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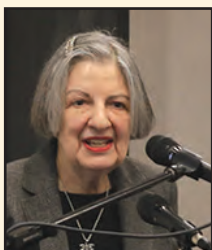
Variety of helpful resources available for Christians in midst of life's storms

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The Gbeka people are an unengaged, unreached people group (UUPG) in Guinea that number about 86,000. Grants Creek Baptist Church, Fosters, along with three other churches, have created a coalition to reach this people group.

'STEP OF FAITH'

IMB photo

Grants Creek, other churches form coalition to reach Gbeka people

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

On a normal Sunday morning, Grants Creek Baptist Church, Fosters, runs about 125 people in its morning service. And it's committed to reaching the Gbeka people, an unengaged, unreached people group (UUPG) in Guinea that numbers about 86,000.

"How is that even possible?" you might ask. Through partnership.

It all began a few years ago when Mike Griffin's brother went on a missions trip to Guinea through his church, Sixth Street Baptist Church, Alexander City. Hearing his brother talk about the thirst for the gospel in that region made the wheels in Griffin's mind turn. And as the pastor of Grants Creek Baptist, Griffin knew God was working in his heart.

After reaching out to the Kauffmans, International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries who serve in

Guinea, Griffin received information on several UUPGs, but felt "impressed to go" to the Gbeka people.

"It's one of the largest numbers that we saw ... without a single Christian," Griffin said. "That really did catch our attention."

But Griffin knew that if Grants

Creek was going to reach the Gbeka people, they would need help. So after mailing out information packets to area churches and conducting a series of meetings

to "discern the will of the Lord," Grants Creek and three other churches formed a coalition for the sole purpose of spreading the gospel among the Gbeka people.

"[We formed a coalition] because the IMB suggests that to be effective in reaching a UUPG you need about six trips a year into those people. Most churches in West Alabama — even the large churches — are just not capable of that kind of commitment, so for that reason

we sought to engage numerous churches to band together to reach [the Gbeka] people," Griffin said.

Along with Grants Creek, the coalition is made up of Southside Baptist Church, Fayette; Shiloh Baptist Church, Ralph; and Calvary Baptist Church, Fayette. The largest church averages 200 on Sunday

mornings, but combined the four churches number about 500.

"Even though we're very excited about what God is doing (and that the) pastors of these churches

have definitely been touched by the Lord to reach these people, we understand that the coalition needs to grow if we're going to be successful," Griffin said.

Faith in God

"It's a step of faith. ... We don't want to make two or three trips and just fall apart. We're believing that God is going to increase our numbers as we go and get the word out."

The vision trip that Griffin and

Nick Reid, a member of Shiloh Baptist, are currently on is the first movement into Guinea that the coalition has made since its inception. Initially the vision trip was planned for Fall 2014, but the Ebola outbreak put it on hold. Griffin and Reid left the United States on April 4 and will return April 16.

Acts 1:8 mindset

Griffin's heart for the Gbeka people began when he first interacted with the Kauffmans years before, but for Reid the passion came later. Reid's pastor, David Mills, had been emphasizing an Acts 1:8 missional mindset in his preaching when the Kauffmans spoke at Shiloh Baptist in August 2015.

Reid said, "David was really the first person I've ever heard to just boil it down to 'you have a purpose and a mission and it's God's purpose and mission to share the Great Commission,'" adding that when the Kauffmans shared, it was "a powerful service."

"I just really remember sensing the Holy Spirit when [the Kauffmans] were there. They weren't there on accident."

After a while, Reid knew God had placed a burden on his heart to reach the Gbeka people with the (See 'Partnering,' page 7)

To learn more about the Gbeka people, the coalition or to get involved, contact Mike Griffin at 205-752-4354 or office@grantscreekbaptist.org.

COMMENT

Resisting the Transgender Agenda

The American College of Pediatricians has come out swinging at efforts to label transgender children as healthy and normal. In a report released March 21, the officers of the group declared, “A person’s belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking.”

The report went on to say, “Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse.”

The statement is called “temporary” with a full report scheduled for release this summer. But the two-page document pulls no punches in condemning toleration of transgender behaviors by parents, educators and other adults.

“The American College of Pediatricians urges educators and legislators to reject all policies that condition children to accept as normal a life of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex,” the statement says. “Facts — not ideology — determine reality.”

Everyone is born with a biological sex, the statement says but “no one is born with a gender.” The statement defines “gender” as an awareness and sense of oneself as male or female. Gender, the statement explains, is a sociological and psychological concept, not an objective biological one.

“No one is born with an awareness of themselves as male or female. This awareness develops over time and like all developmental processes may be derailed by a child’s subjective perceptions, relationships and adverse experiences from infancy forward,” the report contends.

“People who identify as ‘feeling like the opposite sex’ or ‘somewhere in between’ do not comprise a third sex. They remain biological men or biological women,” according to the report.

‘Gender dysphoria’

When a child feels like the opposite sex “an objective psychological problem exists that lies in the mind, not the body” and should be treated as such, according to the report. Children feeling this way suffer from “gender dysphoria” formerly listed as Gender Identity Disorder and recognized as a mental disorder in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, the statement explains.

As many as 98 percent of gender confused boys and 88 percent of gender confused girls



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty, according to the report.

The authors of the report acknowledge that “exceedingly rare disorders of sex development are all medically identifiable deviations from the sexual binary norm” and adds “such individuals do not constitute a third sex.”

Instead, the authors argue, “endorsing gender discordance as normal via public education and legal policies will confuse children and parents, leading more children to present to ‘gender clinics.’”

It is hard to imagine a stronger statement condemning acceptance of transgender behaviors in children. Yet consider what is happening in the nation’s schools.

On April 29, 2014, the United States Department of Education ruled that sex discrimination outlawed by Title IX of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972 applied to gender identity. The original wording of that historic amendment reads, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

More than 40 years later, the U.S. Department of Education said, “Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity. ... Similarly, the actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the parties does not change a school’s obligation.”

The ruling was applied to every public and private elementary and secondary school, college or university receiving any type of federal financial assistance. By equating gender as sex, Department of Education rule-makers imposed on the nation a standard not envisioned in the original law and a standard condemned by the American College of Pediatricians.

Now the U.S. Justice Department sues school districts to force schools to allow transgender students to use the school restrooms

and locker rooms that match their gender identity but not their biological sexual identity.

One must ask where is the concern for basic individual rights of children and others who do not suffer from gender dysphoria? Where is the concern for their rights such as privacy and safety? How are privacy and safety protected when biological boys are allowed to use girls’ bathrooms and locker rooms or when biological girls are allowed to use boys’ bathrooms and locker rooms? The invitation to predatory behavior is obvious.

Perhaps the tide is turning. In November 2015 voters in Houston, Texas, overwhelmingly repealed an ordinance adopted by the city council providing special protected class status for sexual orientation and gender identity. The slogan of those fighting that protected status was crude but true — “No men in women’s bathrooms.”

Anti-discrimination protection

You may remember that Houston’s mayor attempted to silence church opposition to her pet project by subpoenaing sermon outlines of pastors who opposed her efforts. She lost that effort too.

Now the fight has switched to Charlotte, North Carolina. Like Houston, the city council there adopted an ordinance extending anti-discrimination protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The vote was 7-4.

The backlash was immediate and strong. By an overwhelming vote the state legislature adopted a bill blocking such actions by local governments and specifically blocking transgender individuals from using public bathrooms that correspond to the gender identity instead of their biological identity. The bill was quickly signed by the governor.

Now the state is being sued by the American Civil Liberties Union and others.

Since January, one study found that 44 bills in 16 state legislatures have been filed to protect the safety and privacy of women and men by ensuring public bathrooms can be used only by persons of the same biological sex as that specified on the bathroom door. A backlash has begun.

Recent rules promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education and others are wrong and need to be rolled back. We believe roll back efforts will only continue and grow as communities and states enter this debate.

As the statement by the American College of Pediatricians says, gender dysphoria is a psychological issue that needs to be treated, not a right that should be protected by public policy.

To read the American College of Pediatricians report, visit www.acped.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/gender-ideology-harms-children. †

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

See page 19



TAB

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

"If ye continue in My word, then
... ye shall know the truth, and
the truth shall make you free."
John 8:31-32

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

© The Alabama Baptist, Inc. is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-879-6026. **Website:** www.thealabamabaptist.org. **Email:** news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and at additional mailing offices.

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'Religious liberty of all'

Muslim leaders want to see religious freedom for all regardless of faith

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

More than 300 Muslim leaders from some 120 countries went to bat earlier this year for Christian and other religious minorities in Muslim-majority nations.

The gathering in Marrakesh, Morocco, on Jan. 25-27 resulted in a two-page declaration in which the international leaders of the Islamic faith called on the Muslim world to reaffirm the 1,400-year-old Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad and the people of Medina, guaranteeing "the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith."

Coming at a time when Christians in some Muslim-majority countries are facing unprecedented persecution and even genocide (see page 17), and when anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States is being fanned on the presidential campaign trail, religious freedom advocates felt the Marrakesh Declaration should have made headlines. It didn't.

But it may be more newsworthy now following the March 22 terror attack in Brussels that claimed more than 30 lives. Or after the deadly suicide bombing in a public park in Pakistan on Easter Sunday, killing at least 70.

In a February article published by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC), Charles C. Haynes wrote, "The Marrakesh Declaration has received scant media attention in the United States. Positive news about Islam — including the many earlier statements and actions of Islamic leaders to fight extremism — rarely makes headlines."

Dangerous to turn a deaf ear

Haynes, director of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute, a nonpartisan organization promoting the constitutional protections of the First Amendment, contends that it is dangerous for Americans to turn a deaf ear to such efforts.

"At a time when Islam is co-opted by terrorists and demonized by anti-Muslim groups, Americans need to hear the true voice of Islam," Haynes said, noting that hate crimes against Muslim-Americans and mosques across the U.S. have tripled since the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California.

"Ignorance and fear of Islam breed anger, hate and violence," Haynes said, adding that terrorists acting in the name of Islam

are no more Islamic than the Ku Klux Klan is Christian. "If we can tell the difference between authentic Christianity and perverted versions of the gospel, so we should learn to tell the difference when it comes to Islam."

Muslim leaders issuing the Marrakesh Declaration wrote that "the various crises afflicting humanity underscores the inevitable and urgent need for cooperation among all religious groups." They minced no words in saying they:

1. Call upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of "citizenship" which is inclusive of diverse groups. Such jurisprudence shall be rooted in Islamic tradition and principles and mindful of global changes;

2. Urge Muslim educational institutions and authorities to conduct a courageous review of educational curricula that addresses honestly and effectively any material that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos and results in the destruction of our shared societies;

3. Call upon politicians and decision makers to take the political and legal steps necessary to establish a constitutional contractual relationship among its citizens and to support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim world;

4. Call upon the educated, artistic and creative members of our societies as well as organizations of civil society to establish a broad movement for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim countries, raise awareness as to their rights and work together to ensure the success of these efforts;

5. Call upon the various religious groups bound by the same national fabric to address their mutual state of selective amnesia that blocks memories of centuries of joint and shared living on the same land. We call upon them to rebuild the past by reviving

the tradition of conviviality and restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression;

6. Call upon representatives of the various religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, vilification and denigration of what people hold sacred, as well as all speech that promotes hatred and bigotry;

7. Affirm that it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.

Travis Wussow, director of international justice and religious liberty for the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, attended the summit in Morocco. "At a time in which Christians and other religious minorities are being persecuted in record numbers around the globe, it was powerful to see Muslim leaders dialoguing with one another about the issue of treatment of religious minority communities, even more so to see this diverse group agree upon a statement with calls to action," Wussow said.

'What comes next'

"The key though will be what comes next," he said. "In our own country, we would not likely celebrate the Federalist Papers were they not backed up by the U.S. Constitution. In the same way, whether the Marrakesh Declaration will ultimately matter will depend on whether or not its calls to action will be implemented by its signatories."

J. Brent Walker, BJC executive director, agreed the Marrakesh Declaration is a step in the right direction.

"The Marrakesh Declaration's call for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries is encouraging and I hope it will lead to greater protection of religious liberty for all people in those areas," Walker said.

"It serves as a reminder of how fortunate we are to live in a country where everyone's religious liberty is already protected," Walker said. "We know that a threat to anyone's religious freedom is a threat to everyone's religious freedom, and we must stand together to protect the God-given rights of our brothers and sisters of all faiths, both here and around the globe."

"Everyone is entitled to freedom of conscience and choice in religious matters." ✠

**"If we can tell the
difference between
authentic Christianity
and perverted versions
of the gospel, so we
should learn to tell
the difference when it
comes to Islam."**

Charles C. Haynes
director, Religious Freedom
Center of the Newseum Institute

J. Brent Walker
executive director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

April is Counseling Awareness Month.

A look at different styles of counseling



123rf.com

Variety of helpful resources available for Christians in midst of life's storms

By Rod Marshall
Special to The Alabama Baptist

In Matthew 5:4, Jesus says, “For He (God) makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Sometimes obedient and righteous Christians find themselves in a period where the “storms of life” seem to be raining upon them with stubborn and absolute resolve. These storms of life can be vocational, relational or emotional and they are frequently quite challenging. These challenges can leave one feeling overwhelmed and exhausted and tempted to sing the refrain of the old country song that says, “the storms of life are washing me away.” Most of the time the storms pass. But sometimes they don’t and we need to turn to someone for help.

Where is the Christian to turn when they feel overwhelmed, exhausted and struggle to find answers?

Categories of helpers

The good news is that there are many resources available for storm-soaked pilgrims. The variety of resources can be a blessing, but each one offers a particular

kind of help and it is important to know what to expect from each professional resource. Following are descriptions of helping professionals who can oftentimes help Christians get through challenging periods and then some simple guidelines to help us make good choices.

► **Psychiatrists** — Psychiatrists are medical doctors with extensive specialized training in diseases that impact people emotionally (their feelings) or cognitively (their thinking). Psychiatrists are the best ones to prescribe antidepressants or anti-anxiety medication. Should a Christian suffer from some form of mental illness, having a psychiatrist on their team of caregivers can be quite valuable.

► **Psychologists** — All psychologists have an earned doctorate in psychology. Psychologists can be excellent therapists and also are very skilled at psychological testing and diagnosis.

► **Other mental health professionals** — Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC), Licensed Certified Social Workers (LCSW) and Licensed Marriage

and Family Therapists (LMFT) are all types of counselors who have at least a master’s degree (and many times more education than that) and who have passed an examination, received supervised post-graduate training and agreed to abide by a clearly defined code of ethics.

Typically these helping professionals focus more on wellness and prevention than on disease. Unless these clinicians attended graduate programs at Christian schools, they are not likely to have received specialized training in the relationship between faith and counseling.

► **Faith integrative therapists** — This category is a fairly new and very interesting category as it includes individuals who are psychiatrists, psychologists, LPCs, LCSWs or LMFTs. There are a growing number of licensed helping professionals from all disciplines who actively seek to integrate their client’s religious faith into the counseling sessions. These clinicians are very comfortable with their own Christian faith and though they do not use the counseling relationship as an opportunity for proselytism, they do actively integrate religious beliefs and practices into their professional application of psychological principles. Several faith-based universities have begun programs in counseling, social work or psychology so the potential for growth among faith integrative counselors is great. The faith integrative counselor will typically seek to draw the best from the field of psychology and the best from the discipline of Christian theology to craft individualized treatment plans that integrate the client’s personal faith into their approach to counseling.

► **Pastoral counselors** — There are some counselors who have specific training in counseling as a ministry and who focus on counseling as their primary approach to working with others. Many pastors have the skill set and personality to be excellent counselors. Some pastors

have the training to be excellent counselors. A few pastors have the time to make an intentional counseling ministry a major part of the way they serve their congregation. At a few large churches, there may be a pastoral staff person whose focus is on counseling church members.

► **Biblical counselors or Nouthetic counselors** — Some seminary-trained counselors focus on a very specific approach to counseling that is rooted in a Sola Scriptura (“by Scripture alone”) approach to helping others. Many of these counselors are very skilled and well-trained. However, at this time, there is not a state credentialing authority governing the practices of biblical counselors, so the use of the label can be quite broad, capturing some doctoral level-trained professionals, but also being used by lay counselors who have taken weekend workshops or online courses.

► **Lay counselors** — Many Christians have been trained in approaches to “bearing one another’s burdens.” Lay counselors and support groups can be very helpful in getting Christians through stormy times. If you are attending a support group or working with a lay counselor and things do not seem to be getting better, then it may be prudent to see a helping professional.

Selecting a counselor

With so many choices, how can a Christian choose a helping professional with confidence? There are very good, average and less-effective counselors in all the categories. Unfortunately you cannot always depend on the credential of the counselor to assure you of the level of excellence of services that will be provided. Here are some tips to help you select the best counselor for you.

1. Word of mouth. Ask your pastor or a leader you trust who they recommend. If you know someone who has used a professional helper and you have seen good results in their life, then ask them with whom they worked.

2. Be pragmatic. If you have health



MARSHALL



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insurance, it is possible that your insurance might help cover the costs of a psychiatrist, a psychologist or another type of mental health counselor (LPC, LCSW, LMFT). If finances are important to you (and be aware that counseling may take longer than you initially expect), then you may choose to work with someone whose services are covered, completely or in part, by your health insurance. Most pastoral counselors or biblical counselors will not be able to utilize your insurance benefits. Many counseling ministries do offer sliding scales or scholarships for clients. Make sure you clearly understand the financial arrangements before you commit to working with someone.

Ask hard questions

3. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions in the first session. Some Christians feel strongly that they would prefer to work with a Christian helper, while others might want to work with the individual with the most expertise. However, very few devout Christians would want to work with someone who minimizes or dismisses his or her faith.

A good question to ask in the first meeting with any helping professional might go something like this: "My religious faith is very important to me. I would like for my faith to be incorporated into our work together. Are you comfortable with my faith and how would you see it as something we can use to help me move through this challenging time?"

4. Work with someone with whom you feel connected and in whom you have confidence. Remember that you have many options in the helping professionals' world. Find someone that you think will be helpful and whose approach makes sense to you. If you are not sure why they are suggesting a specific assignment, then ask them to explain how it might be helpful. If they refuse to answer, then they may not be the best fit to work with you.

5. Choose the approach that fits you best. If it is of utmost importance to you that your counseling be informed primarily or exclusively by Scripture, then you may prefer to work with a seminary-trained biblical counselor. However, if you have concerns that your specific situation might be better resolved with an approach that also takes into consideration brain chemistry or if there is a strong family history of similar challenges, consider seeing a psychiatrist.

Talking therapy

If you believe your current challenge is more situational and you would prefer a talking therapy, there are many psychologists and other mental health professionals who integrate faith into their practice of counseling. Many of these view their vocation as a calling.

Though it is generally perceived to be rude or socially uncomfortable to ask someone explicitly about their religious faith, it is OK to ask a helping profes-

sional about their view of faith and their own personal faith. If they seem offended or uncomfortable with the question, then that might be an indication that it would not be a good fit.

6. If your counselor seems to be always talking about themselves or their struggles and victories, then you may want to carefully evaluate if that is helpful for you. Helping professionals may occasionally disclose their own challenges and victories, but the relationship should not be centered on the helper.

7. If you honestly do not understand what the helping professional is talking about, then be assertive and respectfully ask him or her to clarify what they are saying. If they seem offended by this request or cannot seem to explain to you what they are talking about, then you may be better served by someone else.

8. The best counseling relationships are characterized by what is called the "working alliance" or "therapeutic alliance." You will likely get better results when you feel as if this relationship is a partnership to which you contribute. Always keep in mind that your counselor should have expertise, but he or she

should respect that you are the greatest expert there is about your circumstances. If you feel patronized or dismissed by the counselor, then you could likely find a better fit.

Keep track of progress

9. Use common sense. If you choose to work with someone to help get through a specific challenge, then pay close attention to the progress you are making. If you do not feel like you are benefitting from the suggestions of your counselor, then do not feel obligated to continue doing something that does not seem to be working.

10. Be realistic. It is highly unusual for one counseling session to bring total healing, but if after five sessions you are not seeing progress, then consider exploring other options.

Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, offers counseling services for a wide variety of presenting issues.

The counseling ministry is more than 20 years old and has offices in 41 locations across the state.

Pathways counselors use an integrated counseling approach in which they utilize evidence-based interventions delivered from a biblical worldview. Pathways is the state's largest provider of professional counseling from a Christian perspective. Pathways also has referrals for psychiatrists and psychologists in the state when needed.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Rod Marshall is president and CEO of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries and has worked in the mental health field for more than 25 years. He is a licensed professional counselor. †



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Ministers must be wise in tax planning because of new regulations

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The most frequent question he's asked by bivocational ministers is, "Can I take all my salary as a housing allowance?"

Lee Wright, coordinator of church compensation services at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said his answer is, "Yes, you can, but you might not want to." And since bivocational ministers number about half of Alabama Baptist ministers, this is a timely question.

Wright directed a conference on ministers' tax issues at First Baptist Church, Pelham, on Feb. 18. The ministers' housing allowance is a unique tax designation for clergy, Wright said. Though it's been challenged in court, he counsels ministers to take advantage of it while it is available, "which could be a matter of years or even decades," he noted. The designation means that money expended for housing is not subject to federal income tax, but is subject to the self-employed Social Security tax rate of 15.3 percent.

Wright explained that a minister has a dual tax status that probably accounts for 90 percent of the tax issues he faces.

"The minister is considered an employee for federal income tax purposes, but self-employed for Social Security (FICA) purposes," he said. "This means he should get a W-2 from the church. The 1099 form (miscellaneous income) would be given, for example, to a supply pastor who generated more than \$600 of income in a year."

Wright said a church can withhold taxes on the minister, or he can send quarterly payments as long as the payments are at least equal to the tax paid in the previous year or 90 percent of the current year obligation.

Housing allowance

A housing allowance should be basically no more than the fair rental value of the house, furnished, plus utilities, he said. It might be a good idea to request more in housing than less, since unused housing allowance can be reported and taxed without penalty on the federal 1040 form.

Wright is hesitant to suggest that bivocational ministers request their full salary in housing because he believes having some salary devoted to retirement savings is beneficial. Wright suggested that retirement contributions are the ministers' best source of tax savings.

"Ministers can designate a portion of their salaries for retirement, so this amount is not taxed, and then they pay less tax on the proceeds in retirement since they'll probably be in a lower tax bracket," he said.

"Sometimes he can realize as much as a 50 percent tax savings through retirement contributions, making this a better

tax savings plan than the housing allowance. And GuideStone Financial Resources can designate all or a portion of retirement income as housing allowance and there's no tax whatsoever if the full amount is used for housing costs."

Wright said retired ministers would pay Social Security tax on earned income, such as that received from interim or supply work, but not on retirement benefits. And another tax savings in retirement is an additional personal exemption on federal income tax for those who are 65 or older.

Wright said he also spends much of his time fielding questions about health care due to the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010.

Proof of insurance coverage

"The individual mandate means that everyone must be enrolled in a health care plan, and there are increasing penalties for noncompliance," he said. "The penalty for 2016 is \$695. And [2015] was the first time we saw a new document, Form 1095, giving proof of insurance coverage."

A recent International Revenue Service ruling clarified individual health insurance premiums as a non-taxable fringe benefit for ministers in the smaller-membership churches where there is only one full-time employee. This is true as long as the plan isn't part of the Health Insurance Marketplace with tax savings already built into it.

The old concept of giving ministers a lump sum and allowing them to designate it as they wish isn't really a good plan anymore. Wright recommends an accountable reimbursement plan that pays for business expenses when the minister turns in regular receipts.

"If there's no accountable plan, the minister's business deductions, such as travel and books, can only be claimed as a tax deduction if he itemizes, and if the accumulated totals exceed 2 percent of the adjusted gross income on the 1040 tax form," he said. "These expenses are also reduced by the Deason Allocation rule relating to the percentage of housing allowance. Thus a minister really loses out."

Wright also cautioned participants about the tax liability of a Social Security offset. "Since the minister is considered self-employed for Social Security purposes and the tax is a hefty 15.3 percent, some churches offer an offset that is the equivalent of what they'd match on a nonministerial employee," he said. "This is a nice thing to do, but it's additional money that must be reported as income for taxation."

Wright will offer church tax conferences for small membership churches in Montgomery on June 7 and in Dothan on June 21. For more information, contact him at 800-264-1225, ext. 241, or lwright@alsbom.org. †

Shoals area prayer rally leaders hope to spur spiritual awakening

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

On the first Thursday of May, millions around the nation gather annually to observe the National Day of Prayer (NDP). This year in North Alabama, an extra emphasis will precede the NDP with the Shoals Area Wide Prayer Rally on May 4 at 6 p.m. Sponsored by Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, area churches and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, the event will emphasize the importance of prayer on the eve of NDP.

Need for prayer

Barrett Long, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tusculumbia, who serves on the rally's 10-person planning committee, said the goal of the event is to spur a spiritual awakening in the Shoals area.

"I think for our area it's a good culture right now where we're seeing some fruit and we just need to continue to pray ... for a spiritual awakening," Long said. "We want the Spirit to move across our area for the

transformation of lives."

The event also will seek to reach across denominational lines. Colbert-Lauderdale Association Director of Missions Eddy Garner hopes the rally will soundly unify believers in the area.

"I hope it'll draw believers together to find a common bond in prayer," he said. "[I hope it'll also be a] spiritual renewal ... and draw our churches together for a common purpose for how we can make a difference in the Shoals area for Christ."

Long agreed, adding, "I think as culture becomes increasingly intolerant of Christians ... the denominational wall is going to fall a little bit. [This rally] is more than a Southern Baptist thing; it's a Kingdom thing. ... It's a Kingdom event that

we want to bring people together."

The rally will be held at the Florence-Lauderdale Coliseum in Florence and will feature music by the Shoals Praise and Worship Choir. Robert Smith Jr., the Charles T. Carter Baptist Choir of Divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, will speak on investing in the hope of prayer.

Garner hopes the rally will have a lasting impact.

"I'm just praying that it'll be an event that we'll look back on and say, 'That was the night that

changed our lives and changed our area for Christ,'" he said.

For more information on the Shoals Area Wide Prayer Rally, contact Colbert-Lauderdale Association at 256-383-7021 or clba@clbaptist.com. ☞

"We want the Spirit to move across our area for the transformation of lives."

Eddy Garner, director of missions, Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association

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Richard D. Austin

Former Alabama Baptist pastor dies at 77

Richard D. Austin, who began preaching at the age of 17, died Feb. 15. He was 77.



AUSTIN

Austin earned degrees from Howard College in Birmingham (now Samford University), the University of Alabama and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Austin served in bivocational and full-time pastoral positions at many churches including Second Baptist Church, Bessemer; Northside Baptist Church, Attalla; Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa; First Baptist Church, Pinson; Inglenook Baptist Church, Birmingham; Dogwood Grove Baptist Church, Adger; Big Creek Baptist Church, Adger; Mud Creek Baptist Church, Adger; and Abernant Baptist Church, to name a few. He also served as pastor of two churches in North Carolina.

He was a member of The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla, at the time of his death. He also taught history and Spanish for more than 35 years for the Jefferson County School System.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; two children; five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (TAB)

Thomas Brooks Barkley

Former longtime pastor dies at 78

Longtime Alabama Baptist pastor Thomas Brooks Barkley died March 14. He was 78.

Barkley, a resident of Gallion, was a retired colonel of the Alabama National Guard, serving for 25 years.

He previously served as pastor of Greensboro Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Hartselle; Southside Baptist Church, Decatur; Forest Hill Baptist Church, Linden; and Thomaston Baptist Church, where he remained a member until his passing. He also served as pastor of churches in North Carolina and Mississippi.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret; two children; and two grandchildren. (TAB)

Partnering TOGETHER

'Every church can be a significant partner,' Boykin says

(continued from page 1)
gospel and had put the need right in front of him, he said.

While on the vision trip, Griffin and Reid are working with translators and storying, a story-telling technique to help share the gospel. Both men were trained in storying at an IMB base camp at Grants Creek in February.

At base camps participants hear testimonies of God's work in an area and learn practical applications and ministry techniques such as storying to reach that specific area.

Praying for boldness

In preparation for the trip, Reid said he prayed fervently for boldness to share the stories he and Griffin were learning.

"Being able to tell the stories in a natural flow is the trick. You

can't really memorize it," he said, adding that he's been using his 6-year-old son's bedtime to practice telling the story of the demon-possessed man.

Confident in God

"After a while, my son said, 'You have to tell me another one,'" Reid said with a laugh.

Before he left, Griffin said he was "prayerful and confident" that after the vision trip "God's going to call some of these churches and others that we don't even know about and they're going to say, 'Hey, we want to be a part of this.'"

Sam Day, director of missions for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association (TBA), and Eric Boykin, TBA's missional strategist, agree that the most effective way to have a global impact is by working together.

Day said, "When God gives a vision for our churches, He gives us a larger Christian community to partner with and accomplish larger visions.

"Every time we hitch our wagons together we wind up completing and complementing each other, and the impact exponentially increases. ... That's where the Gbeka people come into play."

'Teachable and humble'

The plan, Day said, is to "come in as servants, very open, teachable and humble" to understand the needs of the people and then use the coalition's and association's strengths to meet those needs.

Boykin said, "We as an association are going to make (the Gbeka people) part of our foreign missions strategy and really focus on a few areas and partner in a lot of areas."

Producing a video that pastors can show in their churches is one way TBA has helped further the coalition's mission. TBA also is planning to host an IMB base camp.

Boykin said churches can get involved through prayer and partnering.

"Every church can be a significant partner in this thing. Every church can pray. ... Every church can give something toward a team going. Every church can make somebody a point person to keep this UUPG in front of their people," he said.

Ways to help

It can start with churches showing the video (visit vimeo.com/155590665) about the Gbeka people and move forward with participating in the IMB base camp, then with prayer and partnering, Boykin said.

"Especially now with the IMB short (staffed), we need our churches to step up in a huge way.

"We're on the front end of this — it's a great time to get on board. This is a wonderful time to get in on this process, to do something great among the Gbeka people of Guinea."

Day agreed, adding, "We can do so much more together than we can do (by) ourselves." †

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Co-facilitated by Steve Sweatt, LPC/LMFT and Clinical Director of Community Grief Support and Larry J. Michael, Ph.D., Pastor for Adult Ministries and Parish Associate, South Highland Presbyterian Church

Each attendee will receive Dr. Michael's handbook, that has the same title as the workshop, provided compliments of Dignity Memorial/Ridout's Valley Chapel. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided compliments of Brookdale University Park.

For more information or to register, call
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Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Missionary Church, Holly Pond**, will hold revival services April 7–8. There will be a nightly prayer band at 6:45 and the services will follow at 7 p.m. Jack Thomason will speak. The church also will hold its third Sunday night singing April 17, 6 p.m. with Blue Grace. For more information call 256-796-5986 or 256-590-4468. Randy Burtram is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Thomasville Church** will host a Priscilla Shirer Live simulcast April 23, 9 a.m. For reservations call 334-636-4409. Ty Parten is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Jon Glass** is the new pastor of **McElwain Church, Birmingham**. He holds degrees from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and Southeast-



GLASS

ern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Glass previously served as youth pastor at Cresset Church, Durham, North Carolina. He and his wife, Matthea,



WILSON

have five children (one deceased). **Bradley Wilson** is the new minister of music for **McElwain Church**. He also serves as the choir director at Hueytown High School. Wilson holds a bachelor's degree and master's degree from the University of Montevallo. He and his wife, Maria, have one child. ► **Raleigh Avenue Church, Homewood**, will host its 60th anniversary celebration April 24, 10:30 a.m. A fellowship lunch will follow the service. For more information call 205-942-8060. Nic Seaborn is pastor.

ETOWAH

► **Duck Springs Church, Attalla**, will celebrate its 175th anniversary April 17, 10:30

a.m. Edwin Hayes will speak. A fellowship meal will follow the service. Everyone is invited. Royce Head is pastor.

FAYETTE

► **Pilgrim Rest Church, Fayette**, will celebrate its 175th anniversary April 24, 10 a.m. Larry Barnes will speak. Lunch will follow the morning service and a gospel singing will be held in the afternoon. Randy Anderson is pastor.

RUSSELL

► **Summerville Church, Phenix City**, will hold its 10th annual golf benefit for the American Cancer Society on April 16 at the Lakewood Golf Course in Phenix City. Tee time will be at 1 p.m. Lunch will be provided for players at noon. For more information and to register call 334-298-4416. All proceeds will be presented to the Russell County Relay for Life on May 6. Summerville also will host the Woman's Missionary Union annual meeting April 16, 10 a.m.–1 p.m. Robert Goodman is pastor. ► **Philadelphia Church, Smiths Station**, will host Senior Singspiration for all Russell Association churches April 28, 10 a.m.–1 p.m. For more information and to register call Russell Association at 334-298-3481 by April 21. Anyone wishing to be on the program representing their church also should call the association office and speak to Joycelyn by April 14. M.R. Hamilton, pastor of Lakewood Church, Phenix City, will speak. Skip Speed is pastor of Philadelphia Church. Tommy Poole is director of missions.

OTHER

► Former members and friends are invited to the **South Avondale Church** reunion at Irondale Café on April 23, 11 a.m. For reservations email Lavelle.wright@gmail.com.✱



COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

ERLC hosts #PrayForRefugees campaign

WASHINGTON — The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention organized a March 15 prayer campaign, #PrayForRefugees, marking the fifth anniversary of the Syrian civil war.

Campaign leaders encouraged churches, Christian organizations and individuals to pray on behalf of the more than 13.5 million Syrians involved in the international humanitarian crisis. Participants were asked to share the campaign on social media by using the hashtag #PrayForRefugees.

ERLC President Russell Moore said of the campaign, "Christians are called by God to stand up for the sanctity of human life whenever and wherever it is challenged. The lives of these many refugees fleeing the most brutal kinds of religious and ethnic persecution and oppression matter to our God, and so they should matter to us as well. As Christians, we don't have to agree on all the details of public policy to agree that our response ought to be, first, one of compassion and prayer for some of our world's most vulnerable and defenseless people."

ERLC was joined by the International Mission Board, World Vision, World Relief and other organizations in organizing the campaign. (ERLC)



DR volunteer dies while serving in Louisiana

LEESVILLE, Louisiana — A Southern Baptist disaster relief (DR) volunteer died March 29 while on a flood recovery mission in Leesville, Louisiana.

Don Fulkerson, 77, a member of First Baptist Church, Galatia, Illinois, died from a heart attack while serving on a team of Illinois Baptists dispatched March 20 to respond to massive flooding that damaged more than 7,000 homes and affected 28 parishes in Louisiana.

According to the Illinois Baptist State Association Facebook page, it was Fulkerson's 15th disaster response over a period of just four years. As usual, he was working alongside his wife, Margie. "Their faithful service to Christ brought great joy to both of them as they served side by side in the ministry of disaster relief," said Rex Alexander, state DR coordinator.

NAMB President Kevin Ezell extended condolences to Fulkerson's family, saying, "[Don] is a great example of someone who chose to stay active into his later years and to contribute in a way that truly made a difference in the lives of others." (BNG)

Tennessee ministry receives new ultrasound machine

KNOXVILLE, Tennessee — An East Tennessee ministry has a new resource provided by Southern Baptists in its mission to serve the needy — in this case, underprivileged, pregnant women.

Wallace Mobile Healthcare, based in Knoxville, Tennessee, received an ultrasound machine March 6 from the Psalm 139 Project of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). The gift — the latest made by ERLC to centers across the country — occurred during the morning worship service of Wallace Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville.

Wallace Mobile Healthcare seeks to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the uninsured and underprivileged in Knox County and nearby rural communities in Appalachia through the provision of free medical services. The nonprofit mission is named in memory of Bill Wallace, a Southern Baptist missionary from Knoxville who died as a prisoner of the Chinese Communists in 1951. (BP)

REFLECTIONS



Alabama Baptist Convention **State Board of Missions**

**Focus
on**

ONE MISSION

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COME BREAK THE ICE AT THE BAPTIST BUILDING

We've all been there. You're at a Sunday School fellowship or a party of some sort, and someone hands you an icebreaker activity. Suddenly you're faced with the task of finding someone who shares your birth month or who has never seen a *Star Wars* movie, with the goal of finishing your grid before time runs out.

Whether you like party games or not, those icebreakers serve a good purpose. Much like the ships for which they are named – huge vessels charged with breaking up ice to open up navigation channels – an icebreaker in a social setting serves to break up the tension and clear the way for a more comfortable experience.

Twice a year, your State Board of Missions holds an icebreaker activity of sorts. We call it Get Acquainted Day, and the next one is scheduled for Tuesday, May 3, at the Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery. It begins at 10 a.m. and will conclude by 3:30 p.m.

The structured part of the day includes time to hear from Executive Director Rick Lance and other state missionaries from the Evangelism & Discipleship, Missions Mobilization, Leadership Development and Missions

Support teams, as we explore ways we can



**By Doug Rogers
State Missionary**

partner in Great Commission efforts.

In addition, state missionary and sociologist Jim Swedenburg will lead practical discussions related to the demographics of our state and the different leadership styles found in churches. You'll receive a sheet of statistics customized for your church and community and learn how to reach the people who are right around you.

If that's not enough, we'll even treat you to lunch and a tour of the Baptist Building, if you'd like. Need more incentive? *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper will be providing Chick-fil-A

biscuits starting at 9 a.m. Come early and take advantage of the opportunity to chat with members of your state newspaper staff to learn how they can be your partners in ministry.

But perhaps the most important part of the day will be the opportunities you'll have to bounce an idea off a state missionary over lunch or discuss with a new friend a challenge you're facing in ministry.

The entire day is provided at no charge to you, because of the generous gifts from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program. The event is designed with pastors, church staff, secretaries or associational staff who are new to Alabama or new to their position in mind, but if you're just interested in learning more about your State Board of Missions, please consider attending.

We'd love for you to be our guest at the next Get Acquainted Day.

If you're interested, register online at alsbom.org/gad or drop a line to Sheila Rikerd at srikerd@alsbom.org. Questions? Call Sheila at (334) 613-2249. Let's break some ice together so we can navigate the choppy waters of ministry more effectively!

State Missionary Doug Rogers is director of communications & technology services at the State Board of Missions. You can reach him at drogers@alsbom.org or (334) 613-2319.

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**AT THE BAPTIST BUILDING,
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Pastor John Killian of Maytown Baptist Church, Bessemer Association, is a member of the Alabama Baptist Christian Life Commission and previously served as State Convention president.



KILLIAN



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ASSOCIATIONAL CLERKS AND SECRETARIES

It's almost time for the **Associational Leadership Conference: May 19 at Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery.** We will go over the new features of ADX and questions to be asked on the Survey Form.

attention

For more information, please contact State Missionary Mickey Crawford at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 281, or (334) 613-2281, mcrawford@alsbom.org.

FOCUS on One Mission

Anthony Potts serves as pastor/planter of Launch Pointe Church in the Colbert-Lauderdale Association. He

CHURCH PLANTER PROFILE

is married to Holly, and they have three children. He began the church planting work three years ago.

Anthony is serious about God's timing. He has served in ministry for 12 years and has had a desire to complete his seminary education. Lack of funding and timing were a hindrance to reaching this goal.

"About five months ago, I had come to the conclusion prayerfully that I would never be able to graduate from seminary, especially at the rate that I was going," Anthony recounted. "I had prayed for 10 years for the Lord to



Visit plantalabama.org

provide a way to make a seminary education a reality if it was His will. I had complete resolve in that if that was the Lord's will. So I told the Lord Jesus, 'If you want me to achieve a seminary degree, You are going to have to make it happen!' And I left it with Him."

By Lamar Duke
State Missionary



Duke at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332, or (334) 613-2332, lduke@alsbom.org.

For more information about church planting among Alabama Baptists, please contact State Missionary Lamar

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 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!
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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.

★ 2016 REGIONAL AND STATE BIBLE DRILLS ★

REQUIRED ONLINE REGISTRATION:

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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
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(girls completing grades 2-6)

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June 27-July 1

July 18-22

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Missions Adventure Camp for Teen Girls

(girls completing grades 7-12)

June 20-24

July 18-22

Early bird rate: \$210 per person
After May 1: \$230 per person

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(girls completing grades 7-12)

June 13-15

Early bird rate: \$110 per person
After May 1: \$130 per person

Mini Camp for Girls

(girls completing grades 2-6)

June 13-15

Early bird rate: \$110 per person
After May 1: \$130 per person

CITs (Cabin leader In Training)

(girls completing grades 9-12)

June 27-July 1

Early bird rate: \$210 per person
After May 1: \$230 per person

Missions Adventure Camp for Children

(coeds completing grades 2-6)

July 11-15

Early bird rates: \$210 per person
After May 1: \$230 per person

Mom & Me

(girls completing grades 2-6)

June 16-18

Early bird rate: \$110 per person
After May 1: \$130 per person

Mom & Me Little

(girls completing grades K-3 and their moms)

June 24-25

July 15-16

Early bird rate: \$65 per person
After May 1: \$75 per person

Online: worldsongretreat.com

For more information, please contact Crystal Akers at **1-800-264-1225**, ext. **223**, or (334) 613-2223, cakers@alsbom.org.



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COST: Both days, \$20 per person
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Saturday only, \$15 per person

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

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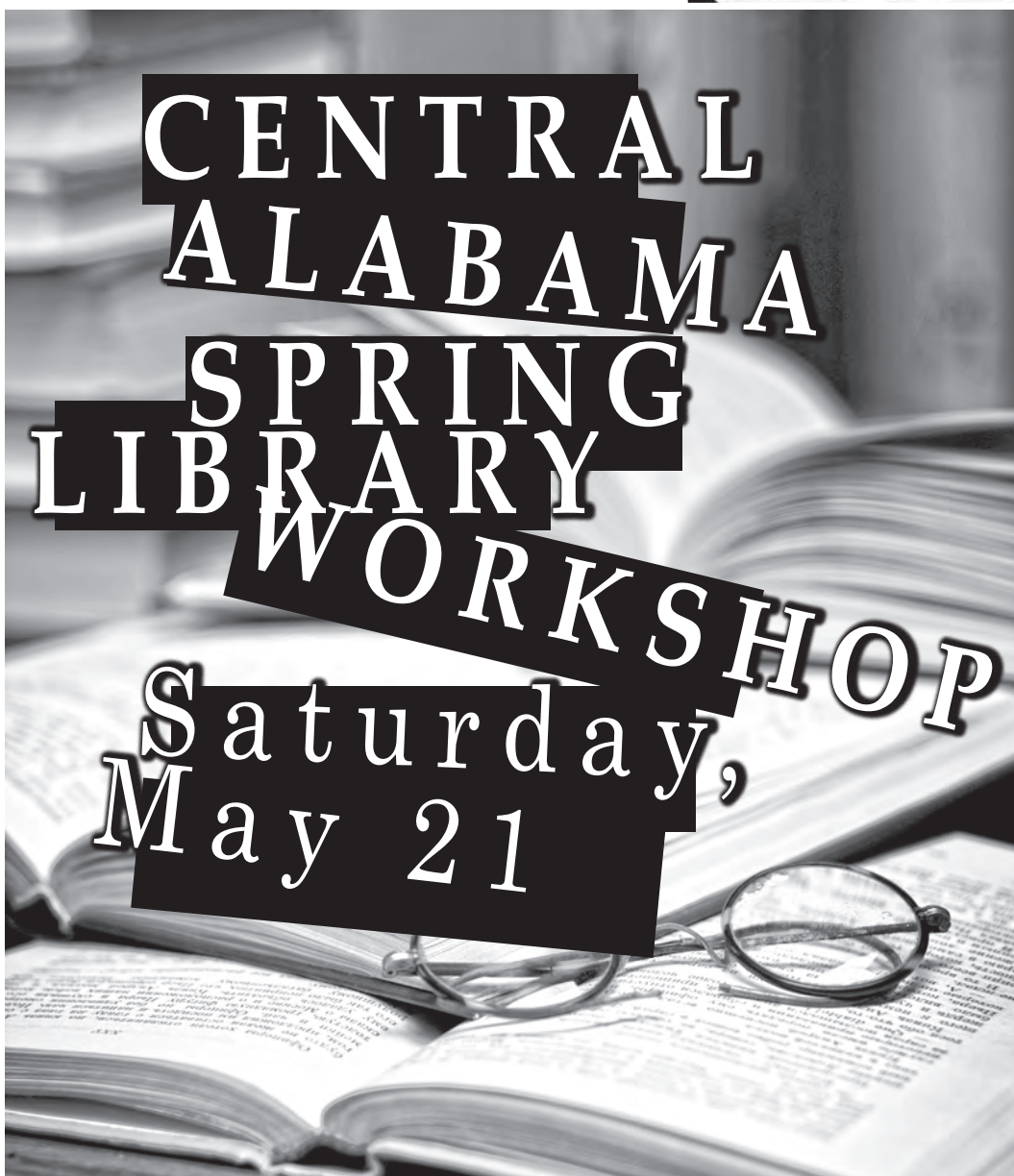
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REGISTER: 1-800-280-1105 or shocco.org

For more information, go online to alabamawmu.org, or please contact Pat Ingram at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 292, or (334) 613-2292, pigram@alsbom.org.





SHOAL CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH, 13214 HOLTVILLE RD., DEATSVILLE

Cost: \$5 (includes noon meal)
Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m.
The conference will conclude by
3:30 p.m.

This is a library training event. Classes will be offered in all areas of library work. Anyone involved in any type of library work is invited — libraries of churches, Christian schools, public schools or private schools — and public libraries. The information provided will help your library grow. A swap table will be available.

*For more information or to register,
please contact Marty Woodall
at (334) 569-3854 or
martybooks1@juno.com.*

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REGIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL & DISCIPLESHIP LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Training is available for Sunday School & discipleship leaders on the dates and locations listed here. Experienced conference leaders will be at each location to offer tips on topics such as organization, lesson preparation, materials, encouragement and affirmation for you as a servant leader in your church, and there are always some new ideas.

At each location, there are three one-hour conference times with multiple topics for each age group. Go online to the web pages listed for

more information or to register. Registration is \$5 per person before the early registration deadline, \$10 per person after the deadline.

Metro-First Baptist Church, Trussville

August 13
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
Thursday, August 11
alsbom.org/metro

South-Government Street Baptist Church, Mobile

August 13
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
August 11
alsbom.org/south

North- Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens

August 27
EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
August 25
www.alsbom.org/north

*For more information, please
contact State Missionary Jamie
Baldwin, 1-800-264-1225,
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jbalwin@alsbom.org.*

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COST: \$300 per person by May 2 (\$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.



Training For Church Leaders

The Summit

SHOCCO SPRINGS, **AUGUST 5 - 6, 2016**
REGISTER ONLINE: WWW.SHOCCO.ORG OR CALL 1-800-280-1105

Now is the time to begin planning for the summer. While looking ahead, make sure to set aside time for family and friends. Give yourself some time to play and rest, but don't overlook another essential element in a happy, healthy Christian lifestyle that you must also reserve time to pursue: personal and spiritual growth.

AT THE SUMMIT: For Church Leaders, you will find plenty of opportunities to grow in knowledge and confidence in how to serve as a leader in your church. Ministers and other professionals in many different areas of church life and ministry will be on the Shocco campus to lead training sessions. From preschool to senior adults, all age groups will be represented.

The Summit begins on Friday with Early Bird Mega Conferences from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., followed by a worship rally beginning at 3:45. Supper will be served beginning at 4:45, followed by two conference times at 6:15 and 7:45. Saturday's schedule begins with breakfast at 6:30 a.m., followed by conference times of 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00. Lunch will be served at noon.

THE SUMMIT: For Church Leaders is for pastors, ministers, teachers, and other workers and leaders. There is no childcare.

UPDATES: alsbom.org/summit

Registration/Pricing: 1-800-280-1105 or shocco.org

For more information, please contact State Missionary Jamie Baldwin, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 240, or (334) 613-2240, jbaldwin@alsbom.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Knowing God

God Is Trustworthy

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

For many weeks Theology 101 has followed the general theme of knowing God. The underlying premise of the theme is that we can only know God in light of how He has chosen to be known. This is to say that our knowledge of God is dependent on His self-revelation.

As a point of beginning, we have looked at commonly recognized aspects of God's being or essential nature. Christians commonly recognize that God has revealed certain characteristics or attributes that flow out of His essence or being as God. Thus Theology 101 has sought to remind us of such attributes as His holiness, love, mercy and grace.

Numerous and varied

Given God's greatness, His attributes are numerous and varied. Knowing that finite minds cannot contain all His attributes, we are limiting our thoughts to several selected ones. This week we continue by thinking about another characteristic that God has revealed about Himself, namely, His trustworthiness.

That God has shown Himself to be trustworthy is one manifestation of His immutability or unchanging nature. God never fails us or disappoints us. He will never let us down.

We can depend on God in all circumstances and amid all of life's changes. We sometimes sing a hymn that expresses His trustworthiness: "They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true."

Job expressed absolute confidence in God as trustworthy with his famous declaration, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

God's protection

A number of truths stem from God's trustworthiness. His promises are sure. We can take Him at His Word.

On the other hand, His warnings are serious and carry serious consequences when ignored. We can depend

on God to react when we ignore His prohibitions against all forms of sin.

That God is trustworthy implies that His protection is guaranteed. As the Psalmist put it concerning the Lord as our Good Shepherd, His rod and His staff are a source of comfort to His sheep (Ps. 23:4).

Ultimate protection

Jesus Himself rested in His Father's ultimate protection in the form of the provision of angels to bear Him up lest He dash His foot against a stone. As Luke 4:10 puts it, "He will give His angels charge over you to keep you."

Divine trustworthiness also means that God's covenant is secure with those who are His believing people. His new covenant was sealed with the blood of His only begotten Son.

That He is totally trustworthy means God's mercies are unailing. In addition, what 1 Corinthians 13:8 says about love is utterly true of God's perfect love: "Love never fails."

Everlasting truth

That He is trustworthy means God's truth is everlasting. It does not fluctuate with times, places or people. Like Himself, God's Word is absolutely trustworthy. The Psalmist declared it so, saying, "The works of His hands are faithful and just; all His precepts are trustworthy" (Ps. 111:7).

In the last chapter of the Bible, after a description of the new heavens and new earth with the new Jerusalem and the river of life, the heartwarming declaration is, "These words are trustworthy and true" (Rev. 22:6). †

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.



2015 'worst year in modern history for Christian persecution'

With North Korea leading the way in Asia and Islamic extremism rapidly expanding in the Middle East, 2015 was the "worst year in modern history for Christian persecution," according to Open Doors USA, which tracks the issue and serves persecuted believers worldwide.

But it's not just Communism and Islamic extremism that caused the year to be the "worst," according to a report released in early January. The year also saw beheadings, imprisonments, torture and eviction from homelands and more.

The Middle East, Africa and Central Asia saw a dramatic rise in persecution in 2015.

More than 7,100 Christians were killed that year for their faith — almost 50 percent higher than 2014, according to the Open Doors report. Nigeria, Eritrea and Pakistan saw the bloodiest and biggest persecution.

Islamic extremism "has risen to a level akin to ethnic cleansing," according to the report.

The top 10 countries that saw "extreme" persecution were: North Korea (topping the list for the 14th year in a row), Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Iran and Libya.

Open Doors President and CEO David Curry told Fox News that it's up to the United States to bring about change.

"As the dominant power in the free world, [the U.S.] must lead the change in bringing more relief and aid to those suffering," he said. "The level of exclusion, discrimination and violence against Christians is unprecedented, spreading and intensifying. ... The persecution of Christians is a lead indicator of when countries are beginning to tip into chaos."

For Christians in the U.S. where persecution is minimal it can be hard to understand, and may even be unbelievable, how Christians are treated for their faith in foreign countries.

The Alabama Baptist (TAB) regularly reports news stories of Christians being harassed, beheaded, imprisoned, beaten, tortured and killed in its "Persecuted Church" column to help bring awareness to the persecution and provide ways for them to pray.

Most recently *TAB* reported stories from a church in Turkey that was attacked by four Muslim men and about the murders and kidnapping that took place in a retirement home in Yemen in March.

SBC resolution

And the global persecution of believers has not gone unnoticed by the Southern Baptist Convention, which passed a resolution at the 2015 annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, on "The Persecuted Church Worldwide."

In the resolution religious liberty is recognized as a "principle rooted in Scripture and demonstrated in the gospel."

"All individuals are created in the image of God and therefore deserve to be regarded with dignity and respect," the resolution reads. "Governments that persecute Christians and abridge religious freedom invariably are guilty of other human rights abuses as well."

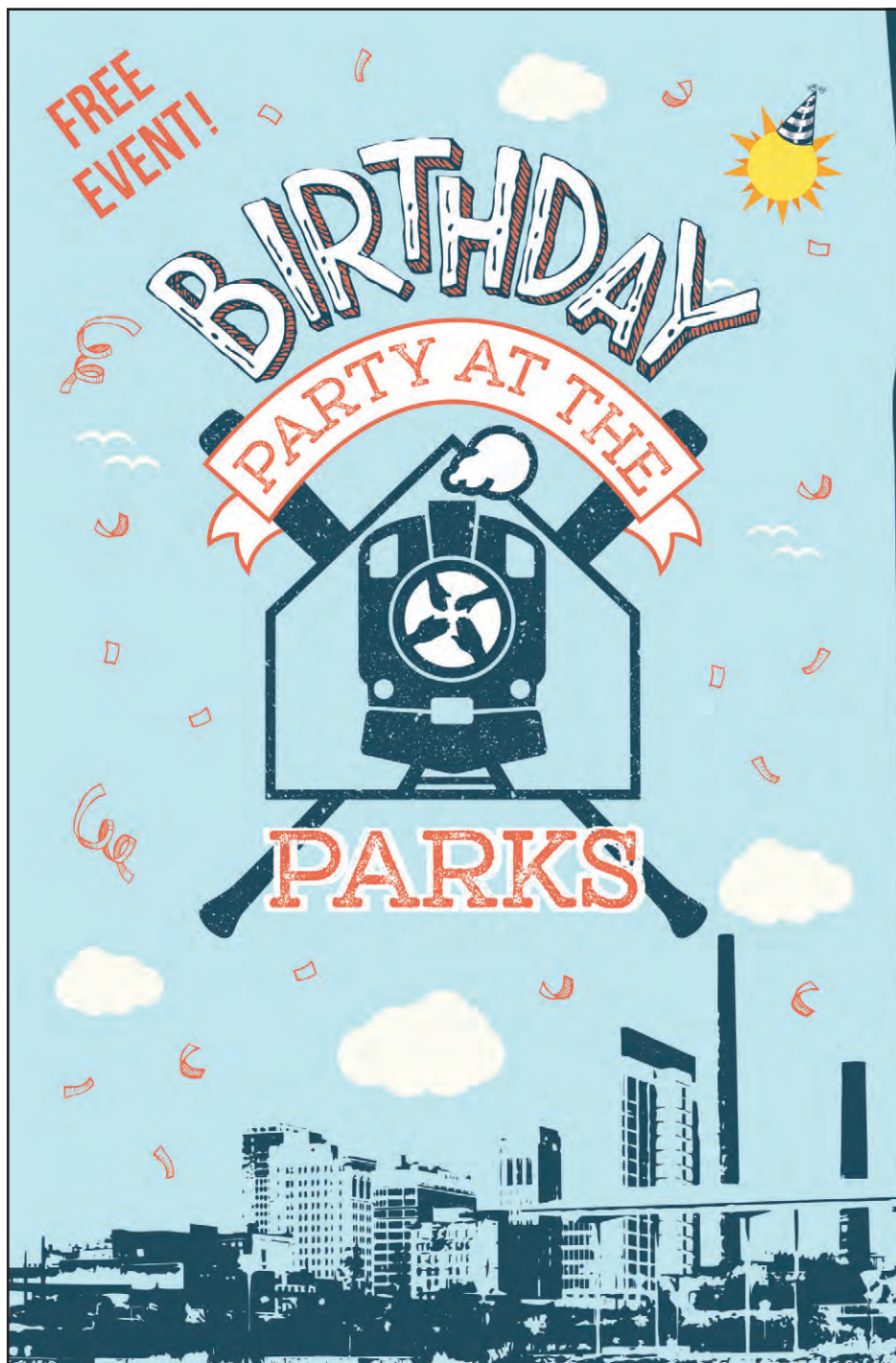
The resolution resolved that Southern Baptists should "encourage our government officials to elevate religious liberty concerns to the highest priority in foreign policy, invoking sanctions against those nations which advocate and tolerate persecution of those with differing religious beliefs." (Neisha Roberts, foxnews.com, RNS)

COMPLETE conference reaches teen girls



Photo by Nalin Khantissouriya

Teen girls and leaders pray during a poverty simulation at COMPLETE, a gathering for teen girls that takes place every March and is based on Colossians 2:10. COMPLETE is sponsored by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union. This year 595 people participated in the event at Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery.



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GRACE gifts

Memorials are listed below (the name of the deceased is bolded).

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- Andrews, Dusty, Ozark: Rusty Andrews
- Allen, Dorcas Cunningham, Carbon Hill: Joe, Melody, Mary Ella & Melissa Ann Saueressig
- Alsbrook, Billy, Selma: Ken & Betty Schroeder
- Allen, Dorcas, Fulton, MS: Marjorie Kay Nix & Family
- Barnett, Annette, Birmingham: Mrs. D.E. Lollar
- Bell, J.C., Pennington: Dorcus SS, Ebenezer BC of Butler
- Benton, Diane: Mr. & Mrs. Stan Bradford
- Bishop, Mary Ann, Selma: Marjorie Kay Nix
- Cobb, Faye & Allison, Spanish Fort: Faye and Wayne Parker
- Cogburn, Tina Marie, Opp: Ino BC of Kinston
- Coker, Sue, Attalla: Zoe Benefield & Angela Sims
- Cross, Margaret T., Linden: Providence BC of Gallion

- Drew, Dorothy, McCullough: Ual & Ann Murph
- Duke, Robert, Gallion: Providence BC of Gallion
- Jackson, Lorene Grissett, Opp: Ino BC of Kinston
- King, Aubrey Wilson, Jr., MD, Mtn. Brook: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
- Love, Glenn Michael, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
- Nabors, Decell, Gallion: Providence BC of Gallion
- Perry, John, Ft. Collins, CO: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
- Perry, Mary Sue, Centreville: Centreville BC
- Phillips, Rena, Lockhart: Bruce & Mable Caraway
- Salter, John E., Bay Minette: John T. Salter, Faye S. Parker and Elaine Roley
- Salter, Katherine Ryland, Bay Minette: John T. Salter, Faye S. Parker and Elaine Roley
- Stacey, Laura H., Atmore: Ual & Ann Murph, Carlton & Virginia Sharpless
- Thomas, Ms. Veree, Saraland: Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Roe
- Trotter, Tommy, Linden: Providence BC of Gallion
- Weaver, Joseph Hart: Pleasant Grove BC of Salem
- Williams, Rev. Paul, Pell City: St. Clair Baptist Association

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who made a Grace Gift to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. To learn more about Grace Gifts or how to make one, visit alabamachild.org/give or call 205.982.1112.

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Medical professionals fit uniquely in Great Commission, Naylor says

Sharing the gospel and healing go hand in hand, according to Rebekah Naylor, former missionary surgeon who spent more than 20 years serving at Bangalore Baptist Hospital in India through the International Mission Board (IMB).

Sharing with more than 100 students and others during a March 31 event called Global Voices, sponsored by Beeson Divinity School's Global Center and the Woman's Missionary Union Foundation, Naylor said medical missions is "strategic physically and spiritually and it can and it must lead to church planting."

"Jesus combined healing with missions," Naylor said, sharing Matthew 9:35 and other passages where healing and preaching the gospel were a two-handed plow of sorts.

"It is true for every believer — we are to care for the needs of people and share the good news of Jesus Christ. If you just hold on to one handle of the plow it's



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Rebekah Naylor shares about medical missions with more than 100 participants March 31 at Global Voices, an event held at Beeson Divinity School's Global Center in Birmingham.

going to go on a tangent. You must preach and heal. It is proclamation; it is demonstration."

While serving with IMB, Naylor worked in the clinic where she had ample time to share her faith and help patients, she said.

She later became CEO of the hospital and was involved in the implementation of education programs the hospital offered to local people, including a school of nursing which opened in 1996. (TAB)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WILLING TO SACRIFICE

In 1985 we packed up our two preschoolers and all our worldly possessions and moved to the Middle East. Our decision to seek appointment by the International Mission Board (IMB) was in response to God's call and our desire to see His kingdom expanded.

Although we knew IMB faced financial challenges, we were

certainly surprised last summer when we heard about the depth of the problem. In the end, the same things led us back to Alabama that had led us overseas so many years ago. We wanted to be a part of the solution so that IMB can continue to expand God's kingdom around the world.

Although the financial package exceeded the minimum



we needed in order to consider retiring early, we did take a hit financially. While generous the VRI was not a "golden parachute." We are extremely grateful to Southern Baptists for their support over the past 30 years including this final payment. We feel like we still have contributions to make and left the field with several goals not yet completed. Re-entry back into the United States has been emotionally difficult for us. With all that, we do not question the decision we made.

Over 30 years ago we made sacrifices in order to follow the Lord's leading. We and nearly 1,000 other co-workers made a sacrifice again in order to be a part of the solution for the financial stability of IMB. We chose the financial health of IMB over our own hopes and even dreams. That a large number of missionaries are willing to sacrifice for the long-term stability of IMB does not surprise, shock or disappoint us. It makes us proud.

Paul and Harriet Lawrence
 Retired IMB missionaries




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Gov. Bentley faces church discipline

Following a divorce in September 2015 and recent news that he was involved in some level of affair while he was married, Gov. Robert Bentley is no longer a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, where he's been a longtime member, deacon and Sunday School teacher.

The Alabama Baptist reached out to Bentley's office regarding his church membership but no response was given.

According to news reports, Bentley stopped attending the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association church in late March. Rebekah Mason, Bentley's former senior political adviser and spokeswoman with whom he denied having a sexual affair, resigned from her position March 31. She also used to attend First, Tuscaloosa, and is

no longer a member, according to news reports.

Gil McKee, pastor of First, Tuscaloosa, told *al.com*, "While church discipline is a church family matter, both Gov. Robert Bentley and Mrs. Rebekah Mason are no longer members of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa. I continue to pray for each of them."

McKee told *The Alabama Baptist* that he would address



BENTLEY

the congregation April 4 regarding the matter and release a final public statement that afternoon.

At press time it was unclear if church leaders removed Bentley from church membership or if he decided to stop attending the church on his own.

Bentley and Mason have recently attended other Alabama Baptist churches together. (TAB)

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

Remember to:

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

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TAB* CLASSIFIEDS

For information about placing a classified ad, contact the advertising department of *The Alabama Baptist at 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or ads@thealabamabaptist.org. Copy deadline is two weeks before publication.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

West Blocton First Baptist, West Blocton, Alabama, is seeking a pastor. Average attendance is 75. Resumes are being accepted. Email resumes to: westbloctonfb@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC & EDUCATION

Union Hill Baptist, Oneonta, is seeking a full-time worship leader for a growing fellowship with two blended Sunday morning services. Educational experience should include small group ministry and discipleship for all ages. Please submit resumes to: 2919 Co. Hwy. 39, Oneonta, AL 35121. 205-274-9232. bbarnett@otelco.net.

WORSHIP PASTOR

First Baptist Church of the Islands in Savannah, Georgia, is currently seeking a full-time worship pastor. We are located in a community with many young families and are surrounded by much opportunity for impact for the sake of the gospel. Our current morning worship attendance averages approximately 550 weekly in two morning services. We utilize a unique mix of choir, praise team and praise band in our worship setting. The worship pastor will fit within a multi-staff team and an amazing number of volunteer leaders to help us fulfill our vision of leading others to know Christ, grow in Christ, show Christ through surrendered lives and to go with the gospel. The worship pastor must be able to effectively lead others into authentic worship and also dis-

ciple others. All applications will be prayerfully considered once we have received a cover letter, a resume with references and a 2-3 minute video introduction of yourself as you briefly share your call to ministry, your passion for worship and your heart to impact others. A webcam or phone video is perfectly fine. Please email your cover letter, resume and video link to: searchteam@fbcislands.com.

WORSHIP MINISTER

Wayside Baptist Church, Alexander City, Alabama, is accepting resumes for a worship minister. The position is part time. Please send resumes to: pastor@waysidebaptistonline.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

Turnerville Baptist Church, Mobile County. Contact Bro. Jason Meaux at jmeaux@turnervillebaptist.org.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR TO STUDENTS

First Baptist Church of Dothan is looking for an associate pastor to students. Description: working with students grade 7 through college graduation. Resumes to: Trent Dillard at tdillard@southernco.com.

YOUTH PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Alexander City, Alabama, is announcing the opening of a full-time staff position for minister to students. We are praying for the Lord to call His chosen man for our youth, grades 7 through 12. The search committee is at work receiving resumes at: P.O. Box 400, Al-

exander City, AL 35011. 256-234-6351. spsc@fbc-ac.org.

YOUTH/CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Southside Baptist Church, Princeton, Kentucky, is accepting resumes for a full-time youth/children's minister. Bachelor's degree, seminary training and experience is preferred. Email: youthsearchteam@southsidebaptist.com or mail: Southside Baptist, ATTN: Youth Search, P.O. Box 684, Princeton, KY 42445.

PART-TIME DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Woodward Avenue Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, is accepting resumes for the part-time position of director of children's ministries. Email resumes to: info@woodwardavenuebaptist.org. Call for more details. 256-383-4078.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Montgomery Baptist Association, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumes through May 1 for director of missions. Master of divinity degree from an accredited seminary. Fifteen years ministry experience preferred. Minimum two years as senior pastor preferred. Work experience in a multicultural community. See website for details: www.mgmbaptists.org/home/dom.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Calhoun Baptist Association requests resumes for the position of director of missions.

Please send your resume to: ATTN: DOM Search Committee, CBA, 1130 Woodstock Ave., Anniston, AL 36207.

PART-TIME PRESCHOOL COORDINATOR

Shades Crest Baptist Church is seeking a part-time preschool coordinator. This individual will be responsible to the church for planning, developing, coordinating and evaluating a comprehensive educational, recreation and ministry program for preschoolers in conjunction with the associate pastor for children and family ministries. For a complete job description, visit www.shadescrest.org. Resumes may be sent to: sreece@shadescrest.org.

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BUS

2000 Ford E-450, 26-passenger church bus. 55,673 miles, diesel V8. One owner. Excellent condition. \$16,000. First Baptist Church, Whiteville, Tennessee. Contact: fbcwhitevilletn@gmail.com.



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- 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.



JUDSON COLLEGE

► **Judson College Signs Two New Recruits:** Judson College in Marion announced the signing of two new recruits for athletic programs to join the Eagles in the Fall 2016 season. Brionna Alvarado, a senior at Sipsey Valley High School in Buhl, signed with the Eagles to play volleyball and softball and Sarah Combs, a senior at John Tyler Morgan Academy in Selma, joined the volleyball team.

SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford University Conference to Focus on Teaching the Reformations:** Samford University in Birmingham will host its second biennial conference on Teaching the Christian Intellectual Tradition (TCIT) on Oct. 6-8. The focus of the conference is "Teaching the Reformations."

Samford's TCIT conferences are designed to encourage excellence in undergraduate teaching across the curriculum, with a particular emphasis on core curriculum and general education courses. In their call for papers

— due June 1 — conference organizers have encouraged a variety of topics and disciplinary approaches.

Reformation scholars R. Ward Holder, of Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, and G. Sujin Pak, of Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, are scheduled to present keynote addresses at the conference. For more information, visit www.samford.edu/events/teaching-the-Christian-intellectual-tradition-conference.

► **Astronomers Emphasize Value of Christian Engagement With Science:** Samford University's Center for Science and Religion in Birmingham and the Issacher Fund hosted astronomers Deborah Haarsma and Hugh Ross for "a gracious dialogue on evolution" March 2-3.

Haarsma, president of BioLogos, and Ross, president of Reasons to Believe, responded to audience questions and moderator Josh Reeves during the March 3 event in Reid Chapel. Both organizations seek to show how the Christian faith is supported by science. The astronomers' answers illuminated some of the unfamiliar corners of a familiar debate and revealed the very different ways devout believers reconcile science and religion.

► **Samford University to**

Host Bike Ride Through Black Belt April 16: Samford University in Birmingham will host the 12th annual Old Howard 100 bike ride April 16. The ride is ranked No. 2 in the nation on active.com's ranking of top century rides in the United States this spring. The ride through Alabama's Black Belt offers routes of approximately 32, 45, 75 and 103 miles. Samford students also will be working at the rest stops as part of the Samford Gives Back service day.

Proceeds from the ride assist Perry County residents who receive care through Samford's year-round health programs. To date the ride has raised more than \$43,000.

For more information or to register, visit www.samford.edu/events/old-howard-100.

UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile Leadership Banquet Features Fox News Channel Chief Political Anchor Bret Baier:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) will bring Fox News Channel chief political anchor Bret Baier to Mobile for the 11th annual UMobile Leadership Banquet on April 28 at 6:30 p.m. at the Arthur R. Outlaw Convention Center.

Baier has interviewed all 2016 presidential candidates on the GOP side and several on the Democratic side including Hillary Clinton for "Special Report with Bret Baier."

Prior to his anchor role, Baier was named chief White House correspondent in 2006 and also served as a national security correspondent covering military and national security affairs from the Pentagon.

Sponsorships and tickets are available now at umobile.edu/banquet16. For more information, call 251-442-2917 or email advancement@umobile.edu.

► **University of Mobile to Hold Vocal Music Workshop on Power Belting Safely:** The University of Mobile (UMobile) will hold a Command Performance Workshop on power belting safely, a vocal technique for singing, April 22-23.

Internationally known singer, teacher and coach Maryann Kyle will focus on healthy belting technique and dramatic interpretation in workshops and a master class.

Clinicians include UMobile's Bruce Earnest, associate dean of The Roger Breland School of Music and the School of Worship Leadership, and Patrick Jacobs, director of opera, voice faculty chair and associate professor of music.

The workshop will be held on the UMobile campus April 22 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and April 23 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To register, call the UMobile Center for Performing Arts at 251-442-2383 or visit www.itickets.com.

► **High School Class of 2016 Can Get JumpStart on College with Bargain Online Classes from University of Mobile:** Students graduating from high school in May can get a jumpstart on college at a bargain price by taking online summer classes through the new JumpStart program at the University of Mobile (UMobile).

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Students interested in enrolling in the JumpStart Summer 2016 classes should apply online at umobile.edu/jumpstart. Online courses also are open to any college student wanting to get ahead or catch up on their college courses, no matter where they currently attend college. †

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 10

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

INTEGRITY Acts 4:36-5:11

Exhibit A: Barnabas (36-37)

The early believers demonstrated their faith by helping other believers who were in need. Of all these early Christians, Barnabas stood out.

Barnabas recognized that all of his belongings are really gifts from God to be used for His kingdom. He even sold a field he owned to give the money to the apostles to be used as they saw fit.

Once believers realize that everything we own belongs to God, it frees us up to give to others. If we trust God, we know that He will take care of us and that our possessions are temporary, not eternal.

There are some people who argue that the early Church was socialist. However, this is not the case. Socialism is a forcing of people to give up their belongings to be used for others. Christian love is willful, not coerced.

On top of this, the Bible affirms private property. This is seen by commands to not steal (which suggests someone owns the property) and comments like "the worker is worth his wages (see Luke 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:18), which suggests that if someone works he deserves to get paid.

Further comments — like Paul's admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 that if someone does not work, he doesn't eat — show that the Bible values hard work and private property, both to be used to further God's kingdom.

Exhibit B: Ananias (1-6)

Unlike Barnabas who trusted in the Lord and His provision, Ananias wanted the acclaim Barnabas got for his generosity, but he did not want to sacrifice his money.

The problem was not that Ananias

kept some of the proceeds for himself. Peter is clear that this is not the problem. Ananias' sin lay in his lying to Peter. By lying, he not only was lying to Peter, but also to the Holy Spirit because all sin is an affront to God.

This is one of the clearest passages in the Bible that affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Ananias wanted personal praise and lied to get it. And in this instance, God punished him severely.

Exhibit C: Sapphira (7-11)

Ananias' wife, Sapphira, followed in her husband's footsteps by also lying to Peter about the proceeds of the sale of her property.

Just like her husband, Sapphira dropped dead when confronted. These deaths show that God does not take sin lightly.

Some people think that lying is acceptable, so long as no one is hurt. In this instance, no one was hurt by Ananias and Sapphira lying except themselves. They kept money that belonged to them. Their lie did not negatively impact anyone, but God is a God of unshakeable truth — this is found throughout the Bible.

Even one of the Ten Commandments, do not commit false testimony, affirms that God is a God of truth. For a believer to intentionally deceive or lie goes against the nature of God and since we are to be imitators of Christ (Eph. 5:1), who is God, we need to avoid lying.

One may ask why God felt the need to put these two to death. In a sense, God was instituting church discipline. The Church is supposed to be the bride of Christ and we are to eschew sin.

Therefore we need to take sin seriously and affirm church discipline for the sake of the Church and also of the believer (see 1 Cor. 5). †

Bible Studies for Life By Jim Barnette, Ph.D. Samford University and Brookwood Baptist Church, Mountain Brook

OUR NEED FOR PURPOSE John 15:1-8

God prunes our lives to make us productive for Him. (1-3)

This text contains the final "I Am" sayings in John's Gospel. Once again, Jesus identifies Himself with a symbol common to the regions of the Mediterranean world. Perhaps Jesus introduces the metaphor of the vine as He and His disciples leave the upper room and journey toward the Garden of Gethsemane. As they pass by the temple, they would see one of the chief ornaments: a golden vine, said to be as large as a man.

Vines and vineyards crop up in several parables in Matthew, Mark and Luke. These parables have two things in common. First they all have a narrative plot. Second in each case, the vineyard, or people connected with the vineyard, portray Israel being far less fruitful than ought to have been the case. By contrast, the extended metaphor in John 15:1-8 shows no plot development, and Jesus Himself is the Vine. He is the real Vine, the Chosen One from God.

We can only bear spiritual fruit when we remain in Him. (4-7)

The "vinedresser" prunes the sprouts and leaves that would hinder the branches from bearing fruit in any way. The small shoots that would take life from the vine are pinched off. The fruit-bearing branches must get all the nourishment.

Often the troubles we face are the Father's way of pinching off those excess leaves that seem so attractive but bear no fruit. Furthermore, the Vinedresser prunes us so that our time and talents are at His disposal instead of being drained off in peripheral interests. All of this occurs for the sake of bearing fruit for His kingdom.

When the prophet Ezekiel appealed to the vine as a metaphor, he warned that if a vine failed to produce fruit its wood was good for nothing but a fire (see Ezek. 15:1-8). For Ezekiel, the vine represents Israel. Jesus picks up this image, warning His contemporaries of their imminent danger. The fire symbolizes judgment and attests to the uselessness of what it consumes. Such is the fate of those who are faithless.

Jesus' abiding in the disciples provides the grounds for their faithfulness to Him. The image of pruning and cleansing recalls the foot washing in John 13, where cleansing also was identified as being in relationship with Him. "Unless I wash you," Jesus declared to Peter, "you won't belong to Me" (John 13:8).

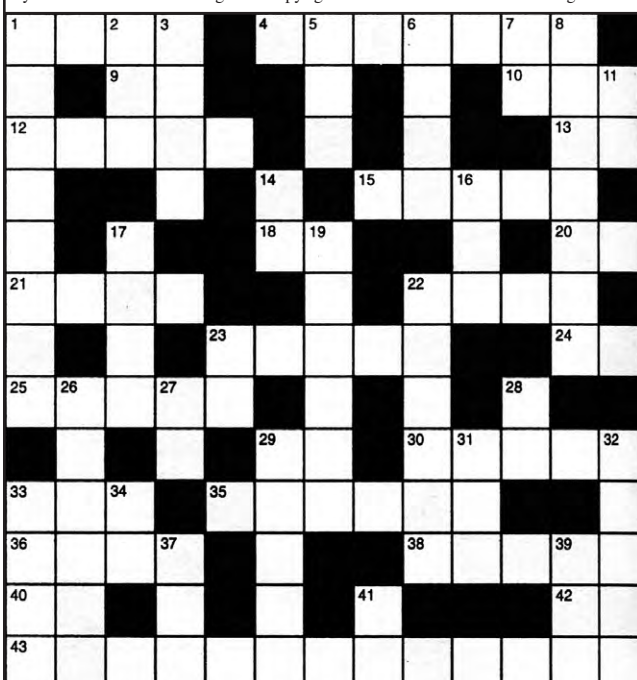
God is glorified through the fruit we bear for Him. (8)

With verse 8 the metaphor of the vine is completed. Its point is the life-giving connection of the believer with Christ. The essence of Christian life and faith has no other source than the association of the person with the glorified Father. As recorded by John, Jesus used water in Chapter 4 and bread in Chapter 6 to symbolize the life-giving quality of the revelation of God. Now Jesus presses the vine image into service to restate this reality.

In John's Gospel, it is more common for the Son to be glorified; but God also glorifies Himself in the Son (see 12:28) and is glorified through the Son (see 13:31; 14:13). Since the fruit of believers is a consequence of the Son's redemptive work, it follows that their fruitfulness brings glory to the Father through the Son. Failure to honor the Son is failure to honor God (see John 5:23). Fruitlessness not only threatens fire, but robs God of the glory that is rightly His. †

Christian Crossword

By Jonah and Sue Schrowang Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing



Across

- The book after John.
- The priests.
- Greeting.
- Pester.
- Alpha and ____.
- Negative response.
- This man was eaten by worms. (Acts 12:21-23)
- Before Christ.
- Anno Domini.
- God created the dry ____ on the third day.
- Galatians is an Epistle of ____.
- An offense against morals; sin.
- Italian for "yes."
- Peter saw this in his vision in Acts 10.
- And the tongue ____ a fire. (James 3:6)
- A teenager.
- Whom ____ ye that I

am? (Matt. 16:15)

- This lady was King Xerxes' wife. (Esther 2)
- Kitchen appliance.
- Fourth letter in Greek alphabet.
- First person pronoun.
- ____ of the Chaldees. (Neh. 9:7)
- Amusement.

Down

- And laid their hands on the _____. (Acts 5:18)
- Definite article.
- Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a _____. (Isa. 7:14)
- Adam's wife.
- The virtuous woman is not _____. (Prov. 31)
- Suffix.
- They wore these in

Bible times.

- ____ ye therefore, and teach all nations.
- Fifth month of the Hebrew calendar.
- Rural Electrification Administration. (abbr.)
- And as it is appointed unto men ____ to die. (Heb. 9:27)
- Then Philip went down to the city ... and preached ____ unto them. (Acts 8:5)
- Paul did this frequently.
- Extraterrestrial.
- The windows of ____ were opened. (Gen. 7:11)
- Exodus. (abbr.)
- Thirteenth letter of the Greek alphabet.
- Small island.
- Metal-bearing mineral.

- Strongest muscle in your body.
- ____, pastors and teachers. (Eph. 4:11)
- Know ____ that the Lord He is God. (Ps. 100:3)
- Maiden name.
- Measure equal to 252 gallons.
- Mathematical symbol for "3.14."



Actress Jennifer Garner (right) plays Christy Beam, real-life Christian mom of three, in the movie 'Miracles From Heaven.' The film shares how Beam's daughter, Annabel, who was diagnosed with an incurable digestive disorder, fell three stories into an old, hollowed out tree and how she experienced a miraculous healing.

'Hope and encouragement'



sonypicturespublicity.com

Christian mom portrayed in 'Miracles From Heaven' shares about new film

Miracles From Heaven" finished its first weekend in the No. 3 spot at the box office, bringing in \$1.9 million on opening day and, more importantly to Christy Beam, a message of "hope and encouragement" to its audiences.

Beam is the real-life mom played in the film by Jennifer Garner. And "Miracles From Heaven" shares her family's story: how her middle daughter, Annabel, was diagnosed with an incurable digestive disorder, how the 10-year-old fell three stories into an old, hollowed out tree and how — spoiler alert — she experienced a miraculous healing.

The Christian mom of three who lives with her family in Texas shared how truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, what not to say to those struggling with illness and what it's like to have Garner play you in a movie.

Q: So how much of the movie is true and how much is artistic license?

A: They adapted it from my book, "Miracles From Heaven." That is the true story. It's the blood, sweat and tears poured out onto the page. Most of the events (in the movie) are very true; they've just taken a little dramatic license with them.

In the book and in the real story, Annabel doesn't come out of the tree unconscious. She actually assisted in her own rescue, which was very crazy because she was nonresponsive for a very long time.

Things like that were different, but the heartbeat and the message and those type of things that we want people to walk away with are spot-on.

Q: At the start of the movie, your character says, "When I was growing up, people didn't really talk about miracles." Is that true to your experience? How has your faith and your understanding of miracles changed?

A: I believed in miracles. I knew they happened. I knew that God was a miraculous God and an amazing God. But I just never thought they would happen to me. I'm just an ordinary person living an ordinary life. God can use anyone, and I knew that, but for some reason I never ever thought he would use me or my family.

Q: Also in the film, several

"The message of the film is there are miracles around you daily; all you have to do is look up. In your time of trial, in your time of challenge, look up."

Christy Beam

real-life mom played by Jennifer Garner in "Miracles From Heaven"

church members tell your character they believe some sin was preventing your daughter from being healed. Did people say things like this to you when your daughter was sick, and how can people better support those around them who are going through something like this?

A: Yes, they told us we were out of the will of God and that we had sinned — that we were being tested by God and how well we did determined whether we passed the test and would be granted a miracle. I think, honestly, people mean well but they don't really grasp that's not who God is.

I honestly feel like we, as people, are the extension and the arms of Christ loving on each other. It is literally Christ reaching down and loving us through other people, wrapping His arms around us through other people. People would say, "Can I bring you dinner?" "Can I help with the girls?" I would say, "No, no, no, I've got it. Thank you." It just became — people said, "You know what? I'm going to bring you dinner," or, "I'm going to see what I can do with the other girls while you take Annabel to Boston this time" — people just doing it and not making a big deal about it or just simply saying, "I'm praying for you." Things like that are great ways we can help each other in times of crisis.

Q: How did you go from book to movie, and what has that

been like to see your family's story in theaters?

A: It's the fastest book-to-screen in cinema history. We were giving the manuscript to the publisher while I was answering calls and emails on the script. My desire for what I wanted to see on film and resonate with people matched (producer DeVon Franklin's) exactly, and so I knew it was going to be OK. I knew it was a God thing.

Q: Jennifer Garner told the "Today" show that the movie encouraged her to re-engage in the Church and give her children a solid faith background. Could you ever have imagined this?

A: I'm just so grateful that someone of Jennifer's caliber and skill and ability felt so compelled to do this role, and she didn't just do it as a job, she stayed up and read the script and read the book and said she immediately fell in love with our family and our journey.

What's so weird about it is she did such an amazing job, my husband and friends have said she even mastered my cadence of speech and she mastered my mannerisms. She just got it and it's so crazy to see it on the screen.

Q: What are you hoping people will take away from it?

A: Every day I get 100 messages from people all over the world. It is resonating with them and resonating deeply. It's a message of hope and inspiration, and they are feeling encouraged. The message of the film is there are miracles around you daily; all you have to do is look up. In your time of trial, in your time of challenge, look up. Be that miracle for someone else. (RNS)





BP photo

Several years ago Old Town Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, began praying for God to show them where to engage an unreached, unengaged people group. After one year of praying, God led Old Town Baptist to these coastal waters and the 'T' people in Southeast Asia.

Seed of the gospel

NC church sees progress in Southeast Asian village

Smoke from the kitchen wafted up through the red floorboards and a single window offered little reprieve from the sun's relentless warmth. Mark Harrison could see the top of a gold pagoda across the road and hear the occasional honk of a truck driving by.

But Harrison's focus was on the family he had come to visit. It wasn't the North Carolina pastor's first visit to this home in a remote Southeast Asian village tucked among green mountains. He had visited the family during other trips to the villages of "T" people. Although the youngest sister and her husband had become Christians, her parents and three sisters never seemed interested in the gospel.

So Harrison hadn't planned to stop that day. Tired from traveling all day, he was headed to the rickety wooden boat that would take him back across the river. But when a local T believer called him, Harrison, missions pastor at Old Town Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, knew he needed to go with him to visit this family again.

Early on, Harrison and Old Town Baptist had decided to focus their strategy to reach T people and encouraging and discipling local believers to share the gospel.

"They [local believers] know the language. They know the culture. They understand the ins and outs of everyday life. They have access to the people," Harrison said.

After more than a dozen trips to T people villages in the past five years, Harrison and Old Town members have seen T people turn from Buddhism, believe in Jesus and then lead others to faith in Jesus.

Yet believers are still few among this unreached people group that is staunchly Buddhist. Less than 1 percent of the nearly 1.5 million people believe in Jesus.

"The T people are deeply rooted in their animistic and Buddhist background," Harrison said. They're very attracted to the gospel, he added, but hesitant to let go of their heritage.

That's the story at the home of the four sisters. As Harrison scooted closer to help the oldest sister tie a knot on the bracelet she had made — a beaded bracelet telling the story of creation and salvation — he asked if she'd ever thought about trusting in Jesus.

"She was very interested in the gospel but could not say 'yes' to Jesus. She wanted to choose both," Harrison said. "She wanted all the benefits of following Jesus and yet [to] maintain her religion."

The woman is afraid family and friends will reject her if she leaves Buddhism.

Courage to leave Buddhism

Ever since they committed to sharing the gospel among the T people, Harrison and Old Town have prayed for them to have courage to leave Buddhism.

When the church began praying about engaging an unreached, unengaged people group, Southeast Asia missionaries such as William and Mallory Ritz helped guide them to the T people and helped them learn about the people group and Southeast Asian culture.

"We help build partnerships between our Southern Baptist churches in America — with our national partners and existing field personnel," William said.

As T believers continue helping Harrison and Old Town learn about their people and culture, Harrison and Old Town in turn help them learn to share their faith.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons. (BP)

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Church leaders kidnapped at gunpoint in Nigeria

KADUNA, Nigeria — Unidentified assailants kidnapped three church leaders at gunpoint in northern Nigeria on March 21, Christian leaders said.

The armed men stormed a church prayer camp site in the city of Kaduna, where the pastors were supervising work in preparation for an Easter retreat for their church, Haddiyar Ekklesiya Kristi A Nigeria (United Church of Christ in Nigeria).

Emmanuel Dzigau, president of the church; Iliya Anto, deputy president of the church; and Yakubu Dzarma, a retired church leader, were kidnapped.

Anto was released hours after the abduction due to poor health but the kidnappers demanded \$500,000 for the other two.

Jibrailu Wobiya, general secretary for the church, who escaped with other church members from the service, said the three pastors were kidnapped as they and other members were praying.

"We were all holding a prayer meeting at the prayer camp located along the Kaduna-Abuja Highway in the city of Kaduna," Wobiya said. "We were working on the camp site in preparation for our forthcoming church conference when the kidnappers invaded the place and began shooting into the air."

Armed with AK-47 rifles and with their faces covered, the assailants struck at about 10 a.m., disrupted the service and dragged the three pastors into their vehicle as church members fled, he said. (MS)

Teenager persecuted by family for Christian conversion

KATENDE, Uganda — After Mohammed Nsera graduated from high school in 2015, his Muslim family built a small house for him on their homestead in eastern Uganda. They burned it down in early 2016 after he put his faith in Christ.

Nsera's family lives in the predominantly Christian village of Katende near Busede, Jinja District, some 50 miles east of the Ugandan capital of Kampala. Part of a hard-line Islamic minority, his family, including six siblings, strongly objected to his Jan. 3 conversion.

It took a week for his father, Abdu, to hear that his son had become a Christian. On Jan. 10 at about 7 p.m., the young man's father and uncle went to the small house they had built for him about 200 yards from the family home to confirm the allegation that he had left Islam.

"I could not deny Christ when my father asked me whether I had joined Christianity," Nsera said. "With a lot of joy I answered him affirmatively, with a 'yes.' My uncle, who had a walking stick, hit me on my back and my father tried to get hold of my shirt but I managed to escape."

While recovering at the home of a Christian some 13 miles away, he learned that they had burned down his house. (MS)

Pastor, wife in China sentenced to years in prison

JINHUA, China — China's crack-down on state-approved churches continued in February with a harsh sentence given to a pastor of an official church in Zhejiang Province after he criticized authorities' demolition of church crosses.

Pastor Bao Guohua, of Holy Love Christian Church, Jinhua, received a sentence of 14 years in prison, and his wife, Xing Wenxiang, 12 years, after they were convicted of "corruption, financial crimes and gathering people to disturb social order," according to *The New York Times*, citing the Feb. 26 *Zhejiang Daily*, the province's official newspaper. Their son, Bao Chenxing, was handed a three-year prison sentence.

The three were arrested August 2015 after they publicly criticized the Chinese Communist Party's policy of demolishing crosses on churches in Zhejiang. Area Christians believe they are being persecuted for their protests. The court also reportedly ordered \$92,000 be confiscated from Bao, and that he pay a fine of \$15,300. Confiscation of \$92,000 from his wife, and a fine of nearly \$14,000 also were ordered. (MS)