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SPORTS BETTING SCHEMES



Popular websites FanDuel, DraftKings face legality battles

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

In the hype leading up to Super Bowl 50, daily fantasy sports websites like DraftKings and FanDuel have overtaken beer companies as the top advertisers for popular sporting events.

However, questions about the legality of the games continue to mount, and a recently filed Alabama lawsuit may help determine whether the games constitute gambling.

The federal suit was filed Nov. 18, 2015, in U.S. District Court in Birmingham by two Jefferson County men. Plaintiffs Sam Manzella and Robert Todd argue that the two dominant companies in the online fantasy sports business, DraftKings and FanDuel, are operating an illegal online sports betting business. The men want their money back, citing a 150-year-old state law that prohibits enforcement of gambling debts.

'Specious attempt'

The suit states: "Defendants (DraftKings and FanDuel) define their sports betting scheme as DFS (daily fantasy sports) in a specious attempt to circumvent Alabama law which expressly prohibits 'gambling.' In Alabama, '[a] person engages in gambling if he stakes or risks something of value upon the outcome of a contest of chance or a future contingent event not under his control or influence, upon an agreement or understanding that

he or someone else will receive something of value in the event of a certain outcome.' A scheme is considered gambling 'if chance is the dominant factor in determining the result of the game, even though the result may be affected to some degree by skill or knowledge.'"

Class-action status

The suit seeks class-action status, identifying the proposed class as "all persons in the State of Alabama who participated in DraftKings' or FanDuel's DFS, deposited money in a DraftKings or FanDuel account and lost money in any game or contest during the six months prior to the filing of the original complaint."

Sports fans have played fantasy sports games for years. Prior to the Internet, individuals within a "league" would select a team of athletes from real-life players on their favorite sports clubs (thus, a "fantasy" team) and then track their real-game statistics over the course of a season to determine the winner. Participants often put money into a collective pot and at the conclusion of the season the winner received the cash.

With the advent of the Internet and mo-

bile apps came the ability to choose teams and track athletes' performance even more closely. The website FanDuel launched in 2009, allowing fantasy sports players not only to take their games online but to play a version of the game that didn't require following a full season of sports action. Instead, players could compete over the course of a day or a few days. Thus, opponents say, the game is gambling, pure and simple because fantasy sports players are essentially mak-

ing wagers on the performance of selected athletes in specific games.

Defenders of the fantasy sports industry say it is a game of skill and cite the 2006 United States Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act (UIGEA), which excludes fantasy or simulation sports games if the game is not "based on the current membership of an actual team" and the winning outcome reflects "the relative knowledge and skills of the participants."

Classification

Under the UIGEA, no winning outcome may be based on the score, point-spread or performance of any single real-world team or the single performance of an individual athlete in any single real-world sporting event. Thus, proponents say, fantasy sports are allowed under federal law because teams are drafted from among current players and are classified as a game of skill rather than a game of chance.

Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), said the industry is taking advantage of the law's intention to curtail illegal gambling.

(See 'Harm,' page 4)



123rf.com

COMMENT

With Outstretched Arms

This week *The Alabama Baptist* proudly unveils a new logo. For almost 20 years the symbol of the state Baptist paper has been a stained glass window with a cross in its center. Beginning today, the emblem changes to a cross outlined by people reaching with outstretched arms to the world.

The difference may be subtle but it is significant. Many saw the stained glass window as an indication the state Baptist paper was only for church officials. There is no mistaking the new logo emphasizes people. *The Alabama Baptist* is for all Baptists — not just pastors and denominational officials.

The three descriptive words used with the logo — Informing, Inspiring, Connecting — make that point. *The Alabama Baptist* informs for understanding and perspective. It inspires for personal Christian growth. It connects Baptists for missions and ministry.

These are important contributions the ministry offers to every believer.

The cross is still the focal point of the new logo just as the message of Jesus paying the price for the sins of all who will believe on His name is the center of the Christian gospel. Without God acting to reconcile the world to Himself through the cross there would be no Christian faith, no Church, no Baptists, no state Baptist paper.

Center of our proclamation

We are a people of the cross and the cross is the center of our proclamation.

Jesus died for people. That is why the new logo is formed by people. The Bible says the gospel is for “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9). That truth is symbolized by people of different colors and different shapes.

God’s love is not determined by race or gender. It is not limited by geography or status. God’s love is for all and so is the ministry of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Outstretched arms of those gathered around the cross could indicate the joy and celebration of those who have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ. Certainly life is transformed when one accepts Jesus as personal Savior.

Notice also the arms are stretched outward. Those who have been changed by the message of the cross have been commissioned to share



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

that message with others. The cross does not turn believers inward. It propels them toward a world needing the message of Christ.

Thus the arms of those gathered around the cross are stretched outward as if inviting others to join them at the cross.

Graphically the new symbol dramatizes the publication’s three descriptive words — Inform. Inspire. Connect. From the center of the symbol, referred to in design circles as a “mark,” flows the information — the story of the cross. Inspiration is suggested by the outstretched hand of those transformed by the cross. Connecting is implied by the focus of the people outward in missions and ministry to those who need the gospel.

The second element of the logo is the large initials TAB. For generations Alabama Baptists have found the name “*The Alabama Baptist*” cumbersome. Some refer to the state Baptist paper as “The Baptist.” Others simply say “Alabama Baptist.” The problem has only been exaggerated by living in a culture where communication happens in short texts and tweets.

The new logo offers the acrostic TAB. While TAB abbreviates the paper’s name, it also is descriptive of the ministry. TAB can represent some of the core values adopted by *The Alabama Baptist* board of directors in 2001.

TAB could also be an acrostic for truth, accuracy and balance, essential traits of a trusting relationship between this ministry of communications and Alabama Baptists whom it has served since 1843.

The foundation for both the new graphic mark and the TAB abbreviation is the historic name of this ministry — *The Alabama Baptist*.

Each word is important. The cross is the symbol of the Christian faith and this ministry is a part of that faith. However, this ministry focuses on that part of the Christian family known as Baptists. We embrace a particular history, a certain understanding of theology, a

particular teaching of church polity and how to do church.

While the ministry celebrates all in the family of God, our daily fellowship is with those brothers and sisters called Baptists.

Baptists are a worldwide body numbering about 43 million baptized believers. TAB shares information about Baptists around the world but our emphasis is on what God is doing among and through Baptists in Alabama. That is why the paper devotes more than 70 percent of its news and editorial space on average to Alabama Baptist-related stories.

Even the word “The” is important. This ministry began at the behest of the Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC). Since 1843 the publication has had an official working relationship with the state convention. In 1918 the state convention purchased the ministry and took possession the first week of January 1919.

Today the paper is owned and operated by a board of directors elected by ABSC. Through that board of directors, the ministry is held accountable to accomplish the purposes for which the convention provides financial support through the Cooperative Program.

The Alabama Baptist is not a private ministry. It is a fostered entity of ABSC.

All three parts — the mark, the acrostic and the historic name — make up the new logo. They are a mixture of modern and traditional designed to appeal to all ages.

The type is a historic style emphasizing the heritage, strength and value of this ministry for almost 175 years.

Changeover process

The new logo and its various parts begin appearing today. It will take some time for a complete changeover. The last item to make the switch will likely be TAB’s website which is in the process of a complete makeover. A change in the front-page design of the weekly publication also is anticipated.

The new logo is only one part of the ongoing evolution of this ministry as we attempt to share the message of the cross and what God is doing among and through Alabama Baptists. We are grateful to minister to Baptists in Alabama, in all 50 states and to readers in more than 125 nations around the world.

Please pray for *The Alabama Baptist* and all of us privileged to serve in this important and historic ministry. ☞

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

See page 7



INTRODUCING OUR NEW LOGO



After almost 20 years, *The Alabama Baptist* has launched a new logo and style for the ministry. A new look and feel to our digital platform, including an upgraded website, will follow soon. To read the details behind the design of the mark as well as the overall logo, read Bob Terry's editorial on page 2.

Televangelists make Netflix 'reel'

Alongside programs like "Orange Is the New Black" and "House of Cards," Netflix now offers users another type of content: Christian sermons. The online video streaming service added lectures by popular Christian pastors in early December 2015.

"I believe if Jesus were on planet Earth today in the flesh he'd be on Netflix," said Ed Young, one of the pastors, in a phone interview.

Young spearheaded the effort to get Christian talks onto Netflix. He said he believes, like Jesus, he should find ways to appeal to the masses. It's that attitude that makes the partnership with Netflix an unsurprising, if unprecedented, convergence of evangelical faith and popular media.

Young, pastor of Fellowship Church, Dallas, has penned more than a dozen books; he

has had television programs on the E! network and other cable channels; he hosts iTunes podcasts and offers video content on YouTube and Roku. He also has gained attention for media stunts such as his 2012 "bed-in," when he and his wife spent a day in a bed on the roof of their church to generate discussion around sexuality in Christianity.

'Fishers of men'

"Jesus said that we should become fishers of men. If I'm going to catch the most fish, I've got to put a lot of hooks in the water," Young said of his many media projects. "But I'm most excited about Netflix right now."

Young's "Fifty Shades of THEY" Netflix series includes five episodes. The pastor paces a colorfully lit stage, offering jocular interpretations of Christian teachings to an audience of hundreds. Some of the other se-

ries have similar formats.

Georgia pastor Andy Stanley addresses working through challenges in "Starting Over." And in "Winning Life's Battles," evangelical icon Joyce Meyer preaches to a massive auditorium.

But for Young, the goal is clear: He plans to continue bringing Christianity to popular media in whatever forms technology provides.

"Jesus was the most creative communicator in history," Young said. "If we're taking a page from His playbook, the Church should be the most creative entity in the universe."

Netflix did not provide many guidelines in terms of content for the episodes but did ask that the programs avoid product promotion or invitations for viewers to make donations. (RNS)

From Catholic to Protestant, Latin America sees change

Latin America remains a mostly Catholic region and culture but its overall numbers have taken a huge dive during the past four decades or so, a survey by the Pew Research Center has found. And the majority of those former Catholics have become Protestants.

According to the study, titled "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," the percentage of current Protestants who were raised as Catholics ranges from 15 to 74 percent, with U.S. Hispanics coming in at 47 percent. Colombia, Paraguay, Peru and Ecuador top the list, showing the trend toward Protestantism in Latin America most clearly.

The Pew data shows that the number of Catholics in Central and South America and parts of the Caribbean has plummeted from 90 percent to 69 percent since the 1960s.

Plummeting percentages

"Much of the movement away from Catholicism and toward Protestantism in Latin America has occurred in the span of a single lifetime," Pew reported. "Indeed, in most of the countries surveyed, at least a third of current Protestants were raised in the Catholic Church, and half or more say they were baptized as Catholics."

For instance approximately 1 in 4 Nicaraguans, 1 in 5 Brazilians and 1 in 7 Venezuelans are former Catholics, Pew reported.

The rise of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Latin America has long been documented. The Pew data also accounts for the growth in the unaffiliated population throughout that part of the world.

"While the Catholic Church has lost adherents through religious switching, both Protestant churches and the religiously unaffiliated population in the region have gained members," according to the study.

Unaffiliated today

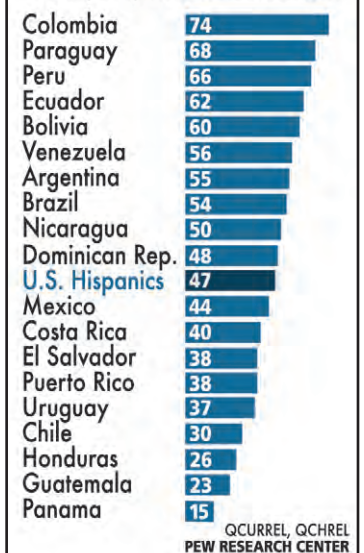
Nine percent of Latin Americans were raised in Protestant churches compared to 19 percent who describe themselves as Protestants now, Pew said.

"And while only 4 percent of Latin Americans were raised without a religious affiliation, twice as many (8 percent) are unaffiliated today," the report said.

Still, most have left for other churches where they reported

Many Protestants were raised as Catholics

Percentage of current Protestants who say they were raised Catholic



finding a more satisfying church and worship experience.

Most former Catholics said they were seeking "a more personal connection with God," while others said "they wanted a different style of worship or a church that helps its members more," the survey found.

And the majority of Catholic-to-Protestant converts are Millennials, leaving Catholicism before the age of 25.

Religiously observant

The survey also found that Protestants in Latin America tend to be more religiously observant than Catholics. "A regional median of 83 percent of Protestants report attending church at least once a month compared with a median of 62 percent of Catholics."

Protestants also are more likely to read Scripture outside of religious services and approach the Bible literally than Catholics.

Social issues is another area where the survey found differences, with Catholics in Latin America tending to be less conservative than their Protestant counterparts in relation to abortion, homosexuality, artificial means of birth control, sex outside of marriage, divorce and drinking alcohol.

"Protestants who participate in religious services at least once a week are somewhat more likely to oppose abortion and divorce — and considerably more likely to oppose homosexuality, sex outside of marriage and drinking alcohol — than are Catholics who attend Mass at least weekly," the survey reported. (TAB, BNG)

"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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HARM TO SOCIETY?

Majority of Americans believe sports betting is morally acceptable, study shows

(continued from page 1)

“When they wrote the law, fantasy sports was a small part of the industry,” Godfrey said. “Just like anything else, if you carve out a niche, people will take advantage of it.”

Godfrey expressed concern that the websites put gambling in the hands of anyone with a smartphone or computer, including children and teenagers. The legal age to play the games in Alabama is 19.

“There is big money in it for those who know how to work the system but most people who play end up losing money,” he said. “The state needs to be diligent in protecting its citizens from predators like that.”

Other states

Godfrey noted the corruption inherent in the industry as well, as revealed in late 2015 when allegations surfaced that employees of the two major companies were playing at rival sites and winning big. Following those revelations, several states declared the games illegal, including New York, Illinois, Vermont and most recently Texas. Five states — Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana and Washington — already ban state residents’ participation in daily fantasy sports games. Officials in

Massachusetts and Nevada stopped short of calling the games illegal, instead calling for regulation of the industry in those states as gambling enterprises. A representative from Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange’s office said he is unable to comment on the legality of fantasy sports at this time.

FanDuel and DraftKings have declined to comment on the pending cases against them but both companies are fighting back. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton says they have no argument.

Texas law

“Paid daily ‘fantasy sports’ operators claim they can legally operate as an unregulated house, but none of their arguments square with existing Texas law. Simply put, it is prohibited gambling in Texas if you bet on the performance of a participant in a sporting event and the house takes a cut,” Paxton said in a statement.

As part of his fight against the industry, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman wants the companies to stop operating in the state and to pay back hundreds of millions of dollars in profits made off the games. CNNMoney estimates that the industry brings in about \$1.5 billion a year in revenue, primarily from advertising on the sites. Sports leagues including Major

Among Americans:
SPORTS BETTING

Should daily fantasy sports such as FanDuel and DraftKings be legal?

LifeWayResearch.com

League Baseball, the NBA and the NHL, as well as owners of several NFL and NBA teams are investors in the industry, as are companies including ESPN, Yahoo and CBS. Both DraftKings and FanDuel have grown rapidly by offering daily games, CNNMoney reports.

Cheating controversies aside, FanDuel and DraftKings have faced opposition from amateur sports including the NCAA and Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Both groups asked the websites to stop offering college versions of their games because they consider them gambling.

In December 2015, College Football Playoff executive director Bill Hancock announced that ESPN would not air ads for the websites during broadcasts of bowl games including the championship game. NCAA President Mark Emmert had previously said NCAA would block daily fantasy sports ads during the men’s and women’s basketball tournaments and the College World Series.

Surveying Americans

As the issue begins to work its way through state and federal courts, a LifeWay Research study released Jan. 22 shows widespread belief that gambling is morally acceptable. Among Americans surveyed, 64 percent disagreed with the statement that it is morally wrong to bet on sports. They were less certain about the legality of daily fantasy sports. Seven percent of respondents said they were not sure whether websites like FanDuel and DraftKings should be legal. The remaining 93 percent were almost evenly split, with 47 percent saying the sites should be legal and 46 percent saying they should not. The ambivalence of the American public regarding gambling may be rooted in the fact that historically, “gambling has invited shady and addictive behavior,” said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research. “Clearly people perceive a harm to society that goes beyond the wager itself.” †

DAILY FANTASY SPORTS 101

▶ A website like DraftKings or FanDuel accepts wagers of real money from bettors on a sporting event. Bettors “draft” a team of athletes from among current rosters of amateur and professional teams.

▶ The site assigns “points” based on the performance of those athletes and teams participating in specific athletic competitions (thus the “daily” fantasy sports description).

▶ Once the sporting event concludes, the site calculates a score based on their point scheme and pays bettors with the highest point totals. Bettors who do not win do not get their money back.

DraftKings and FanDuel allow players to bet on fantasy NFL and college football teams, as well as hockey, baseball and NASCAR.

▶ An estimated 32 million Americans spend \$467 per person (about \$15 billion total) playing fantasy sports annually, according to *Forbes* magazine.

(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)

Among Americans:
SPORTS BETTING

Sports betting should be legalized nationwide.

It is morally wrong to bet on sports.

LifeWayResearch.com

Alan Cross (center), Montgomery Mixtec Task Force coordinator, teaches a breakout session during the annual Maximum Impact National Mixtec Summit.



Photo by Rachel Brown

Local missions field

Alabama Baptists reach out to more than 2,700 Mixtec people 'across the street'

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

Second only to New York City's concentration of 3,000, the city of Montgomery is home to more than 2,700 Mixtec people — an engaged yet unreached people group native to south-central Mexico.

In the early 2000s, the corn industry began to collapse in Mexico and the Mixtec people, who were mainly corn farmers, began to lose their source of livelihood. As they migrated to the United States for a chance at a new life and new jobs, several cities became locations where the traditional, patriarchal families began to settle — New York City; Montgomery; Richmond, Virginia; Yakima, Washington; and Nashville.

Recognizing the nations had come to them, Alabama Baptists formed the Montgomery Mixtec Task Force in 2009 to work together to reach the Mixtec with the gospel.

The task force, divided into three categories — church planting, benevolence and immigration — is now comprised of Gateway Baptist Church, Highland Gardens Baptist Church, Yarbrough Street Baptist Church and Ridgecrest Baptist Church, all in Montgomery. Nehemiah Center (a ministry of First Baptist Church, Montgomery), Community of Hope, Forest Park Ministry Center and Every Tribe Ministry also make up the task force.

Alan Cross, former pastor of Gateway Baptist, recently took on the role of task force coordinator.

"We've taken it upon ourselves to reach these unreached people who now live across the street from us in Alabama," Cross said. "God has brought a people group to us and it's

our responsibility and privilege to be able to become missionaries to them."

Most Mixtec live in multihousing communities — apartment complexes, like Hopper Gardens, or mobile home parks.

They mainly worship their ancestors but also mix that with worship of spirits and gods of nature. They have village chiefs, medicine men and follow a hierarchical model of society, with the father being the leader, Cross said.

They also speak a completely oral American Indian language.

Hallay Cagle, director of Every Tribe Ministry, has been working with the Mixtec since she was a sophomore in high school and lived among them in Hopper Gardens for three years.

"I always knew I was called to be a missionary and I assumed that I'd

be one overseas but I think God just brought the overseas here," Cagle said.

But reaching the Mixtec with the gospel doesn't come without its hardships, she said.

"It's difficult. Ancestor worship is a huge stumbling block. Their religion is totally focused on fear. They do a lot of rituals and believe in evil curses and evil spirits," Cagle said. But she's found a way to use that fear as a door to share about God's peace, hope and love.

Since Cagle has been working with the Mixtec she's seen two adults and 10 children come to know the Lord.

But Cagle and Cross are certainly not alone in reaching the Mixtec in the U.S. The second annual Maximum Impact National Mixtec Summit was held Jan. 21–23 at Gateway Baptist to gather those working with Mixtecs across the country. People from Virginia, California, Mexico and

Canada, among other places, gathered to learn more about reaching the Mixtec, to fellowship with other volunteers who are reaching them in the U.S. and to learn new strategies for sharing the gospel.

The summit featured a Spanish-only session that hosted about 65 Hispanic church members and leaders who are interested in reaching the Mixtec.

Lisa Rose, Montgomery Baptist Association's (MBA) church and community ministries director, coordinated the summit, which was sponsored by the task force, MBA and International Mission Board.

"The summit was very rich and full of info and fellowship," Rose said. Networking was another great aspect of the summit, she said, as Montgomery-area volunteers hope to plant a Mixtec church in 2016.

Cross said, "It's so important for churches to network together in this ministry. There's no way that any one church could do this on its own."

Worldview, religion

Through large group and breakout sessions, participants learned about the Mixtec worldview and religion, how to share the gospel with a non-Spanish speaking people, how to find Mixtec around you, how to use immigration as a platform to share the gospel, how to live among the Mixtec and more. Although there are barriers to reaching this people group, Alabama Baptists and others are working to share the gospel with them.

"We must see our local communities as missions fields instead of something to react against," Cross said. "We are trying to see what God is doing in this ... as we see Him at work in moving people around the world so that they would be receptive to the gospel and be connected to Christians who will share." ¶

For more information on the task force, call 334-271-6794 or email lrose@mgmbaptists.org.

Ministry Tips



MINISTERING TO IMMIGRANTS

By Alan Cross
Montgomery Mixtec Task Force Coordinator

Alabama has more than 160,000 foreign-born residents from all over the world, including 65,000 undocumented immigrants. Acts 17:26–28 says God determines the times and places where people live so they can reach out and find Him because He is not far from each one of us. As followers of Jesus who are "sent" to the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of

the Holy Spirit, have we considered what God might be doing in this present hour in sending the nations to us? Are we seeing ourselves as missionaries? Here are some ways to minister to the nations next door:

Pray. Ask God where He is working and who your neighbors are. Then ask Him to change your heart. Humble yourselves.

Study Scripture. Submit to a biblical perspective about how we should love immigrants (Lev. 19:33–34; Matt. 22:34–40).

Map. Investigate your community. Go

to ethnic restaurants and grocery stores and ask questions. Peoplegroups.info is a good tool.

Identify resources. What resources exist in your own congregation to minister to immigrants?

Develop a plan. Find one thing that works and commit to it — English as a Second Language classes, immigration workshops, tutoring programs, apartment outreaches/Bible studies, sports ministry, community celebrations — all of these are platforms to build relationships.

Partner with others. We cannot do this alone. Connect with your local association and other ministries and community organizations.

Persevere. Suffer for the sake of the gospel (Phil. 3:10–11). This work will not be easy but God will get the glory and you will receive much joy.

Listen then advocate. Hear immigrant stories and then be a voice for them and identify/partner with them in their struggles. ¶

Alabama Baptist pastor receives backlash on anti-refugee letter to editor in TAB

A letter to the editor in the Jan. 21 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* has sparked controversy as well as a clarification by the letter writer (see sidebar, this page).

In the Jan. 21 letter, Alabama Pastor Ted Sessoms criticized Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders for what he says is coddling Syrian refugees.

SBC leaders and others rushed to Twitter beginning Jan. 26 to condemn the letter by Sessoms, pastor of Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Northport, suggesting denominational officials should consider Old Testament passages where God gave instructions to destroy entire populations, including women, children and animals.

At press time, more than 300 conversations, likes or comments were in the Twittersphere regarding the letter to the editor.

“Why would He give such instructions?” Sessoms asked in the letter. “Because He knew the impact these idol worshippers of false gods would have on His people. It is not a matter of loving your neighbor. My neighbors are the people that value the same standards of life and way of life that I value.”

‘Garbage’ letter

Florida Pastor Dean Inserra, member of an advisory council to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, called the letter “garbage” and

wondered why the Baptist newspaper would even publish it.

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, called the letter and the concepts expressed in it “an embarrassment to the gospel and the one who told us to love our neighbor and our enemies.”

Sessoms told Birmingham TV stations CBS-affiliated WIAT-42 and NBC WVTM-13 on Jan. 28 that he wrote the letter to express his frustration with Baptist leaders who have advocated for allowing refugees to enter the country.

“In this country we are under attack by terrorists and we don’t know who those folks are,” Sessoms said. “And (we do) so by allowing these refugees to come in [without knowing] their background. But we certainly know their past is to hate Americans and hate Christianity.”

A couple of posts on the Arbor Springs Baptist Facebook page gave the pastor a thumbs-up.

“Just read your letter to editor in *AlBaptist*. Great. Say it again and again,” wrote one commenter. “Your church members should be very proud to have a man such as you as Pastor,” added another. “I don’t know what the people of AB are thinking. THANKS again so much for writing what a lot of us are thinking.”

To read the letter, visit www.thealabamabaptist.org and search “Syrian refugees.” (ABP, *TAB*)



Sessoms' letter in the Jan. 21 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Sessoms seeks to clarify original letter to editor

Please allow me to clarify a statement I made in a previous letter concerning the Syrian refugees.

I nor the church I pastor have ever advocated taking the life of anyone other than self defense. We hate no one or nation.

My opposition to our Southern Baptist leaders was that they failed to protect and preserve the Christian faith that is being over-powered by the Muslim faith in this country.

As God was protecting Israel from the Amalekites that constantly attacked Israel, I felt our Southern Baptist leaders had an obligation to protect our denomination. I apologize to anyone for even

a hint that we have a right to take innocent lives. Only God could make a decision of that magnitude. Our mission is to tell others about Christ which the Koran and the Muslim faith denounce that God even had a Son. I am against the Syrian refugees coming into our country simply because of terrorism. If they move into our community, we will love them and minister to them as best we can.

As I stated in my last letter we just need to make good decisions for the future of the Christian faith and for the future of our country and generations to come.

Ted Sessoms
Pastor, Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Northport



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REFUGEE DEBATE

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



SUPPORT OF REFUGEES

I am against denying refugees the rights to America's soil and my neighborhood. These are not people who hate America, hate Christians and vow to destroy our way of life; they are people desperately fleeing an atrocious war. Perhaps these leaders should refer to Jesus' order to love our enemies and persecutors. Why would He give such instructions? Because we are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. This is a matter of loving your neighbor — not only the people who share your values, but the people you encounter daily, especially those hungry for the gospel.

We owe it to our posterity to make good decisions. And opening up our country to tens of thousands of refugees who have been carefully examined and deemed nonthreatening will demonstrate America's self-proclaimed Christian values and better our children's future.

Yes some refugees are indeed people who are willing to give their lives for Allah, just as we claim we are willing to give our lives for Christ. Their religion does not cause them to hate Christians; our religion should not cause us to hate Muslims. In fact quite the opposite.

Why fear the construction of mosques? What a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate Jesus in the way we welcome our new Muslim neighbors.

What these leaders who are against allowing refugees in are communicating is, "I believe that Christ died for me and commanded me to reflect His great love for His people by, quite simply, loving His people. I know that this is a perfect opportunity to not only tell you about Jesus, but show you Jesus. However, you are the enemy, and you are not welcome here."

Lauren Deutsch
Tuscaloosa, Ala.

SHOCKED BY LETTER

I am writing to express concern over Ted Sessoms' letter to the editor in the Jan. 21 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. I was shocked to see a letter like this published in the pages of this paper. Sessoms seemed to imply we should commit genocide against Muslims ("Perhaps our leaders should study the Old Testament when God gave specific instructions to destroy these people"). This goes well

beyond a reasoned disagreement over refugee policy into a sinful call for violence against those with whom we are called to love (Matt. 5:44). Statements such as this should have no place in a Christian paper.

Evan Musgraves
Vestavia Hills, Ala.

RESPONSE TO LETTER

The letter to the editor "Syrian Refugees" written by an Alabama Baptist pastor in the Jan. 21 issue of *The Alabama Baptist* is disturbing in the extreme. The writer asserts that these refugees are the same people that hate America, hate Christians and have vowed to take over the world by destroying our way of life. To paint all refugees with the same brush often applied to radical extremists is simply wrong-headed. The inference is that they hate us, so let's hate them in return. He further claims, "It is not a matter of loving your neighbor." No it is precisely about loving your neighbor. The pastor's mindset

is counter to everything Christ taught us.

We are further told that the writer's neighbors "are the people that value the same standards of life and way of life that I value." Wrong again. The Good Samaritan parable that Jesus gave us in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" tells us very clearly that the people of the world are our neighbors — specifically including those who hate us and do not share our values or "our way of life," whatever that is.

It is simply inconceivable that a Baptist pastor could articulate views that are clearly and incontrovertibly the polar opposite of the teachings of the entire New Testament.

Rogers Redding
Helena, Ala.

(See 'Letters,' page 21)



DIGITAL SIGNS



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— Randy Lamon, Minister of Education/Administration
Gilliam Springs Baptist Church

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answersingenesis.org



FEBRUARY 28-29, 2016

Answers in Genesis conference schedule

Sunday, Feb. 28

- 9 AM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Dinosaurs: Have You Been Brainwashed? (youth/college session)
- 10:15 AM Ken Ham — Genesis & the State of the Culture
- 6 PM Ken Ham — One Blood, One Race
- 7:30 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Millions of Years: Where Did the Idea Come From?

Monday, Feb. 29

- 9 AM Ken Ham — Dinosaurs for Kids (grades K-6)
- 11 AM Ken Ham — Science Confirms the Bible (grades 7-12)
- 6:30 PM Ken Ham — Communicating the Christian Message in a Secular World
- 8 PM Dr. Terry Mortenson — Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years

For more information, visit answersoutreach.org/Florence16

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Want to see your letter to the editor in TAB?
Email news@thealabamabaptist.org. Be sure to include your name and location.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will feature The Way-lighters Quartet and soloist Greg Carter, formerly with The Royal Masters Quartet, in concert to kick off the spring season of gospel singing Feb. 5. Doors open at 6 p.m. with food, fellowship and door prizes. Special music will begin at 7. Donations and a love offering will be collected. Scott Bush is pastor.

BETHEL

► **William "Billy" Harris** is the new pastor of **Linden Church**. His first day was Jan. 3. He previously served as interim pastor of Linden Church. He also served at Thomasville Church; Mount Sterling Church, Butler; Nicholville Church, Sweet Water; Sweet Water Church; and Isney Church, Silas. Harris holds a bachelor's degree in history from Mobile College (now the University of Mobile);



HARRIS

a master of divinity from New Orleans Seminary; and a doctor of ministry from Andersonville Seminary in Camilla, Georgia.

He and his wife, Patty, have two children and two grandchildren.

► **William Faircloth** is the new minister to students for **Linden Church**. He previously served as youth and associate pastor of Liberty Church, Thomasville. Faircloth holds a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Alabama and a master's degree in history from the University of South Alabama, Mobile. He and his wife, Whitney, have one child. His first day was Jan. 10.



FAIRCLOTH

BIBB

► **Schultz Creek Church, Centreville**, will celebrate Pastor Ben Corley and his 50 years of ministry with a 50th anniversary tea Feb. 14, 2-3 p.m. in the fellowship hall.

DEKALB

► **Chris Guinn** has resigned as pastor of **First Church, Crossville**, to await reassignment. His last Sunday as pastor is Feb. 7. Guinn served at First, Crossville, for 11 years.

FRANKLIN

► **Freedom Community Church, Russellville**, and **Branches Church** recently merged into one congregation. The new church is called Branches Church and is located at 996 Village Wood Drive SE, Russellville. Jim Poss is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Shoal Creek Church, Decatur**, honored worship leader Joe Holmes and his wife, Kim, in an appreciation luncheon Jan. 10. Holmes has served at the church for 10 years. They received a Caribbean cruise and a month-long sabbatical. Gary Linville is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Wayside Church, Alexander City**, held a double ordination service to ordain **Munsung Jang** and **George A. Gardin Jr.** to the gospel ministry. Gardin serves as student pastor at Wayside and Jang will soon begin a Korean language mission church at Wayside. Shane Dismuke is pastor.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Jason Hancock** is the new minister to senior adults and pastoral care for **First Church, Cullman**. He previously served as pastor of Logan Church. He also served at Mission Grove Church, Cullman, and Valley Springs Church, Cullman. He and his wife, Jill, have two children. Kevin Wilburn is pastor. ☩



HANCOCK

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Ryan Childers



CHILDERS

*Grace Point Baptist Church, Valhermoso Springs
Morgan Baptist Association*

FAVORITE VERSES: Ephesians 1:13-14

FAVORITE HYMN: "Victory in Jesus"

HOBBIES: Reading, exercising, supporting daughters in their activities

FAMILY STATUS: Husband of 25 years to wife, Tina; daughters, Savannah and Rebekkah

Ryan Childers, 43, of Falkville, has been in ministry 25 years. For 16 years he has served as a pastor in Marshall and West Cullman Baptist associations and currently serves as pastor of Grace Point Baptist Church, Valhermoso Springs. Childers shares the gospel in schools through the programs *Eagles for Christ* and *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*.

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

A: My grandfather was song director and one of the original seven deacons at Mount View Baptist Church, Falkville. My father and mother raised me in church and at the age of 8, I was drawn by God and graciously received the gift of salvation.

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

A: At the age of 18, I was called into the gospel ministry. I immediately surrendered to this call and began preparing [to serve].

Q: What does your ministry demand?

A: It demands me to be a diligent student of the Bible in order to "feed the flock." As a pastor, I shepherd God's flock, teaching them to do the work of the ministry.

Q: What do you get from your ministry?

A: I receive joy knowing that I am obedient to the will of God in my life. Seeing people come to faith then grow

in faith gives me great satisfaction.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: Everyone in our family is a part of the ministry. My wife has a teaching and mentoring ministry. My oldest child teaches in TeamKids and coordinates programs and my youngest child assists in Vacation Bible School and other ministries as needed. Our family makes use of abilities and spiritual gifting to bring honor to our Great King.

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

A: Until I am summoned home I will be active in ministry. I am aware that at different stages in life the Lord has different assignments.

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

A: Knowing that God uses me to share the gospel, resulting in conversions, and to teach the gospel, resulting in spiritual maturity, brings great satisfaction.

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

A: Everything. Because I received Christ at a young age it prevented me from making wrong life decisions. It is my relationship with Him that empowers me for all of life's challenges. He has shown me how to love, to be a good husband, father and a faithful shepherd. His love sustains me and is the assurance that He will receive me unto Himself. ☩

REFLECTIONS



Find us on
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The Alabama Baptist
newspaper.

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to: *Someone You Should Know*, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209 or news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Alabama Baptist Convention **State Board of Missions**



ONE MISSION: The Great Commission **ONE PROGRAM:** The Cooperative Program **MANY MINISTRIES:** Great Commission Ministries

news and features about missions and ministries from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions | (800) 264-1224 | alsbom.org

SENT BY THE LORD IN 2016

Consider the word "sent." We're all sent as believers and followers of Jesus Christ to be on mission with the Great Commission.

SENT BY CHRIST TO MINISTER AND MAKE DISCIPLES

The year 2016 is a good time to be reminded that we are sent. I've chosen as my verses for this year two from John's Gospel (HCSB):

- John 17:18: "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

- John 20:21: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"

As we look together toward ministry opportunities

in 2016 and beyond and as we minister in Kingdom service, may we be always reminded:

- We are sent by Jesus Christ.
- We have the Great Commission.
- The Great Commission is all about making disciples. We are sent to make disciples for Christ.

If your State Board of Missions can assist your Alabama Baptist congregation with Great Commission Ministries, please feel free to call upon us.

SENT TO EVANGELIZE IN A CHANGING CULTURE



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

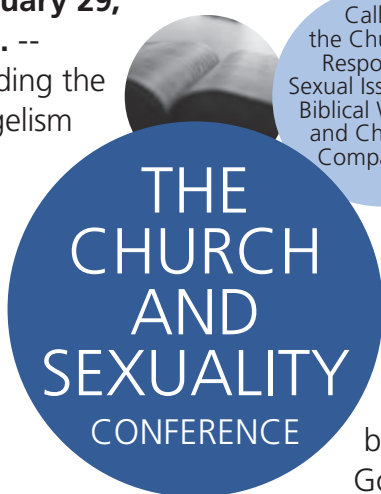
For the first time ever, the State Board of Missions

is sponsoring a conference on The Church and Sexuality on **Monday, February 29, 10 a.m.-3:45 p.m.** -- immediately preceding the annual State Evangelism Conference (SEC), which will begin the same evening.

Both events will be held at First Baptist Church of Montgomery. The SEC will feature a strong lineup of preachers who will encourage us to share Christ with others. Detailed information, including the list of speakers, may be found online at alsbom.org/sec.

The Church & Sexuality Conference will feature keynote speakers Timothy George and Russell Moore as well as two panel discussions and nine

breakout sessions led by pastors and other Christian leaders.



Calling the Church to Respond to Sexual Issues with Biblical Wisdom and Christlike Compassion

These speakers will be calling us to respond to sexual issues with biblical wisdom and Christlike compassion. Our culture is changing rapidly, but the Word of God never changes.

We must remain true to its teachings and exhort others to do the same.

For more information on this conference and to register, check online at alsbom.org/cas16.



AT THE BAPTIST BUILDING, 2001 E. SOUTH BLVD. IN MONTGOMERY
Tuesday, May 3, 10 am - 3:30 pm » 9:30 - 10 – Check-in and refreshments

Meet your state missionaries » Discover how we can partner together to fulfill the Great Commission » Tour the Baptist Building » Spouses welcome » Lunch provided

Ideal for pastors, church staff, secretaries or associational staff who are new to Alabama, new to their position, or who have never attended a Get Acquainted Day
Register by calling or emailing Sheila Rikerd, **1-800-264-1225, ext. 249, or (334) 613-2249, srikerd@alsbom.org**, or go online to alsbom.org/gad.

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



By vocation, training and personality, I am an engineer. One defining characteristic of an engineer is the efficient use of resources to meet goals. I hold a strong conviction that this mindset is intimately tied to stewardship of God's blessings.

This being so, it seems obvious to me that the best use of trained individuals is in the area of their talents/expertise. Whether we are considering our missionaries in the field or those behind desks and pulpits, I want them to be at the focal point of their respective ministries, not beating the bushes trying to raise funds!

I want them to be utilizing all of their energies, intellects, talents and time to achieve our mutual goals of advancing the Kingdom. First responders should expect and receive the proper tools with which to carry out their life-saving/protecting duties. Surely, soldiers of the cross deserve nothing less!

Additionally, there is the truism that the total is greater than the sum of its parts. My meager offerings would mean little in the vast expanse of the lost but, as a part of the CP whole, the collective whole can be efficiently used to maximize the impact for Christ. Thus many small offerings, brought together and blessed by our Lord, can be thunderous in the impact.

I am grateful for the Cooperative Program and believe it is fundamental to our faith.

B.G. Bailey of Heflin is a trustee of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions from Cleburne Association.



BAILEY



Upcoming Enrichment Events from Alabama WMU

Renew, a day away with friends

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

For women of all ages
Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster
Register by Thursday, February 18
\$35 per person

#renew216

Complete, a gathering for girls in grades 7-12

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, MARCH 4-5
For teen girls, grades 7-12
Eastmont Baptist Church,
Montgomery

Register by Monday, February 15
\$35 per person (includes lunch
Saturday & a t-shirt)

#complete16

For more information or to register for these events, please contact Alabama WMU at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 226, or (334) 613-2226, or go online to AlabamaWMU.org.

Mom & Me

Spring Fling

for girls in grades K-3 and their moms

Friday and Saturday, April 1-2, 2016
WorldSong Missions Place,
Cook Springs

COST: \$70 per person (includes t-shirt)
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: March 25

Join us for an action-packed overnight camp that will:

- ✦ be filled with fun and adventure.
- ✦ foster your desire to live on mission.
- ✦ provide meaningful one-on-one time for you and your daughter.

For more information, go online to worldsongretreat.com or contact Crystal Akers at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 223, or (334) 613-2223, cakers@alsbom.org.

FOCUS on One Mission

Church planting, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, focuses on coming alongside

**WHY,
WHAT
AND
HOW OF
CHURCH
PLANTING**



the planter to assist him in the process of an effective church start. Ed Stetzer recently reminded me of what we learned from my friend and one of my mentors, Joe Hernandez: we do not have church planting systems, but we have church planter systems. Our investment is in the planter.

After all, as goes the leader, so goes the church plant. Leadership is the

most predictable element of whether a plant will be effective or not. Let me further introduce to you the three major systems which we seek to develop in order to accomplish this task:

1. Assessment examines the **WHY** of planting. We at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions would never put ourselves in the position to decide whether someone is supposed to plant a church or not. However, we can hold a mirror up to the planter to help him examine whether he is really ready to plant at this time. One way of looking at this segment of our process is to think of it as the readiness examination. The need may get us there, but only the call of God will keep us there when the going gets tough.

2. Training answers the **WHAT** of planting a church. Alabama Church Planting Basics will equip the planter with what to do to plant a church. For instance, we will begin with the biblical foundation and prayer and move to vision, values, focus group, etc. There are many elements to this three-day boot camp that are basic to serving a church as pastor or planting a church from scratch. I remember when I first went through a similar training after being a

pastor for 30 years. I said, "Where has this training been all my life?" It would have helped me as a pastor. There are 15 sessions, and they each build to form a solid structure on which to build the church. Participants will come away with a structure on which to hang the vision, values, strategy and mileposts/next steps necessary to see a church birthed.

3. Coaching deals with the **HOW** to implement the learnings in real-world situations. Coaching networks are put in place following the Alabama Church Planting Basics in most locations. These are 12 monthly in-person coaching sessions (four hours each) led by an experienced and competent church planter/coach. These sessions are made up of approximately two hours of training and two hours of dealing with your real world needs. Lifelong relationships are formed through these sessions.

Please take time right now to go to plantalabama.org and register for the next available Alabama Church Planting Basics at plantalabama.org/event.



By Lamar Duke
State Missionary

For more information, please contact State Missionary Lamar Duke, lead church planting strategist, at **1-800-264-1225**, ext. **332**, or **(334) 613-2332**, lduke@alsbom.org.

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www.togetheratthesprings.org

FOCUS on One Mission



Sharing Christ in Crisis



SAVE THE DATES

April 7-9, 2016, State Disaster Chaplaincy Training Shocco Springs

April 8-9, 2016, State Disaster Relief Training Shocco Springs



SBDR.org. YOUR CONNECTION TO DISASTER RELIEF: ↔ Administration ↔ Assessment ↔ Chaplaincy ↔ Childcare ↔ Cleanup/Recovery/Chainsaw ↔ Communications ↔ Mass Feeding ↔ Shower Deployment

Personnel eligible for Assessment training must have prior field experience in Cleanup/Recovery/Chainsaw.



Disaster Relief training is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the **Cooperative Program**.

ALABAMA DISCIPLESHIP TOUR

Have you and your church missed the mark of making faithful and mature followers of Jesus Christ? Then don't miss the **"Returning to Disciple-Making 2016 Alabama Discipleship Tour"** with Claude King.

Claude serves as discipleship specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources. He is co-author of *Experiencing God* with Henry Blackaby and *The Mind of Christ* with T.W. Hunt. He is the author of *The Call to Follow Christ* and *Come to the Lord's Table*.

This tour is to aid pastors, church staff and key leaders to examine strategies for effective discipling.

The events are 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. **The cost is \$8 per person**, except where noted otherwise, and includes lunch. **REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.**

TOUR LOCATIONS AND DATES

Walker Baptist Association Office, 230 North Walston Bridge Rd., Jasper • Wednesday, February 17 • Registration Deadline: February 11 • Contact Sue Martin: martin@sue@walkerbaptist.net, [205] 387-1820

Tuscaloosa Baptist Association Office, 4300 Highway 69 N., Northport • Tuesday, February 16 • Registration Deadline: February 11 • Contact Haley Hulsey: haley@tuscaloosacba.com, [205] 339-2273

Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association Office, 3901 Hatch Blvd., Sheffield • Thursday, February 18 • Registration Deadline: February 12 • Cost: \$7 per person • Contact Jennifer Richardson: jennifer.richardson@clbaptist.com, [256] 383-7021

Birmingham Baptist Association Office, 750 Montclair Rd., Birmingham • Tuesday, March 22 • Registration Deadline: March 18 • Contact Katie Schock, katies@bbaonline.org, [205] 599-3245

Brooks Memorial Baptist Church, 904 McRae St., Atmore (Escambia Association) • Thursday, March 23 • Registration Deadline: March 18 • Contact Anna King: annaking@bellsouth.net, [251] 296-4640

Mobile Baptist Association Office, 616 Azalea Rd., Mobile • Thursday, March 24 • Registration Deadline: March 18 • Contact Kelly Jones: kjones@mobilebaptists.org, [251] 661-7111

Morgan Baptist Association Office, 1410 State St. N.W., Hartselle • Thursday, August 4 • Registration Deadline: July 28 • Contact Joan Jenkins: jjenkins.mba@gmail.com, [256] 206-1260

FOCUS on One Mission

FEBRUARY 19-20, 2016

Valley View Baptist Church | Tuscaloosa

PURSUE >>

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Life in Focus
Hebrews 12:2



A DISCIPLESHIP EVENT for Alabama college students, young adults and their leaders

PURSUEAL.ORG

State Evangelism Conference

Free Admission

February 29 & March 1

Monday at 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday at 9 a.m.

First Baptist Church,
Montgomery

SPEAKERS: Steve Gaines, Don Wilton, Danny Lovett, Jimmy Jackson, Mac Brunson, Dusty McLemore, Daven Watkins, Ted Traylor

Special Music by Charles Billingsley and Larnelle Harris

See full program at alsbom.org/sec.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Amy Nelson at 1-800-264-1225, ext 258, or (334) 613-2258, anelson@alsbom.org. alsbom.org/sec

This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.



Ted Traylor



Charles Billingsley

Larnelle Harris

THE CHURCH AND SEXUALITY CONFERENCE

Calling the Church to Respond to Sexual Issues with Biblical Wisdom and Christlike Compassion

FEATURING

keynote speakers Russell Moore and Timothy George, two panel discussions and nine relevant breakout sessions



Russell Moore



Timothy George

February 29, 2016
10 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Check-in begins at 9:30 a.m.

First Baptist Church,
Montgomery

(Preceding the State Evangelism Conference)

Cost of \$25 includes lunch and a copy of Russell Moore's latest book, "Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel," Christianity Today's 2016 Book of the Year. Register at alsbom.org/cas16.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

Someone in My Life Is Gay – What Do I Do?: Helping Believers Respond When Someone in Their Life Comes Out

"They're Saying I'm Intolerant": Communicating a Biblical Perspective in a "Co-Exist" Culture

Making a Covenant With Your Eyes: Helping People Overcome Pornography

Teaching the Next Generation: Equipping Students with a Biblical Understanding of Marriage and Sexuality

Preaching About Biblical Sexuality: Key Strategies for Developing Relevant Messages

Appropriate Policies and Procedures for Your Church: Navigating the New Cultural Landscape

What's Wrong With Just Living Together?: Countering the Culture of Premarital Sex and Cohabitation

"Why Did God Make Me Like This?": Questions About Gender Identity

Keeping the Home Fires Burning: Sexuality Within Marriage

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES:

The Biblical Truth About Sexuality in a Morally Relative Age

TIMOTHY GEORGE
Dean, Beeson Divinity School

Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel

RUSSELL MOORE
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

children's choir LEADERSHIP summit CONFERENCE

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Create an ideal opportunity for children to experience worship.

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- Network with other people in similar situations.

Cost: \$115 per person (based on 3-4 persons per room, \$20 deposit per person due upon registration)

For more information, go online to www.alsbom.org/children-summit or contact State Missionary Karen Gosselin at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 318, or (334) 613-2318, kgosselin@alsbom.org; or Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland at ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279 or scleveland@alsbom.org.

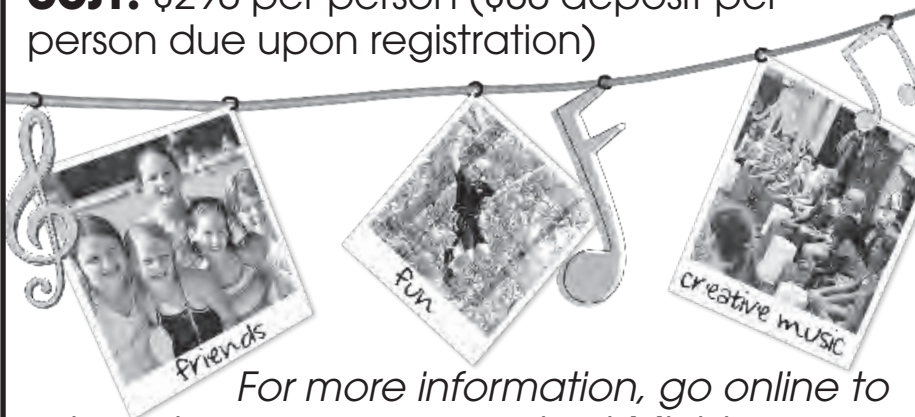


Monday through Friday, July 11-15 & Shocco Springs

At **Mix Music Camp** we work to identify and help train worship leaders for the next generation. Other activities will include:

- Wet Willie Water Slide • Hiking Trails • Miniature Golf • Basketball • Volleyball • Pedal Boats • Horseshoes • Octaball • Disc Golf • Poly Pong • Fishing • Ropes Course • Paintball • Pedal Cars • Swimming

COST: \$290 per person (\$80 deposit per person due upon registration)



For more information, go online to mixmusiccamp.org or contact Ministry Assistant Cindy Parrish at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 230, or (334) 613-2230, cparrish@alsbom.org.



Senior Adults Singin'

10 a.m.-Noon

COST: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

Tuesday, March 15, Hillcrest Baptist Church, Enterprise

Thursday, March 17, Eden Westside Baptist Church, Pell City

Tuesday, September 13, West End Baptist Church, Clanton

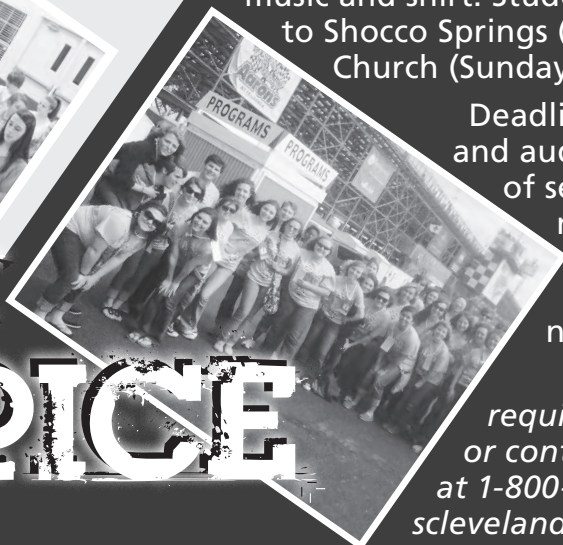
Thursday, September 15, First Baptist Church, Russellville

Psalm 96:1-2 (NIV) says to "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day."

Join Frank Jones as he leads senior adults from churches all over Alabama in four different locations to sing hymns to the Lord. You may have been singing the hymns since you were a child, but each time you sing them, your praise to God is new again!

For more information, go online to alsbom.org/senioradultsingin or contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org.

APRIL 22 - 24



ONE VOICE

OneVoice is a group of auditioned singers and instrumentalists in grades 7-12 who actively participate in local church youth music ministry. This year's tour will include a concert at Liberty Park Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills. Lodging will be at Shocco Springs. Cost of the tour is \$225 per person and includes lodging, meals, local transportation, music and shirt. Students must provide their own transportation to Shocco Springs (Friday) and home from Liberty Park Baptist Church (Sunday).

Deadline for returning the application information and audition CD is March 11. You will be notified of selection by March 21. Those who were members of the Alabama Baptist Children's Honor Choir, NewSong or OneVoice are automatically selected. No audition CD is necessary, but an application is still required.

For more information and audition requirements, go online to alsbom.org/onevoice or contact Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279, scleveland@alsbom.org.

Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

Free admission,
no registration



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Karen Peck and New River ☀ Don Cass,
retired evangelism director, Southern
Baptists of Texas Convention ☀ Bob
White, executive director, Georgia
Baptist Convention ☀ David Burton,
evangelist, David Burton Ministries

*For more information, please contact
Ministry Assistant Lori McGough at
1-800-264-1225, ext 245, or
(334) 613-2245, lmcgough@alsbom.org*



*This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama
Baptists through the Cooperative Program.*

SPRING SENIOR ADULT RETREAT



**MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY,
APRIL 11-13** ☿ Shocco Springs

DEFINITIONS OF "RETREAT"

1. An act of withdrawing. No, that doesn't sound like senior adults!
2. A quiet or secluded place in which one can rest and relax. That sounds like Shocco Springs!
3. A period of group withdrawal for prayer, meditation and study. That sounds more like the Spring Senior Adult Retreat when we add fun and fellowship to the definition!

You won't need a dictionary. Just bring your Bible and a friend, or find a new friend or several at the retreat when you travel to Shocco Springs in April. It all begins with lunch on Monday and ends with lunch on Wednesday.

Info on Cost/Registration: shocco.org or
1-800-280-1105

*For more information, go online to
alsbom.org/senioradultretreat or contact State
Missionary Eileen Mitchell, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221,
or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org.*

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Ephesians 4:15

CHURCH REVITALIZATION BOOK REVIEW

BY DANIEL EDMONDS, **Director, Sunday School & Discipleship**

Why They Stay

Dr. Steve R. Parr and Dr. Tom Crites

Why They Stay has a strong message for church strengthening and revitalization: invest in the future of the church through parents, teens and children. Deuteronomy 6 places a strong emphasis on a parent's responsibility in disciple-making. The church should partner with parents in responding to this admonition. Parr and Crites, through their research, reveal the practices of parents and churches that result in the next generation staying connected to the community of faith.



By Daniel Edmonds
State Missionary

Fifteen critical issues are revealed that have direct impact on an individual staying connected to the church. The majority of those factors relate to parenting and the child's experience of discipleship during the formative years. Parr and Crites' take-away for a church: "Attention should be given to improving marriages and parenting, to providing a healthy church environment, to providing a more effective discipleship experience for children, teens, and younger adults, and to maintaining a connection that helps older teens navigate their post high school years" (156).



CHURCH
REVITALIZATION

The reader will discover wisdom and counsel that will help in the forming of strategic steps that will create lifelong followers. The statistical discoveries will be of great value in leading the church to assess or reassess its role in making disciples that will disciple their families for the generations ahead. In the brief time that this book has been available, church leaders have already been using this great resource in their revitalization efforts.

State Missionary Daniel Edmonds may be contacted at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 285, or (334) 613-2285, dedmonds@alsbom.org.

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONEPROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANYMINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries



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Single Adults

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, APRIL 22-23

First Baptist Church, Enterprise

Singles, join us for a time of laughter, community and hearing from God. The doors will open on Friday evening at 6:30, and the fun will begin at 7:00. Saturday morning, come for coffee and muffins at 8:30.

The session will begin and end with lunch.

COST: Both days, \$20 per person

Friday only, \$10 per person

Saturday only, \$15 per person

For more information, please contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, or (334) 613-2221, emitchell@alsbom.org.

★ 2016 REGIONAL AND BIBLE DRILLS ★

REQUIRED ONLINE REGISTRATION:

alsbom.org/bibledrillandspeakerstournament

2016 Regional Bible Drills

- **NORTH:** East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, April 14. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.
- **SOUTH EAST:** Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, April 14. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.
- **NORTH CENTRAL:** CrossPoint Church, Trussville, April 17. Sign in begins at 1:30 p.m., drills begin at 2 p.m.
- **SOUTH CENTRAL:** Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, April 17. Sign in begins at 1:30 p.m., drills begin at 2 p.m.
- **SOUTH WEST:** College Park Baptist Church, Mobile, April 18. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.
- **WEST CENTRAL:** First Baptist Church, Livingston, April 18. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.
- **NORTH EAST:** Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, April 19. Sign in begins at 3:30 p.m., drills begin at 4 p.m.

2016 State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament

First Baptist Church, Montgomery, April 23.
Registration begins at 12:30 p.m., drills begin at 1 p.m.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Julie Smith at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 255, or (334) 613-2255, jsmith@alsbom.org.





Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Almighty

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

Christians understand the Bible to say that God is powerful. However, He's not just powerful but all-powerful, not just mighty but almighty. Often this idea is expressed in a more formal way by the term "omnipotent." The patriarchs of the Old Testament knew Him as God Almighty (Ex. 6:3). After the Bible gives us the record of God's revelation of Himself in the history of Israel and in the coming of Christ, it draws toward its end with a reference to God as almighty. A heavenly multitude is heard to say, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns" (Rev. 19:6).

Just as God is revealed in the Bible as eternal and spiritual in His being, He also is revealed as possessing all power. Power is one aspect of God's essential nature as God. A god of partial power or limited power would hardly qualify to be called "God." From the Bible's opening chapters God's power is displayed. We see it in creation. His creating power resided in His spoken word, which effectively brought into existence the visible universe with all of its life forms. The New Testament with its revelation of the trinity of God's being identifies His Son as the agent through whom creative power was manifest, saying that God created the world through the Son (Heb. 1:2).

Sustaining power

God's power through Christ also is sustaining power. He "upholds the universe by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). Again the New Testament with its revelation of God's Trinity of being identifies His Son as the One in whom all things consist or hold together (Col. 1:17). The Bible records many displays of divine power. God is not only seen as powerful in creating and sustaining, He has shown Himself to possess delivering power, most notably in effecting Israel's emancipation from Egyptian bondage. God's power to deliver His people manifested itself in many miraculous acts. Repeated in the centuries to follow, God

intervened to deliver Israel from many enemies or to redeem them from captivity. The Bible introduces a God whose omnipotence is able to perform wonders and miracles. Possessing that very power, Christ demonstrated miraculous authority over nature (by quieting the stormy sea), over disease (by numerous healing miracles), over demons (by casting them out) and death (by raising Lazarus).

God not only possesses all power over the earth, He has absolute power over the spiritual realm. The high point is God's power to deliver in a spiritual sense, which reached its highest point in the sending of His Son, through whom "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13).

Since God Himself is eternal, His power is everlasting. It will never diminish. The prophet Isaiah voiced it like this, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary." If that were not enough, the prophet added about God, "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength" (Isa. 40:28-29). In view of God's omnipotence we are compelled to agree with the heavenly multitude that voiced the loud confession that "the Lord God Omnipotent reigns," and then we do well to respond by heeding the invitation that follows, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory" (Rev. 19:7). †

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.



Alabama Baptists support life through pregnancy resource centers

As the Restoring Americans' Health-care Freedom Reconciliation Act of 2015 — which would effectively repeal some of the Affordable Care Act, including the majority of funding to Planned Parenthood Federation of America — is battled around Washington, Alabama Baptists continue to support pro-life efforts such as pregnancy resource centers.

Life-affirming

And life-affirming networks like Care Net are providing information for those who find themselves faced with a decision: Have an abortion or a baby?

Since 2008, Care Net has strived to "present women and men with realistic alternatives to abortion so that they choose life for their unborn children," a goal that has resulted in 462,089 lives saved, according to its website.

In addition to the list of Alabama centers included in the Sanctity of Human Life coverage in the Jan. 14 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, those seeking infor-

mation about pregnancy options, a free pregnancy test or post-decision support can visit:

▶ **Alpha Women's Resource Center**, Jackson, 251-246-7750, pregnancyces-thelp.com

▶ **Sav-A-Life**, Troy, 334-566-2880, savalifetroy.org, wlcoftroy@gmail.com

▶ **Real Life Crisis Pregnancy Center**, Albertville, 256-878-1300, real-lifecpc.org

▶ **Women's Resource Center of Escambia**, Atmore, 251-368-4949

▶ **Women's Hope Medical Clinic**, Auburn, 334-502-7000, womenshope.org

▶ **Dale County Pregnancy Center**, Ozark, 334-774-4419, savalifeozark.org

▶ **Pregnancy Test and Resource Center**, Jasper, 205-221-5860, ptrcjasper.com

▶ **Mary's Haven Pregnancy & Family Resource Center**, Prattville, 334-365-6262

To see a full list of centers and other resources, visit care-net.org. (TAB)

UMobile among most beautiful campuses

The University of Mobile (UMobile) has been named one of the "50 Most Beautiful Christian Colleges and Universities" in the United States for 2016 by Christian Universities Online, a resource for information about Christian higher education.

UMobile was praised for its sprawling, suburban campus of 880 acres nestled in the middle of a forest, with well-designed grounds and "a wonderfully natural setting."

"At Christian Universities Online

we understand that students make their choice of school based on a multitude of factors. The natural surroundings, layout and beauty of the campus have considerable weight in this decision," the organization explained in its listing at christianuniversitiesonline.org.

Campuses were scored based on continuity of campus, architectural style, signature buildings and natural setting. Universities considered for the honor are members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. (UMobile)

Volunteers organize, distribute 'buckets of love'

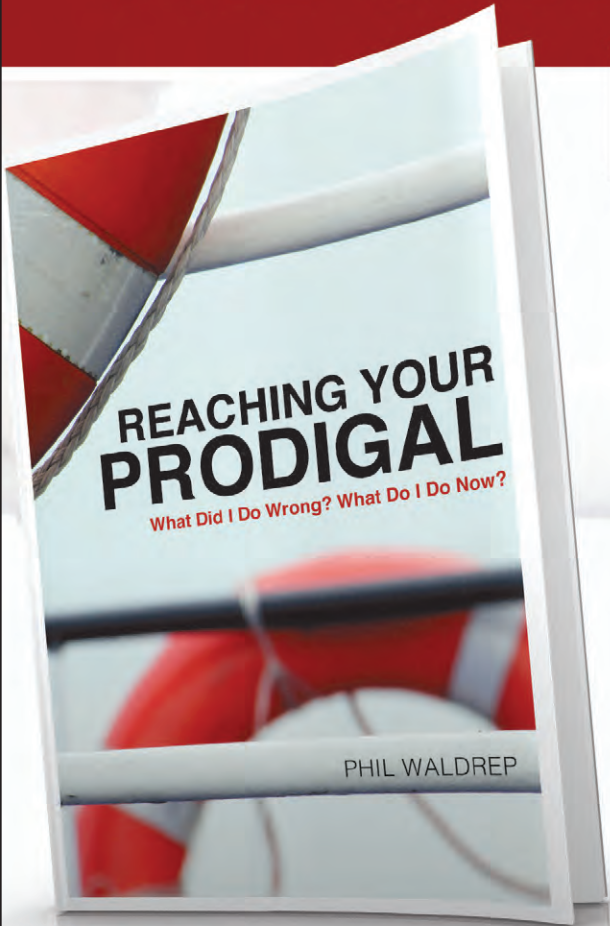


Photo by Kristina Wade

Evergreen Baptist Church, Jackson, and Chilton Baptist Church, Thomasville, in Clarke Baptist Association, spent time in December 2015 ministering through Wings of Life rehabilitation center. A total of 26 youth and adults spent a day organizing and assembling 'buckets of love' filled with coats, blankets, soap, toothbrushes, shampoo and other items to pass out to the homeless in Mobile. The students also led a worship service in the morning at the center and then cooked and served a meal to Wings of Life residents and the homeless in the area.

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Answers in Genesis conference equips Christians to defend, share their faith

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Underwood has wanted to bring Answers in Genesis to Highland Baptist Church, Florence, for more than two years. It seemed like an unlikely goal as Answers in Genesis, an apologetics ministry dedicated to helping Christians defend their faith and effectively proclaim the gospel, normally only conducts conferences in cities much larger than Florence, but where there's a will there's a way. On Feb. 28-29, Highland Baptist will host its first Answers in Genesis conference.

"Christians need to be equipped to answer both those who are skeptical and those who are genuinely seeking truth," said Underwood, associate pastor for education and senior adults at Highland. "This conference will help them do that."

With morning and evening sessions on both days, the conference will address a variety of topics from dinosaurs to Noah's

flood using Genesis to "relate the relevance of a literal Genesis to today's world," according to Answers in Genesis' website.

"If Genesis 1-11 are not true, then nothing about our faith is valid," said Underwood, emphasizing the importance of conferences such as this one. "Jesus Himself testified to the veracity of Genesis (chapters) 1-11 several times during His earthly ministry with respect to marriage, salvation and God's sovereign purpose in creation and redemption."

"If Genesis (chapters) 1-11 are not true, then nothing about our faith is valid."

**Chris Underwood
Highland Baptist Church,
Florence**

Conference speakers will be Terry Mortenson — historian of geology, theologian, speaker, author and researcher — and Ken Ham — president, CEO and founder of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum.

While the conference is free and open to all ages, Underwood suggests it will be most beneficial for those over the age of 10. On Feb. 29, however, Ham will lead two sessions designed for children and adolescents. Child care will be provided for children up to three years old and will be on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The schedule for the conference will be:

► **Feb. 28**

9 a.m. — "Genesis & the State of the Culture" (Broadway Fellowship Campus)

9 a.m. — "Dinosaurs: Have You Been Brainwashed?" (youth/college session)

10:15 a.m. — "Genesis & the State of the Culture"

6 p.m. — "One Blood, One Race"

7:30 p.m. — "Millions of Years: Where Did the Idea Come From?"

► **Feb. 29**

9 a.m. — "Dinosaurs for Kids" (grades K-6)

11 a.m. — "Science Confirms the Bible" (grades 7-12)

6:30 p.m. — "Communicating the Christian Message in a Secular World"

8 p.m. — "Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years"

With the exception of the 9 a.m. "Genesis & the State of the Culture" session Feb. 28, all sessions will take place at the church at 219 Simpson Street in Florence. The 9 a.m. "Genesis & the State of the Culture" session will take place at Highland's Broadway Fellowship campus at 3215 Huntsville Road in Florence.

For more information on the Answers in Genesis conference, visit answersoutreach.org/Florence16. John Brock is pastor of Highland. ¶

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Atheism largest setback for presidential candidates

The conventional wisdom in American politics has long been that someone who is not religious cannot be elected president of the United States. Most Americans have consistently said it is important to them that the president have strong religious beliefs. And a new Pew Research Center survey finds that being an atheist remains one of the biggest liabilities that a presidential candidate can have.

Half of American adults say they would be less likely to vote for a hypothetical presidential candidate who does not believe in God, while just 6 percent say they would be more likely to vote for a nonbeliever.

Phone survey

These are among the key findings of a new Pew survey conducted Jan. 7-14 on landlines and cellphones among a national sample of 2,009 adults.

The new survey found 51 per-

cent of adults say they would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who does not believe in God. Indeed, in the eyes of the public, being a nonbeliever remains a bigger drawback than having had an extramarital affair (37 percent say they would be less likely to support a candidate who had been unfaithful), having had personal financial troubles (41 percent say they would be less likely to support a candidate who had had financial struggles) or having used marijuana in the past (20 percent would be less likely to support a former pot smoker).

The study also shows that having a president who shares their religious beliefs is important to many Americans, with about half of U.S. adults saying it is "very important" (27 percent) or "somewhat important" (24 percent) to have someone in the White House who shares their religious perspective.

Being seen as a religious person is generally an asset for candidates; people who think a candidate is a religious person tend to be more likely to see that candidate as a potentially good president.

When asked about their view of religion's influence in American society, the survey finds that the large majority of U.S. adults continue to believe that religion is losing influence. And most who hold this view — about half of

all U.S. adults — say they think religion's declining influence is a bad thing for American society.

Too little expression

The survey also shows that 4 out of 10 Americans think there has been too little expression of religious faith and prayer by political leaders, compared with roughly a quarter (27 percent) who say there has been too much religious talk by politicians. (Pew)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

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Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumes are being accepted. Email: dkovacich@deerfootbaptist.org. Fax: 205-661-6073.

PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church of Andalusia is seeking a full-time pastor. If God is leading you to a new place of service, consider Southside where you will find a strong and loving congregation, a supportive paid and volunteer staff, solid finances and a dynamic, evangelistic and missions-minded atmosphere. God may have just the right assignment for you in Andalusia. Send your resume by Feb. 15 to: Pastor Search Committee, Southside Baptist Church, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420, or email to: southside@sbcandalusia.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Chapel Hill Baptist Church is searching for a bivocational pastor for our church. Please send resume to: Pastor Search, ATTN: Mike Moody, 2489 Gopher Ridge Rd., Samson, AL 36477.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

First Baptist Church of McCalla, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Interested parties may email resumes to: mccallab@att.net, or mail them

to: P.O. Box 268, McCalla, AL 35111. Phone number is 205-477-6131.

WORSHIP LEADER

Cullman County church seeking full/part-time qualified worship leader. Worship style is primarily praise and worship led by the worship leader and worship team. Please send a cover letter and current resume to: ckpenn4@gmail.com. No phone calls or onsite visits will be accepted. Deadline to submit resume will be March 1.

MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

Oak Bowery Baptist Church in Calhoun County, Alabama, is seeking a part-time music/worship leader. Resumes may be mailed to: Oak Bowery Baptist Church, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 3300 AL Highway 144, Ohatchee, AL 36271, or oakbowerybaptist@att.net.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER

Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster is seeking a music minister to direct blended worship. Send resume to: 10696 Highway 119 South, Alabaster, AL 35007, or by email to: Siluriabaptist@gmail.com.

TWO POSITIONS

Clearview Baptist Church in Birmingham is seeking a part-time worship leader and a pianist. Call 205-854-2027 or

email connie@clearviewbaptist.com.

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Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram

Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

Have you ever wanted to meet someone so badly that you crave every morsel of information about them? Think of your favorite celebrity — maybe that person or performer came to your town and was going to have a one-day meet and greet for only 50 lucky people. You will be able to have one-on-one sessions with this person/people, eat with them, ask them questions, etc. What lengths would you go to in order to be one of those 50 people? Would you take a day off of work even if it meant you would lose your job? Would you max out your credit cards? Take out a loan? How far would you go?

Now imagine Jesus was coming to visit you at your house at 9 a.m. the next day. You got a divine message much the same way the angel announced that Mary was going to have a son. If you don't believe in God at all, wouldn't you be curious enough to show up? What if you confessed your belief in Him but later denied Him and stopped living for Him, wouldn't you want to tell Him face to face what you feel now? What if you have been on the fence, so to speak, wouldn't you want to be one of those 50 people if for no other reason than to ask Him questions and decide once and for all? What if you are a believer? Wouldn't you want to be there just to fall down and worship the King?

I have some good news for you. No matter what category you fall into, you can yell at Him, tell Him what you feel, ask Him questions. You can worship, you can be in His presence any time you want. You don't need an appointment, you don't need to risk your career and you don't need to do anything but seek Him. In Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus tells us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." He loves you, He lives for you, He died for you and He wants you in eternity with Him. Won't you seek Him? †



(augmented reality)

Follow these instructions

- 1** Download the **Aurasma** app from your app store.
- 2** Choose the **"ALBaptist"** profile under channel and tap "Follow." You will only have to do this one time. (Any ALBaptist options will allow you to follow *The Alabama Baptist*.)
- 3** Tap the  icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 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.

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

Pharmacy seeks to block state birth control rule

WASHINGTON — A family-owned pharmacy and two female pharmacists asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Jan. 4 to stop a new Washington State law that would force them to sell abortion-inducing drugs in violation of their religious beliefs. The Washington law is the only one of its kind in the country and has been condemned by the American Pharmacists Association as "radical" and "grossly out of step with state regulatory practice."

Margo Thelen, Rhonda Mesler and the Stormans family have worked in the pharmacy profession for more than 70 years. When a customer requests an abortion-inducing drug, they refer the customer to 1 of more than 30 pharmacies within five miles that willingly sell the drugs. This has been standard pharmacy practice for decades and has been allowed.

But in 2007, Washington adopted a new law making referrals for reasons of conscience illegal. The law leaves pharmacies free to refer patients elsewhere for a wide variety of reasons related to business, economics and convenience — but not for reasons of conscience. Because of the law, Thelen lost her job, Mesler was threatened with losing hers and the Stormans face the loss of their pharmacy license.

Luke Goodrich, deputy general counsel of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, said, "It is absurd to force a pharmacy to sell drugs against their conscience when there are over 30 pharmacies within five miles that already sell the exact same drugs."

The Supreme Court will likely consider whether to take the appeal in March 2016. (Becket Fund)



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LETTERS

(continued from page 7)

DISHEARTENING

In regards to the letter to the editor that was published in the Jan. 21 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, I find it extremely disheartening that our state Baptist paper would publish such a hate-filled and unbiblical letter.

I can appreciate that the issue of refugees entering the United States is a highly complex one and that every voice has a right to be heard. That being said, not everything that is right or even lawful is beneficial for the saints.

The pastor's use of Old Testament instruction given specifically and historically to the people of Israel as they are establishing a kingdom in the promised land is irresponsible and he should not be commended for such. His notion that his neighbor only includes those who share similar cultural and religious views is not only unbiblical, but also not what Christ said or lived out.

Christ's instruction was to love those who hate and pray for those who would do you harm. His plea to His followers was to live, with Him as their example, among those who would persecute them, not separate themselves because of fear and the threat of harm.

Jesus Christ Himself lived

among, prayed for, wept over and ultimately died for the very ones who would accuse Him of blasphemy, try and convict Him in a sham of a trial, beat, mock, spit upon Him and nail His already broken body to a tree. He went to the cross, suffered the shame, bore their sin and our sin on the cross willingly. That is the message we as believers in Christ should be encouraging each other with, not one filled with hatred and disregard for all human life.

Brian Turnbull
Cropwell, Ala.

CANNOT BE SILENT

I have been somewhat reluctant to get personally involved in the debates regarding the arrival of refugees in our country. But after reading a letter sent to the editor of *The Alabama Baptist* a couple of weeks ago I could not remain silent any longer.

Allow me to offer some personal thoughts on why Christians must show concern for these refugees. First we have been given the mandate to love God and all people (Mark 12:30-31). When was the last time you had loving thoughts or showed deeds of love and kindness to a refugee? Second we should remember that refugees are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 28). It does not matter what country they were born in or what country they come from. They are still made in God's image. Third we should never forget that some great Christians were economic refugees. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob left the land of Canaan, the promised land, on a number of occasions in search of food and security (Gen. 12:12; 26:1; 41:57; 42:6; 43:1-7). Fourth we should also take heed to God's words to Israel regarding refugees. Leviticus 19:34-35 says, "And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

For those of us who are Christians, now is the time for us to demonstrate the attitude of Christ, which was one of radical love and sacrifice.

Stanley Kilgore
Pastor, Center Grove Baptist Church, Cullman

TAB Talks interviews Kevin Blackwell



Photo by Neisha Roberts

The Alabama Baptist debuted its TAB Talks, live-interview conversations with ministry leaders throughout the state and nation, during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting November 2015, at Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne. Here, Bob Terry (right), editor of the paper, interviews Kevin Blackwell, Samford University's assistant to the president for church relations and executive director of the Ministry Training Institute (MTI). Blackwell outlined the new youth ministry certificate program offered through MTI.



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 7

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

IN HIS SERVICE Matthew 9:35-10:8

Whenever I consider the concept of serving royalty, I think about the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. Red-coated soldiers with their tall black helmets demonstrate precision and pride as they march from Wellington Barracks to the palace for the privilege to protect the royal family. Those who are selected for these regiments surrender individual liberty in order to serve the crown and the kingdom.

Serving our King calls for service outside our comfort zone. Our Sovereign deserves our surrendered lives in attitude, allegiance and action. As ambassadors for Jesus, we have much to learn about representing Him before a hurting, broken and lost world. In this week's lesson we review a familiar passage that ministry is God working through His people to carry out His purposes.

Motivated by Compassion (35-36)

Teaching, preaching and healing — this was the essence of Jesus' ministry in the rural villages and towns of Judah. Earlier in the chapter Jesus had instructed John's disciples, healed the sick, raised the dead and restored sight to the blind. The individuals affected by His ministry were like thimbles of water in an ocean of needs. People were hurting and broken all around Him.

Matthew characterizes the crowds as "weary and worn out." They had no one to help them and the religious leaders offered them no immediate solutions to the pressing needs of their lives. Jesus saw the people and their needs, and He was deeply moved with compassion. These "sheep without a shepherd" were completely unaware that they were in the presence of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20) and the

Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). He was preparing to give the disciples a calling to minister to the needs of people through prayer and service.

Challenged to Pray (37-38)

Jesus regularly used farming terminology when speaking to villagers away from the big city. His reference to the harvest in this passage is meant to identify those who were and would become His followers. It harkens back to Psalm 126:5-6, where a tearful sower becomes a joyful harvester bringing his sheaves with him, and also to Jesus' harvest of Samaritan believers at Sychar (John 4:25-28).

Tearful prayers for the nations serve to prepare the spiritual ground for the seeds of the gospel. The fruit of those prayers is a joyful harvest of souls. Offering expectant requests that God will thrust forth more laborers to work in the field is a challenge for us, though, because many believers feel that local ministry is mandatory (for the pastoral staff), but global discipling-making is optional. When we invite God to send whomever He chooses, including us, our children or our grandchildren to the far reaches of the planet so that other people groups will trust Christ — that is the kind of compassionate praying that leads to surrendered service to the King.

Commissioned to Go (1-8)

"Prayers with feet" — this is one way to characterize Jesus' commission to His disciples in this passage. Immediately after the instruction to pray for laborers, Matthew gives testimony of the disciples' launch on their first missionary journey.

Jesus was equipping the disciples with increasing responsibility. First it was pray and go to the lost sheep of Israel (v. 6). Next it was go and find people of peace (Luke 10:5). Finally it was go and make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19). We are to be on mission with Him. ✠

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

DISTINCT IN MY APPROACH TO CONFLICT Matthew 5:21-26

We continue our unit on the Sermon on the Mount. In last week's passage Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (two divisions of His Bible). Today He begins to fulfill them.

The title of this week's lesson is providential, for the writing is being completed on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference had strategies for dealing with conflict: collect the facts, negotiate, purify the self and engage in direct action (see King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," written 52 years ago in April). These Christians based much of their strategy on Jesus' words and the model of His life.

Nevertheless, today's passage does not anticipate the Civil Rights struggle outright. Rather it contains some instructions for resolving conflict with fellow Christians and for dealing with someone who is suing you.

Avoid anger. (21-22)

Murderers were liable to judgment in a court (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). Jesus says those who are angry (perhaps He means enraged to the point of hate) with a brother or sister are liable to God's judgment. Verse 22 contains an Aramaic word, "raca," an obscure insult. The "council" or "Sanhedrin" is either the Jewish high court in Jerusalem or a local court. "Hell" in some translations is "gehenna," from "Ge Hinnom," the Hinnom Valley south of Jerusalem, which became associated with a place of posthumous torture for the wicked.

The passage begins what some call the "Antitheses," based on the idea that Jesus contrasts the Jewish Law with His own radical teaching. Regrettably the title is misleading, as is the claim that no good

Jew would ever do something like this. On the contrary, ancient Jews called this "building a fence around the Torah" ("Instruction" is a better translation for "Torah" than "Law"). Jewish students of Jesus' day expected their teachers to say, "Torah says, 'Do not do X.' My torah ("instruction" with a lowercase "i") says, 'Do not come close to doing X. And besides, God knows your intentions.'" Jesus has just mentioned pure intentions in Matthew 5:8.

Seek reconciliation. (23-24)

Jesus assumes His followers will continue to engage in worship at the temple, and Matthew's inclusion of the instructions suggests that he and his readers did so up to the temple's destruction in 70 A.D.

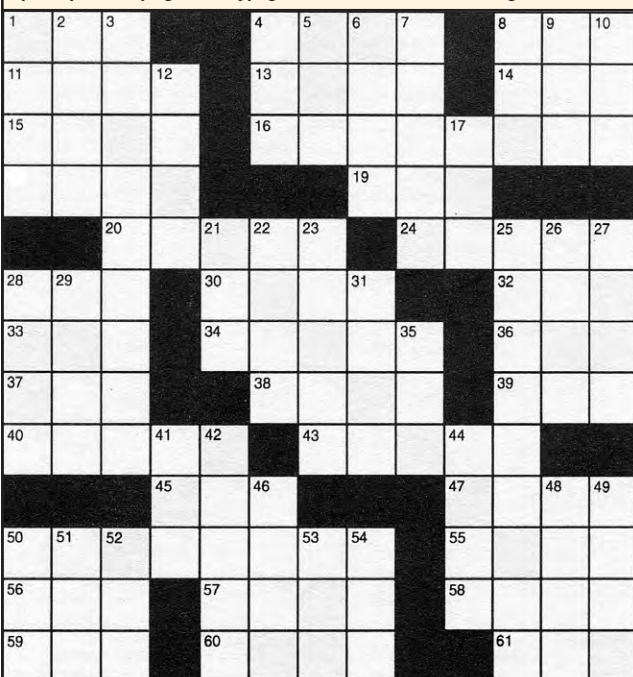
To make a gift on the altar suggests that one is in right relationship with God. But Jesus says that isn't the case if there is enmity between you and a fellow believer. Like ancient Jews, modern Christians often think of their prayers, worship and acts of mercy — not to mention their tithes — as gifts to God. Imagine never doing any of these things without first being reconciled to one another. That brings home the difficulty of Jesus' teaching, doesn't it?

Resolve differences. (25-26)

Now the instruction shifts to how to deal with nonbelievers (compare James 2:6). In Jesus' day, His followers were relatively powerless in comparison to Gentiles, who could exploit their social position in the law courts. The judge here also is portrayed as favoring unfairly the wealthy and powerful. The believer who reconciles with the abusive nonbeliever is acting out the character Jesus calls for in the Beatitudes. In our own society, of course, it is Christians who are likely to wield power and hence who stand to be reminded of Jesus' instructions to relinquish power, in particular when we must deal with others in fairness and God's mercy. ✠

Christian Crossword

By Evelyn M. Boyington Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



- Across**
- And ___ Israel that were round about them fled. (Num. 16:34)
 - And ___ the son of Omri did evil. (1 Kings 16:30)
 - Have ye not read in the ___? (Matt. 12:5)
 - This is the ___ of the generations of Adam. (Gen. 5:1)
 - There shall not a ___ of him fall to the earth. (1 Kings 1:52)
 - Anger.
 - With long ___ will I satisfy him. (Ps. 91:16)
 - And they ___ him, and put on him a scarlet robe. (Matt. 27:28)
 - Come, ___ the place where the Lord lay. (Matt. 28:6)
 - Unsuitable.
 - Be not afraid of their ___. (Jer. 1:8)
 - Therefore called she his name ___. (Gen. 30:6)
 - Aim.
 - Alkali.
 - Ye tithe the mint and ___ and all manner of herbs. (Luke 11:42)
 - He went and took ___ the daughter of Diblaim. (Hos. 1:3)

- Ever. (poetic)
- Tax agency.
- To wash.
- He went out to meet ___. (2 Chron. 15:2)
- Adhesive.
- She scorneth the horse and his ___. (Job 39:18)
- The ___s are a people not strong. (Prov. 30:25)
- Before. (prefix)
- Lift up a ___ against him. (Isa. 59:19)
- Set me as a ___ upon thine heart. (Song of Sol. 8:6)
- I am like an ___ of the desert. (Ps. 102:6)
- Canal.
- The son of Naum, which was the son of ___. (Luke 3:25)
- ___ unto them that are wise in their own eyes. (Isa. 5:21)
- College official.
- The son of Arphaxad, which was the son of ___. (Luke 3:36)
- The ___ of man shall be bowed down. (Isa. 2:17)
- Exclamations.
- "The Cat in the ___."
- Put on.
- Short.
- The ___ of truth shall be established forever. (Prov. 12:19)
- Your fathers, where ___ they? (Zech. 1:5)
- Married.
- Sharp.
- Green vegetable.
- Is there any taste in the white of an ___? (Job 6:6)
- Go, wash in the ___ of Siloam. (John 9:7)
- I love ___, my brother Absalom's sister. (2 Sam. 13:4)
- As it were the body of heaven in his ___. (Ex. 24:10)
- I will lift up mine ___ unto the hills. (Ps. 121:1)
- Antitoxin.
- Dribble.
- Invisible emanation.
- The priests the sons of ___ shall come near. (Deut. 21:5)
- Though they be ___ like crimson. (Isa. 1:18)
- Light brown.
- On the seventh day God





Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

Halfway there

UMobile receives first Steinway pianos

University of Mobile (UMobile) music students crowded outside the Martin Hall office of Kadisha Onalbayeva, professor and Steinway Artist in the UMobile Center for Performing Arts. A Steinway grand piano was on its side in the middle of the small room, students and professors itching to test the keys once the piano was set atop its legs.

Finally the moment came. “Okay — let’s go play, everybody,” Onalbayeva said, and students poured into the room to take turns playing on a piano recognized worldwide for its quality and beautiful tones.

This was the first of nine Steinway pianos delivered Jan. 21 to excited music students and faculty. The pianos were purchased with donations to the university’s “All Steinway, All Together” fundraising campaign.

The delivery marks the halfway point in the fundraising campaign that aims to replace old pianos with state-of-the-art Steinway pianos and earn the university the

prestigious designation as an All-Steinway School.

Will Carpenter, a junior majoring in music/business from Mobile, said the donations that made the pianos possible have an eternal impact.

‘Donation to ministry’

“For a school like ours, we are here to honor and glorify God. It’s not just a donation to a school — it’s a donation to a ministry” preparing students whose aim is to glorify God through music, Carpenter said.

Roger Breland, executive director of the UMobile Center for Performing Arts/School of Music and School of Worship Leadership, said gaining the designation of an All-Steinway School increases the university’s ability to recruit gifted student musicians.

“If we strive for excellence on the platform, we must have excellence in the practice room,” Breland said.

For more information about the “All Steinway, All Together” campaign, go to umobile.edu/Steinway or call 251-442-2412. (UMobile)

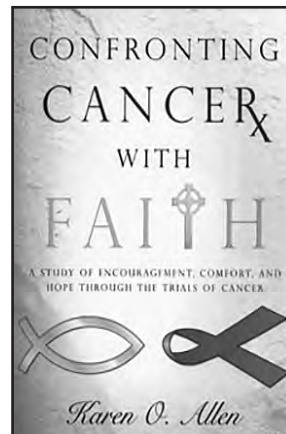
Media reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp

Confronting Cancer with Faith: A Study of Encouragement, Comfort and Hope Through the Trials of Cancer

Karen O. Allen. Birmingham: Ewe R Blessed Ministries, 2015 (Revised ed.). 151 pp. (Paperback).

I don’t remember seeing a study on cancer before, but since so many of us have experienced it ourselves or through loved ones, it seems like a good idea. The author of this study is doubly qualified to write it: she is a cancer survivor herself and she works at The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s Comprehensive Cancer Center.



“Confronting Cancer with Faith” is designed as a six-week study with readings for each day. There are questions for reflection in each reading but nothing strenuous that would require a lot of time or work. Each reading is packed with information, inspiration and encouragement.

I can see how going through the study as an individual or with a group would be helpful to a person who is facing the life-changing diagnosis of cancer. While the author is candid and does not minimize the physical and emotional trauma she went through, the overall tone is one of hope and dependence on God in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

Allen’s goal was to write a book that would help the reader use cancer as “an unforgettable time of spiritual renewal and growth.” I think she succeeded.

Songs in the House: Memories From My Journey

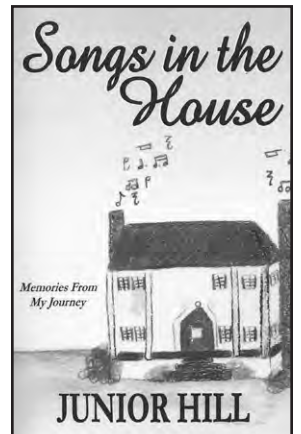
Junior Hill. Hartselle: JHI Publishers, 2015. 155 pp. (Paperback).

I think I could just post a picture of the cover with the message “Junior Hill has written another book,” and leave it at that. Alabama Baptists know and love Brother Junior and I suspect most are like me — eager for opportunities to hear him preach

and ready to read anything he writes. But for the one or two of you who have not already laid down your paper and gone online to order the newest one I’ll tell you a little bit about it.

First a disclaimer: I was involved in the production of this book, helping to format it for publication. My opinion, however, is the same as it has been with all of his other books. I loved it.

“Songs in the House” is pure Junior Hill. It is a compilation of some of his experiences in his 60 years of ministry. As always he writes just like he talks — with humor, humility and conviction. This book is the next best thing to hearing him preach.



Six Simple Steps: Find Contentment & Joy as a Ministry Wife

Diana Davis. Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2015. 157 pp. (Paperback).

“Six Simple Steps” is a great little book. I can imagine how helpful it would be to a young ministry wife, or even an older one who is struggling to fit into the role she has been called to. The six simple steps really are simple: relax, smile, love, say “we,” be resilient and serve passionately. Yes. Simple. You don’t have to read the back cover to figure out that Diana Davis is a ministry wife herself.



However, as you might have guessed, the author does complicate things a bit — in a good way — as she fleshes out and develops the six steps into practical advice with action steps and Scripture references and even includes a study guide with suggestions for using the

book in an eight-week study or a weekend retreat. My guess is that ministry wives will love this encouraging and engaging book.✠

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en.wikipedia.org

'Chocolate Girls'

IMB missionaries minister to prostitutes in France

By Beth Vaughan
International Mission Board

Taking a deep breath, I stepped into the darkened room located in a popular port town nestled along the French Riviera. The aroma of stale alcohol and cigarettes overwhelmed me. I was greeted by a blonde woman who eyed me suspiciously.

"This is my friend, Beth, from America," Tara Chaney introduced me. "She's visiting me for a few days and wanted to come on our little tour to see you all tonight."

Instantly the blonde woman's demeanor changed. She oohed with delight and embraced me in a friendly "bisou," or kiss — a French greeting not usually offered upon a first meeting.

When Tara first asked if I wanted to join her and some other women to hand out chocolates to local prostitutes, I was tentative. What would I do or say? Could I truly embrace these women for who they were? What about the language barrier?

I spent the day prior to our tour asking Tara a barrage of questions about the history of each lady and how this all began.

It started with two International Mission Board (IMB) missionary women who saw a need and an opportunity to show the prostitutes in this popular port town they are loved and valuable. Five years ago they began handing out small, quality chocolates to the women. Each chocolate had a Bible verse taped to it. What started with these two IMB missionaries eventually grew to include women from other evangelical missions organizations and a few from local French churches.

Honor and trust

On the day of our outing, we met early at a fast-food restaurant to pray and plan our route — and for me to bolster my courage with a strong cup of coffee. Later that day we started our tour, which consisted of visiting establishments along four specific streets. The women stood in the doorways waiting for clients. When they saw our group coming they let out squeals and offered plenty of "bisous." Initially the ladies weren't quite sure what

to make of me. After a quick introduction from Tara though I was accepted as one of "the Chocolate Girls" (a nickname lovingly bestowed upon the group by the women). One woman even told me her real name instead of her street name — often viewed as an expression of honor and trust.

I asked Tara what her dream was for this ministry; what do the Chocolate Girls ultimately want to see happen?

"We want to learn," she said, without hesitation. "We want to learn how to offer a way out of that life for those who want it. The majority of the ladies we minister to have advanced degrees, are trained for good, decent jobs. However, they are unable to make enough money in those jobs. In order to offer them a way out we need more than just a program to give them skills training, and we just don't know how to do that."

Tara said she and the other Chocolate Girls desperately want to see a church planted for these women or at least a Bible study formed that they can attend.

Even better would be a network of churches that would welcome the women when they decide they are ready to see what church is all about, she noted.

In order for the Chocolate Girls to obtain their desired training and partnerships they need someone who can network full time with churches and other organizations that can help reach the women. They're requesting groups to prayerwalk the streets during the day, ahead of the tours at night. They also are seeking other evangelical believers to walk alongside them, learn the ropes, pray and go.

► Pray a church will be planted among the women.

► Pray God will send someone to be the full-time networker and administrator of this ministry.

► Pray the Holy Spirit will reveal more opportunities for Tara and her colleagues to learn how to best reach the women with the hope of the gospel. (BP)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons.

For more information on how to partner with IMB missionaries, email contact@imbeurope.org. To learn more about IMB work in France, visit <http://www.imb.org/france>.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Church building burned in Sudan; Muslims arrested

YIDA, South Sudan — Muslim extremists from Sudan have been arrested in connection with the burning of a church building in South Sudan, sources said.

Members of the Sudanese Church of Christ in the refugee settlement of Yida awoke the morning of Jan. 16 to find their worship building in flames, area Christian leaders said. Tens of thousands of refugees from Sudan's South Kordofan state have set up homes in Yida, about seven miles from the Sudanese border.

"I learned that those who set our church on fire were sent from Sudan purposely," said a church leader who wished to remain unnamed.

Authorities arrested a Muslim suspect, identified only as Tia, who revealed the names of three other Muslim suspects, and police also captured them, including one identified only as Mohammad, sources said. One of the arrested men said they were sent from Sudan to attack churches and aid workers helping Nuba Christians from Sudan, a local Christian leader said.

Over the past year, three church buildings were reportedly burned in Yida, home for refugees that number nearly 70,000, according to one estimate. Most of them are Nuba Christians from South Kordofan state who believe the Islamist government of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir is targeting Christians and bombing churches as part of its war against rebels. (MS)

Suicide attacks leave 26 Christians dead, dozens injured

GOMBI, Nigeria — Suicide attacks on two predominantly Christian communities in northeast Nigeria on Jan. 27 and Jan. 29 left at least 26 people dead and dozens injured, sources said.

On Jan. 29 a suicide bomber suspected to have been sent by the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram detonated explosives in a crowded market in Gombi, Adamawa state, killing at least eight people, sources said.

The Red Cross reported eight people were killed and 25 wounded in the bombing that was said to have been carried out by a teenage boy.

Gombi was one of several Christian communities taken over by Boko Haram, and many of the town's displaced Christians are Church of the Brethren in Nigeria members still living in camps for internally displaced people in other parts of the country.

In Chibok, Borno state, suicide bombers suspected to have been sent by Boko Haram bombed a crowded market Jan. 27, killing at least 17 civilians and a soldier and injuring at least 30 others, sources said. Following the government troop recovery of the town, the market had reopened that day for the first time since Boko Haram took over Chibok two years ago, area Christians said. (MS)

Pastors kidnapped by masked gunmen in Nigeria

OKENE, Nigeria — Two Nigerian pastors have recently been abducted in Kogi state, as kidnapping cartels that have plagued the central state the last three years directed their aim at Christian leaders.

In a departure from numerous kidnappings of high-profile business and government leaders in Kogi state since 2013, gunmen abducted Pastor David Onubedo of Deeper Life Bible Church on Jan. 25 in Okene after a Bible study, according to local reports. Onubedo's captors are reported to have contacted his wife and the leadership of the church to demand \$249,000 for his release.

In Lokoja, capital of Kogi state, gunmen kidnapped Pastor Ayo Raphael on Jan. 10 during a worship service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Resurrection parish, sources said. Masked gunmen disrupted the service and took the pastor away at gunpoint, a member of the congregation said on condition of anonymity.

The kidnappers of the Pentecostal pastor also are demanding \$249,000 for his release, the source said. (MS)