
- Play division.
- I have made known ____ thee this day. (Prov. 22:19)
- Their brethren of the second degree, Zechariah, _____. (1 Chron. 15:18)
- We will come unto him and make our ____ with him. (John 14:23)
- For as many as are ____ by the Spirit of God. (Rom. 8:14)
- A son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)

Down

- Horse mothers.
- Man's nickname.
- "Sing," past tense.
- Anger.
- The name of the wicked shall _____. (Prov. 10:7)
- One was Bozez, and the name of the other _____. (1 Sam. 14:4)
- The captain of his host was Abner, the son of _____. (1 Sam. 14:50)
- And. (Latin)
- Snake-like fish.
- The king of Assyria brought men from _____. (2 Kings 17:24)
- God is our ____ and strength. (Ps. 46:1)
- None is ____ save one. (Luke 18:19)
- Englishman.
- Roman numeral 54.
- River in Yorkshire, England.
- Narrow strip of wood.
- Thoroughfare. (abbr.)
- Be ye therefore followers of God as ____ children. (Eph. 5:1)
- Fencing sword.
- Who will have all ____ to be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)
- Fiddled while Rome burned.
- Thou art ____, O Lord. (Ps. 119:151)
- As Peter was beneath in the _____. (Mark 14:66)
- ____ize: arrange installment payments.
- Hindu goddess of splendor.
- Yea, they tempted God, and ____ the Holy One of Israel. (Ps. 78:41)
- Took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser _____. (Acts 17:5)
- Simian.
- Knowledge.
- Whose ____ is destruction. (Phil. 3:19)
- Urchins.
- And Cain went out and dwelt in the land of _____. (Gen. 4:16)
- Vegetable.
- Sea eagle.
- Draw ____ to God. (James 4:8)
- The children of ____, four hundred fifty and four. (Ezra 2:15)
- Thou wast naked and _____. (Ezek. 16:7)
- Now an ____ is the tenth part of an ephah. (Ex. 16:36)
- Wherefore, do ye ... ____ the people from their work? (Ex. 5:4)

33. Of great reputation.

- Individual character.
- Last book of the Bible. (abbr.)
- Thou shalt not ____ a kid in his mother's milk. (Ex. 23:19)
- Descendant of Eri.
- And Zebadiah, and Arad, and _____. (1 Chron. 8:15)
- And the sons of ____; Bedan. (1 Chron. 7:17)
- The Lord God shall ____ unto him the throne of his father David. (Luke 1:32)
- To seduce, if it were possible, ____ the elect. (Mark 13:22)
- Jacob's seventh son.
- Not "a" or "u."
- Mouth.
- Modern music.

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BOOKS

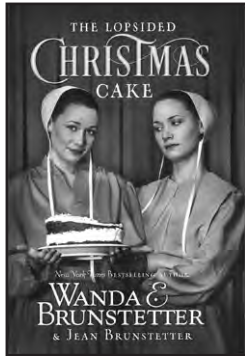
Media  reviews**The Lopsided Christmas Cake**

Wanda E. Brunstetter and Jean Brunstetter. Uhrichsville, Ohio: Shiloh Run Press, 2015. 203 pp. (Paperback).

I had never read a book about the Amish before, but I have noticed they are proliferating on the Christian bookstore shelves. Obviously, people — lots of people — are reading them so I thought it was time for me to see what the books were like. Ordinarily I just choose from what is sent to me to review so it was a treat to shop for a book. I chose this one because it looked cute. And it was.

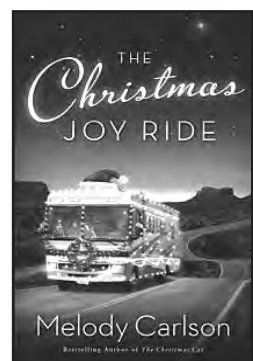
Billed as a “lighthearted Christmas romance from Amish country” the book was a treat. I’m not sure what I expected: squeaky clean, for one thing — which it was; a childish, boring story, for another — which it was not. Oh there were no dark, brooding parts (it told us it was lighthearted, remember), but it wasn’t silly either.

The lopsided Christmas cake in question played only a minor role in the story, which was about two Amish sisters who inherit their late grandparents’ store and move away from their home to run it. Along the way they make friends in their new Amish community and find romance (it warned us about that too so I’m not spoiling anything). The jury is still out on whether I’ll seek out other Amish books to read but I did enjoy this one.

**The Christmas Joy Ride**

Melody Carlson. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell, 2015. 168 pp. (Hardback).

Imagine a Thelma and Louise-type trip across the country in a motorhome. Now imagine the trip right before Christmas, with stops along the way to make Christmas wishes come true.



One more thing to imagine: Thelma (or maybe Louise — I didn’t actually see the movie) is 85 years old, and Louise has never driven a motorhome before.

Sound like fun? This lighthearted book does make the trip — and the read — fun. Melody Carlson is a good storyteller, weaving just enough surprises into this adventure to keep the pages turning. Carlson has written at least seven other Christmas books and she shows no signs of running short on good ideas.

If you’re looking for a book with a deep message, this one is not for you. But if you want one that reads like a Hallmark Christmas movie, only with a clear and uncompromising Christian message, you might enjoy this book. ☞

Meet the reviewer

Martine Bates Sharp, Ed.D., reviews books and movies for The Alabama Baptist. She is a university professor and retired principal. She is a member of Central Baptist Church, Decatur.



Martine@kingdomresearch.org

‘Christmas Worship’ **Baloche pairs worship standards with sounds of the season**

By Leann Callaway
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While encouraging worshippers to find new meaning in traditional carols by combining them with contemporary praise songs, singer/songwriter Paul Baloche is seeking to do more than spread Yuletide cheer during his December concerts.

Desiring to help listeners slow down and enter the Christmas season with adoration and reflection, Baloche has paired worship standards with the sounds of the season on his album, “Christmas Worship Vol. 2.”

‘Shift in perspective’

“There is so much content, beauty and theology in traditional carols, but most of these songs are not vertical in nature — meaning that they are not directly speaking to the Lord,” Baloche said. “By adding a simple chorus at the end which is a response to the beauty of the lyric, melody and the nostalgia of these beautiful carols, then transitioning into a first-person response in keeping with the Advent season, it’s an amazing shift in perspective.”

For this project Baloche collaborated with a variety of musicians including the worship duo All Sons & Daughters and Irish worship leader Kathryn Scott.

“There are different generations represented on this album and each one inspires me to write, sing and be better,” he said.

As the writer of praise songs such as “Open the Eyes of My Heart,” “Hosanna,” “Our God Saves,” “Your Name” and “A New Hallelujah,” Baloche’s work has become a staple among contemporary worship services around the globe.

Having served in music ministry for the past 30 years Baloche desires to equip worship leaders, songwriters and praise teams with beneficial tools and resources provided through his website, leadworship.com.

Especially during this busy season, Baloche



Paul Baloche

Photo courtesy of Hoganson Media

desires to stay focused by reflecting on his true purpose and calling for ministry.

“My purpose in leading worship and songwriting

is to try to encourage people to press into Jesus and desire to follow Him each day,” Baloche said.

“If you do something long enough you uncover life lessons along the way. You aspire to be faithful to God’s calling in your life, pressing through even when you fall short. When you hit a certain age and as you grow in your faith you recognize the potential and the burden of being a leader as you realize the importance of stepping up and being more inten-

tional toward the people God has put in your life. That’s when your prayer becomes, ‘Lord, give me grace to finish well.’” ☞

**MOVIE REVIEW****Homeless for the Holidays**

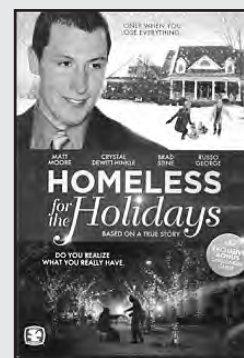
Bridgestone Multimedia Group

Homeless for the Holidays” is about a businessman who, through no real fault of his own, finds himself and his family in dire straits at Christmas. While Jack Baker, the main character, is basically a good guy — certainly no Ebenezer Scrooge — he does suffer from shortsightedness and the same sort of affluenza many of us have without realizing it.

Like Ebenezer, Jack is a changed man at the end of his suffering. Oh I’m not giving anything away; this

is a Christmas movie, and don’t they all have happy endings?

The story has holes in the plot big enough



to drive a truck through and parts are bordering on corny but I liked it anyway. It’s clean enough for the youngest children in the family to watch, the message is sound, it has discussion questions for the family and I saw it at a well-known Christian bookstore for \$5.

What’s not to like? Well except for the plot problems, but it’s Christmas — the season for miracles. Just sit back and enjoy it. ☞



BP photo

Michael Meurrier (center), a physical therapist from FBC Oxford, Mississippi, demonstrates how to pick up a heavy object to a grandmother (left) who still does backbreaking work on her farm.

'Going to the nations'

Mississippians share God's love with people of Oaxaca, Mexico

Wherever you go, we go. First Baptist Church, Oxford, Mississippi, made this commitment to Jeff and Liesa Holeman long before they began serving as International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries in 2008.

It started a decade earlier when Jeff Holeman became student minister at the church and led the youth group to make return missions trips to Brazil.

In 2003 he felt called to overseas missions full time.

Holeman jokingly said he did what he was supposed to do by going home and telling his wife, "We're going to be missionaries."

"It didn't go well," he said. It wasn't that Liesa didn't feel a tug toward missions, but she thought that would be later in life after their children were grown.

The Holemans stayed in Oxford until they took their two children with them on the church's missions trip to Brazil in 2006. The children responded so well that the family then went on another trip, eventually being appointed by IMB at the end of 2007.

First Baptist, Oxford, partnered with the Holemans where they first served in Peru. And in the three years since the Holemans have begun serving as cluster strategy leaders in Oaxaca, Mexico, the church has adopted the Tlacolula Valley Zapotec people group in that area.

Jeff Holeman said, "We have a huge support group behind us ... they don't let go of us. That's a two-way street. We value our relationship with one another. Just because we're out of sight, we're not out of mind."

Earlier this year, a missions team from Oxford

spent a week alongside the family, teaching English as a Second Language and leading medical clinics. First, Oxford, member Buster Hale had been part of Jeff Holeman's first missions trip to Brazil and has served alongside him on missions trips to both Peru and Mexico.

"We've watched Jeff and Liesa grow," he said. "We've been a part of raising them in the Lord."

Liesa Holeman said, "God called the church to [invest in others]. And we as missionaries have a responsibility to help our churches touch, feel and understand our stories ... to help them understand the importance of going to the nations.

"When they sent us [First, Oxford] told us they would come alongside us. It's amazing to see that they sent us and now they are coming themselves."

The Holemans mentor students and young adults who serve as short-term missionaries, such as Sarah Toles from The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham. Toles worked with the Holemans for four months in Oaxaca before returning to Birmingham and nursing.

This year she went back to Oaxaca on a short-term missions trip to help medical professionals conduct medical clinics there.

"They're like family," she said of the Holemans. A student minister at heart, Jeff Holeman realizes the impact short-term missions can make.

"God uses short-term missions to open our minds and hearts about what it means to be available to God.

"My prayer is that U.S. churches become aware that cross-cultural missions ... [is] something they can do in their own cities, and it will equip these people groups to share the gospel in their own countries." (BP)

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Compiled from Wire Services



Muslim extremist group continues attacks in Nigeria

WOGOM, Nigeria — Boko Haram has revived its once trademark hit-and-run raids on villages, killing at least eight people, kidnapping and displacing others and burning homes in north-eastern Nigeria and southeastern Niger villages Nov. 28–29, according to news reports.

The raids are the type of attacks Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has said he would be able to stop by the end of December, aided by a regional army of 8,700 soldiers. At the same time, Boko Haram has continued almost daily suicide attacks that Buhari has said would be much more difficult to combat in Nigeria and neighboring countries.

While Buhari is having more success against Boko Haram than previous Nigerian administrations, he has been unable to defeat the strong militants, said Ann Buwalda, executive director of the Jubilee Campaign for religious freedom and human rights.

"Is there progress? Yes. But is Boko Haram actually curtailed? I would say no, that this government is doing what it can, but still is not able to fully capture or apprehend or destroy Boko Haram's strongholds in the northeast of Nigeria," Buwalda said.

Boko Haram attacked villages in Borno state and Adamawa in Nigeria, and in the Diffa region of Niger. Days earlier, Boko Haram killed 18 people and injured 11 others during a raid in the village of Wogom located near the southeastern town of Bosso, Niger, on the Nigerian border.

But the village attacks are not an indication that Boko Haram is gaining strength, Buwalda said, whose organization receives reports from the non-governmental organization Stefanos Foundation and others in Nigeria.

"They continue their efforts to terrorize the local population in the northeast," Buwalda said. "But I don't see that Boko Haram is at this very moment gaining territory. That's not what I've observed in terms of their levels of attack." (BP)

Christian men shot, killed in Yemen for their faith

TAIZ, Yemen — Two Christians in Yemen, both converts from Islam, have been ambushed and killed because of their faith, according to sources close to the victims.

In Taiz, a city with a pre-war population of 600,000 people in southwest Yemen, at least one member of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) ambushed a Christian man in the city and shot him 15 to 20 times in early September. A second Christian was shot once in his home Oct. 2, sources said.

The second victim may have been killed by a Muslim extremist group or by members of his own family, they said. Because of security threats in Yemen, a 99.9-percent Muslim country ruled by "sharia" (Islamic law) and embroiled in a Civil War, the names of the victims and the sources cannot be released. Both men were openly confessing Christ.

A Yemeni friend of the second Christian said the convert was involved in evangelism, though he tried to keep his activities low key. The friend said the second Christian killed, who was in his late 30s or early 40s, was not involved in any other activities that could have led to his death. Others who knew the convert from Islam said Muslims were harassing and threatening him.

A source close to the Christian slain first said a member of AQAP was responsible.

"For six months he had been receiving direct threats from known AQAP members that he knew personally," the source said. "There is no reason to believe that his family was involved in the killing. His family knew of his faith for more than a decade, and although it created tensions they never threatened his life." (MS)



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