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Transgender restroom directive epitomizes Obama administration's power grab, Strange says

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Church profiles show declines

Southern Baptists may find cause for hope in the latest Annual Church Profile (ACP) report. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) added more churches in 2015, mostly because of church planting efforts. Churches also experienced an increase in total giving.

However, according to the ACP, compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources in cooperation with state conventions, other key measures declined. Those included membership, average worship attendance, baptisms and missions giving.

The national trend also rings true in Alabama — more churches but fewer baptisms and members.

A bright spot in the ACP data was the increase in churches. The number of churches affiliated with the SBC grew by 294 to 46,793, a 0.63 percent increase over 2014. This is the 17th year in a row the number of SBC churches has grown.

Membership decline

While the number of SBC-related congregations increased, reported membership declined by more than 200,000, down 1.32 percent to almost 15.3 million members. It's the ninth year in a row there has been a membership decline. Average weekly worship attendance declined by 1.72 percent to less than 5.6 million worshippers.

While the number of people who affiliate with Baptist churches has decreased, the number of religiously unaffiliated adults has increased by roughly 19 million since 2007, according to Pew Research. In 2015 there were approximately 56 million religiously unaffiliated adults in the United States. This group is larger than either Catholics or mainline Protestants.

Southern Baptists also experienced a decline in baptisms, down 3.3 percent to 295,212. Reported baptisms have fallen eight of the last 10 years. The ratio of baptisms to total members decreased to 1

(See 'Giving,' page 10)

ALABAMA	2015 Alabama	2014 Alabama	numeric change (2015-2014)	% change (2015-2014)
ASSOCIATIONS	75	75	0	.00%
CHURCHES	3,242	3,215	27	.83%
BAPTISMS	16,342	17,355	-1,013	-5.84%
OTHER ADDITIONS	19,008	21,668	-2,660	-12.28%
TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	966,764	998,236	-31,472	-3.15%
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$720,317,996	\$718,690,841	\$1,627,155	.22%

SBC	2015 SBC	2014 SBC	numeric change (2015-2014)	% change (2015-2014)
ASSOCIATIONS	1,139	1,157	-18	-1.56%
CHURCHES	46,793	46,499	294	0.63%
CHURCH TYPE MISSIONS OPERATING	4,648	4,595	53	1.15%
TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	15,294,764	15,499,173	-204,409	-1.32%
BAPTISMS	295,212	305,301	-10,089	-3.30%
RATIO OF BAPTISTS: TOTAL MEMBERS	1:52	1:51	---	---
WEEKLY WORSHIP AVERAGE	5,577,088	5,674,469	-97,381	-1.72%
SUNDAY SCHOOL AVERAGE	3,605,303	3,723,679	-118,376	-3.18%
UNDESIGNATED RECEIPTS	\$9,154,427,472	\$8,748,114,744	\$406,312,728	4.64%
OTHER ADDITIONS*	244,645	276,021	-31,376	-11.37%
TOTAL RECEIPTS*	\$11,545,861,631	\$11,154,665,938	\$391,195,693	3.51%
TOTAL MISSIONS EXPENDITURES*	\$1,205,295,079	\$1,230,258,151	-\$24,963,072	-2.03%
GREAT COMMISSION GIVING*	\$613,201,805	\$637,498,179	-\$24,296,374	-3.81%

*Not asked by all state conventions

ESL
MINISTRIES

Reaching
Internationals
in Alabama

COMING SOON



COMMENT

Coincidence or God?

It was about 7:30 in the evening as I neared the site where my car was parked. It had been a strenuous two hours walking the hills of western North Carolina. The venture was my first real hike since falling in October 2015, breaking my knee cap and tearing the ligaments on both sides of the knee.

Surgery and physical therapy had been painful but worthwhile. Since then it had been a regular routine on an exercise bike and a NordicTrack. Friends tell me I hardly limp at all anymore.

But this afternoon was the real thing — a three-mile walk on a circular trail. I did alright but going downhill was still the most difficult part. A mixed sense of relief and accomplishment filled me as I crossed those final yards to the trailhead.

Antifreeze puddle

That is when I saw it — a liquid puddle snaked from under my car and pooled just in front of the driver's side headlight. Leaning over I felt the liquid. It was not oil but was slick to the touch. It was antifreeze. Three years earlier the water pump on the car had failed and the feel of the liquid drugged up unwelcome memories. I could see myself stranded with a broken down car alone in the woods as darkness neared.

Normal level

Before calling for help on my cell phone (I assumed there was coverage) I decided to test the car. It started. I watched the thermostat rise to its normal level and stop. I decided to attempt the five- or six-mile drive back to where my wife, Pat, and I were staying. Thankfully there was not a problem. The temperature gage never rose above normal.

The next day we headed back to Birmingham with a stop at the international terminal at the Atlanta Airport. On the first day of our getaway we had gone to the TSA office there for Pat to be interviewed for a Global Entry pass she needed.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Unfortunately the TSA computers went down the morning of her appointment and she had to reschedule for the afternoon of our return.

That morning there was no puddle under the car but before leaving Highlands, North Carolina, I purchased a gallon of antifreeze anyway. I did not want to get caught unprepared.

Uneventful drive home

The drive was totally uneventful. The car never overheated. We negotiated Atlanta traffic to the airport and found a parking space. Pat did the interview and we cruised back to Birmingham in time to attend a high school honors assembly for our oldest grandson. In all, it was a good day.

Wednesday morning was back to work in Birmingham. The car had performed so well I left the antifreeze in the garage. At noon I headed for a meeting that took me east on Montevallo Road. About 10 minutes from the office the inside of the car started getting warm and humid. Old memories flooded to the forefront as I glanced at the thermostat. The car was running hot and nearing the danger zone.

A safe place

Immediately I turned around hoping to get back to the office but that was not to be. The warning system started dinging and it would not quit. A sign came on saying engine power was reduced because the car was too hot. I could not

stop without creating a major traffic jam and there was no place to pull off except into some stranger's driveway.

I pushed the car for three more blocks and pulled into the parking lot of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Later I was surprised at the relief that came over me when I pulled in. It felt like a safe place from the chaos of the situation. But isn't that what a church is supposed to do?

A custodian offered water for the radiator but the water poured out as quickly as it was put in. There was no driving the car. It had to be towed. The church staff allowed me to wait in air-conditioned comfort for AAA to arrive. That was a blessing on a 90-degree day.

Fractured pipe

Later the service manager at the dealership from which I purchased the car reported a coolant pipe near the top of the engine had fractured making the situation look worse than it was. At first he thought the water was spewing out the top of the engine block. The problem was fixed in a matter of hours and I was back in my trusted six-year-old car.

Looking back

That is when I began to reflect on the whole experience: a water leak alone on a mountain trailhead; near perfect performance from my car the following day on mountain roads and interstate highways and even through Atlanta traffic.

We did not break down in some strange place. The crisis occurred after Pat and I were safely home, once we had access to familiar resources.

Was that coincidence or was that God?

In his book "Come and See," the late Robert H. Jackson urges readers to look for God in the coincidences of life. He writes, "All persons experience coincidences in life. Obviously we do as Christians but with a decided difference. We who are believers look for the Father within those coincidences. When we do, we discover Him there, setting the stage for His glorification in the event as well as in the lives of those caught up with us in the mysterious happenings."

'Setting the stage'

I have no explanation why the leaking pipe held together long enough to get me off that North Carolina mountain, through Atlanta traffic and back to familiar surroundings. It should not have but it did.

Taking Jackson's counsel, I cannot say it was all a coincidence. Instead I see God "setting the stage for His glorification in the event as well as ... in the lives of those caught up in the mysterious happenings."

What about you? Do you look for God in the circumstances of life or just chalk things up to coincidences? †

C E L E B R A T E

Father's Day

June 19

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Ephesians 6:4

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Proverbs 22:6



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

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Reaching Millennials

Balancing discipleship, activities-minded ministry key to reaching Millennials

By Maggie Walsh
The Alabama Baptist

Their hair looks different, their style is unconventional and they often have at least one tattoo. Millennials.

There have been countless studies done on this group of 18- to 34-year-olds, each with different, and often contradicting, conclusions. They're selfish, but wanting to serve. They're more authentic, but apathetic. And the conclusions go on and on.

But there's one statistic that stands out: Nearly 6 in 10 Millennials who grow up in churches leave to claim no religious affiliation. The April study conducted by Barna Group sought to understand the priorities, challenges and trends in youth ministry to see how churches engaged young people in ministry.

For instance when Millennials were in youth groups 10-20 years ago the strategy was to entertain them, said Dave Walsh, pastor of Arton Baptist Church.

"There was the hope that when they were older they would come back and get involved. That strategy doesn't work anymore," Walsh said.

Kathy Cooper, minister to single adults at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, says one reason that strategy has become unsuccessful is because of the message some Millennials are getting from church.

"So many feel that the church is telling them, 'Come back when you are married. Otherwise we are sticking you with the college kids or with older singles,'" she said.

At that point, "what choice do Millennials have?" Cooper questioned. What would you do if you felt as though your marital status kept you from fitting into a church family?

And gone are the days where it's popular to be in church, said Russ Robbins, longtime education minister at First Baptist Church, Eufala.

"In the past, you were almost judged more if you were not in church than if you were," he said. "Now there are so many distractions and demands on our time and I think Millennials are interested more in adventure and experiences (than past generations) and if that takes place on Sunday, then it's no big deal."

Cooper agreed that Millennials are a mobile generation like never before.

Increased mobility

"They can fly to Paris tomorrow where flying anywhere 30 years ago was uncommon," she said.

Increased mobility, additional distractions, feeling out of place — where does all of this leave church leaders?

Walsh said, "Most people — Millennial or otherwise — need to feel that their time is being used wisely. If all they're doing is sitting in a pew as a spectator, they're not going to continue doing that. [They're] going to find some-



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thing else that gives them greater satisfaction. "We need to get them deeper ... to make them see what they do in church as part of their mission or ministry."

Cooper agreed, adding that while the increased mobility can make Millennials hard to pin down, it can also be an opportunity for ministry.

'Want to serve'

"Many of my 20-somethings want to serve; they want to give and be a part of a community," she said. "Millennials want to go to the lostness, not wait for it to come into the church."

First, Montgomery, gives them the opportunity to do just that through a special fund that was set up to help young singles go around the world and serve.

Churches also have to create spaces and cultures for Millennials within their congregations, Robbins said.

"We have to make a place that makes them feel loved and cared for and appreciated. A place where they're not threatened and are comfortable, where they can ask questions that don't make them feel stupid," he said.

For instance Millennials at First, Eufala, have a facility where they meet for Bible studies, cookouts and darts tournaments. "We try to provide experiences for them that aren't conventional," Robbins said.

Keeping a balance between discipleship and activities-minded ministry is key to reaching this age group, Walsh said.

"To keep them involved, they're going to have to see value in what they do and the time they invest into church," he said. "And I believe that value is going to be something that

is going to produce more missions-minded people.

"You've got to deal with people where they are and form relationships. ... Regardless of what strategy is used, it's got to be done according to God's Word and the purpose always has to be to lead people into a deeper relationship with God."

Cooper agreed.

"Our message never changes but our methods need to. ... You have to make [Millennials] feel wanted and needed, and they will come," she said.

"The church must see the future in these young people, married or single. Get their ideas. Get their opinions. Listen to them. And then equip them and watch them reach their world." ✝

How to minister to Millennials

- ▶ Make a place for them.
- ▶ Involve them in service.
- ▶ Mentor them.
- ▶ Be intentional to disciple them.
- ▶ Communicate the way they like to communicate, i.e. Facebook, Instagram, texting.

(Source: Kathy Cooper, minister to single adults, FBC Montgomery)

'Returned citizen's' life changed because of 'church ladies' efforts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Charlene A. Ferniz, an active member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, knows the struggle of becoming a returning citizen all too well.

After reading the June 2 article "Doing missions behind bars" in *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB), Ferniz shared her story with TAB.

"The Church needs to be in the prisons," Ferniz said. "I know the impact that the Church has had on my life since I re-entered society."

After being arrested for a crime she admittedly committed in 2010, Ferniz said she began reading the Bible for the first time. She also started attending Bible studies and met three women who came to the county jail — where she resided as she awaited trial — every Tuesday.

Found God

"They were called 'church ladies,'" Ferniz said. "I grew up in the Catholic Church so I knew who God was but had no idea that I could have a personal relationship with Him. Or that God would even want a relationship with me.

"The more I read the more I

wanted to know," she noted.

Ferniz's sentencing finally came down and she was transferred to Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka for three months to complete her sentence. She continued her Bible reading while there.

And when her sentence was completed, she returned to Tuscaloosa and reached

out to "those church ladies," she said. "They helped me with my immediate needs but more importantly they got me plugged into a church.

"These ladies are members of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, and so am I," Ferniz said. "It is in this church I found unconditional love and acceptance. I found joy and peace above all understanding. No one asked questions. FBC became my rock, my beacon during dark times."

Not only did Ferniz find Christ and a church family to help her transition back into society, but she also gives back by being part of the Kairos of Alabama Prison Ministry team and helps with

ministries at the Federal Correctional Institution (for women) in Aliceville.

Is Ferniz's story one that could be repeated over and over again if Alabama Baptist churches determined to see the closest prison facility or jail closest to them as a missions field?

Could the state's prison system crisis be exactly what Alabama Baptist churches need to bolster relevancy within society and discipleship efforts among believers?

TAB staff is working to determine what the possibilities might be and will be developing

content and providing resources during the next few weeks.

Staff members would like to know about your prison ministry efforts as well as suggestions of inmates, returned citizens and prison ministry volunteers who would be an inspiration for readers to know. We also want to know your concerns and fears so we can ask the experts for advice in those areas.

Please pray about how you and your church might participate in making a positive difference in the Kingdom and the state by intentionally focusing on the prison population in some specific way.

Email your suggestions and/or information to jrash@thealabamabaptist.org. For more information on Kairos, visit www.kairos-al.org.

Judge issues 'marriage' order

U.S. District Court Judge Callie V.S. Granade issued a June 7 order attempting to ensure same-sex "marriages" in all 67 Alabama counties.

Granade's order was issued in the *Strawser v. Alabama* case, a lawsuit filed by same-sex couples seeking marriage equality.

"Given the actions by Alabama state and local officials during this litigation, both before and after the Supreme Court decided *Obergefell* (the national same-sex 'marriage' case), it cannot be said with assurance that there is no reasonable expectation that Alabama's unconstitutional marriage laws will not again be enforced," Granade wrote in the order. (TAB)

"FBC [Tuscaloosa] became my rock, my beacon during dark times."

Charlene A. Ferniz member, FBC Tuscaloosa

REFLECTIONS

The Pastor @ Home

"DON'T MAKE ME USE MY PREACHING VOICE."



Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

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Southern Baptist Disaster Relief named top national aid

MINNEAPOLIS — Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) has been named National Member of the Year by the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD).

"On behalf of the North American Mission Board and the SBDR network, I would like to express our gratitude to the membership of the National VOAD for this recognition of our work," said Mickey Caison, executive director of Disaster Relief for the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Those efforts were recognized May 20 when several disaster relief teams were acknowledged during this year's National VOAD conference in Minneapolis.

"I am honored that the North American Mission Board allows me to serve this incredible organization," said Caison, accepting the award.

"It's a privilege to bear witness to the willingness of our volunteers to provide help, healing and hope to individuals, families and communities every day as they serve as the hands and feet of Jesus," he said. "The love and compassion expressed by our volunteers ... are used by our Lord not only to assist in recovery following a disaster but also to impact eternal relationships with Him."

For 46 years, more than 100 organizations like NAMB and SBDR have cooperated through VOAD to serve people and communities impacted by natural disasters. Initiatives within each disaster relief organization, like the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program, have helped bring even more aid to disaster-stricken communities during the last half-century. (BP)

Golden Gate Seminary locks doors on Mill Valley campus

MILL VALLEY, Calif. — Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary closed its main campus in the San Francisco Bay Area on June 3 to prepare for its 400-mile move to Southern California.

After a ceremonial locking of the doors at 4 p.m., President Jeff Iorg sent out a campus-wide email that read, "The Mill Valley campus of Golden Gate Seminary is now closed. We press on."

The Southern Baptist seminary had been located in the Bay Area since its founding in 1944.

Employees at the new 150,000-square-foot facility in Ontario, California, will report for work June 20 to prepare for its official opening July 5. The first group of students is expected to move into new student housing in late June.

The seminary also anticipates that messengers to the 2016 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, will vote for a final time on a name change to Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Based on the overwhelmingly positive first vote on this issue in 2015, we have been preparing for immediate implementation of an affirmative decision if it is made by the messengers in 2016," Iorg said. "This may make the 2016 convention unique as a new seminary identity likely enters the history of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Dedication events for the new campus in Ontario will be Oct. 5-8.

The seminary began its relocation after the sale of its main campus in 2014 and the subsequent purchase of new sites in Ontario in Southern California and, for the Bay Area, in Fremont. The seminary also operates campuses in Denver, Phoenix and the Pacific Northwest. (BP)



CAISON

Want to see your news in *The Alabama Baptist*?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org, or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

Someone You Should Know

By Leigh Pritchett, Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

Richard Richie



RICHIE

Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville

Morgan Baptist Association

FAVORITE VERSE: Romans 8:28

FAVORITE HYMN: "How Great Thou Art"

HOBBIES: Watching and playing football, coaching and watching his sons play soccer, traveling, spending time outdoors fishing and hiking

FAMILY STATUS: Husband of 13 years to wife, Toni; sons, Robert, Nathan and William

Richard Richie, 49, of Hartselle is the bivocational pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville, and a substitute teacher in both public and private schools. He is finance chairman, webmaster and transition team member for Morgan Baptist Association. For the International Mission Board (IMB) he serves as a trustee as well as a member of the trustees' administration committee and European Affinity Group. Richie has been in pastoral ministry 21 years, serving in Indiana, Maryland, and Randolph and Morgan associations. An Auburn University alumnus, Richie holds a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he is pursuing a doctorate.

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

A: My Grandma Richie. From my early age she was always talking to me about the Lord. She gave me my first Bible. She used to always tell me she could see me as a preacher someday. ... In 1981, I accepted the Lord on a Methodist church retreat in Aldie, Virginia, sitting around a campfire. ... After the retreat, when my mom met me at the door, she knew from the radiance of my face that something wonderful had happened.

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

A: At First Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia, I was director of the Singles 3 (18-25

year olds) department. Working with Jay Wolf (the pastor at the time; now pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery) was instrumental in helping me to answer God's calling into the ministry. Jay mentored me, guided me, and I shadowed him whenever possible.

Q: What do you get from your ministry?

A: I get the joy of working with people in all aspects of their life. ... Just to be able to walk through life with people and encourage them in and through the Lord is very fulfilling.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: The biggest thing is their prayers. We always have people who are part of our prayer team. ... Additionally, my wife — as my best friend and greatest confidant — is a huge source of support as we discuss and pray about a lot of things.

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

A: I see myself as possibly moving into a director of missions position to help mentor, support and encourage pastors and churches. I especially see myself continuing to be involved with IMB, getting people involved in missions and leading Acts 1:8 missions trips.

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

A: My measuring rod is if Jesus is happy with what I've done. ... As Colossians 3:23 states, "Do all that you do as unto the Lord." ☠



IMB photo

Haylee Holeman (top left), teenage daughter of IMB missionaries Jeff and Liesa Holeman, often accompanies her mother to minister to the children at the Casa Hogar children's home in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Record giving

Lottie Moon offering sees highest total in its history

Southern Baptists provided resounding support through the 2015 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) for International Missions.

Finalized in early June, the 2015 LMCO totaled \$165.8 million — the highest total in the 127-year history of the offering. The offering surpassed the previous all-time record of \$154 million in 2013 by \$11.8 million. The 2014 LMCO offering totaled just over \$153 million.

"Southern Baptists have exhibited their commitment to God's mission through these gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering," said International Mission Board (IMB) President David Platt. "Especially after a year in which we have walked through many challenges together, the support Southern Baptists have shown through this offering will not only sustain but also encourage the thousands of missionaries sent from Southern Baptist churches who are spreading the gospel right now. As an IMB family, on behalf of unreached people around the world, we are deeply grateful for the generosity of Southern Baptists who have given for God's glory among the nations."

Vision for 'limitless' teams

Wanda Lee, executive director/treasurer of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), which promotes the offering in partnership with IMB, expressed her gratitude for the gifts.

"When Lottie Moon saw the depth of lostness in China and pled for help, churches responded with increased giving and prayer support. This year, we are grateful Southern Baptists responded once again at a critical time when increased resources are needed for our international outreach. How thankful we are for every person who gave and prayed, proving that together we can accomplish so much more than any one church or individual can alone."

IMB's vision for the future includes "limitless" missionary teams — healthy groups of "sent ones" who partner together with the goal of each team making disciples and multiplying churches.

Full-time missionaries are essential as leaders who continue to be the key strategic workers in some of the most difficult places on earth. More than 3,600 IMB missionaries depend on LMCO and regular missions giving by churches through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program for missionary salaries, housing, medical care, children's education, field transportation and other expenses. Supporting one fully funded missionary overseas costs an average of \$141 per day, or about \$51,000 per year.

Making a difference

The 2015 offering will account for more than half of the total 2016 IMB budget of \$278,755,000, said Rodney Freeman, IMB treasurer and vice president of support services.

Of the world's 11,000 people groups, more than half — billions of people — are unreached with the gospel. More than 3,000 unreached people groups also are unengaged, which means there is no one working to share Christ or plant churches among them.

LMCO enables missionaries to make a difference.

Take Liesa Holeman for instance. She found an unlikely inroad into difficult-to-access indigenous communities in Mexico right where she lives in the city of Oaxaca by volunteering at the Casa Hogar children's home.

Southern Baptists' gifts enable Holeman to purchase the ministry supplies she uses at the children's home where partnering U.S. churches send groups to share the gospel. There are still at least 10 unengaged, unreached people groups in Mexico alone, totaling more than 300,000 people. And there are more than 30 unreached people groups in the country, representing nearly 1.5 million people.

For more information about IMB and LMCO, visit IMB.org/FAQ. (BP)

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons.

Alabama Baptist colleges named among best 4-year colleges in state

All three Alabama Baptist colleges — Judson College in Marion, Samford University in Birmingham and the University of Mobile (UM) — were named among the best four-year colleges in Alabama, with 2 of the 3 garnering the top two spots.

Named by bestcolleges.com, Samford ranked No. 1 of the more than 80 collegiate institutions in the state for its “breadth of programs, intimate class sizes and high rate of graduate employment.” UM garnered the No. 2 spot for its affordable cost, 14 to 1 student-faculty ratio and “strong Christian values.”

The two colleges outranked bigger public universities such as Auburn University and the University of Alabama, which were ranked No. 3 and 7, respectively.

Judson was ranked No. 17 in the state for its “unique ... focus on the education and social development of women through the tradition of Christian values.”

Alabama Baptist colleges also were recently recognized among top colleges for their online learning programs, an education trend that has steadily increased in

popularity for more than a decade.

According to the 2015 Survey of Online Learning, 28 percent of students now take at least one distance education course. Additionally the number of distance education students increased 3.9 percent from 2014 to 2015, reported the survey conducted by Babson Survey Research Group.



In a ranking of best four-year, online colleges in Alabama by bestcolleges.com, UM ranked No. 5 and Judson ranked No. 8.

UM “offers a unique distance education program,” bestcolleges.com reported, and offers five degrees fully online as well as general education courses and electives.

Bestcolleges.com said Judson’s general education core program, which is offered online, is “one of the most comprehensive ... in the state.” Online students may choose from more than 20 majors and minors and hundreds of courses.

Judson also garnered spots in the 2016 national rankings of Top 50 Online Christian Colleges and Universities and Best Online Christian Colleges from Christian Universities Online. (TAB)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Last Things

Intermediate State

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

Probably all of us have been present to witness the body of a friend or loved one placed in its grave. We also have heard words spoken on such occasions when a minister makes reference to a future resurrection. Such a prospect injects a time of sorrow and sense of loss with a cherished hope that will become reality at some future time.

Our concern this week is to think about an obvious question: What is the situation between a present death and a future resurrection of departed believers?

Christians customarily refer to the time between death and resurrection as the intermediate state. Quite obviously, the body that is laid to rest in the cemetery is without the animating life or soul of the person. Hence, we can say at the outset that the intermediate state is disembodied existence. But it is more than mere existence; it is blessed existence. Thus we need to inquire what the Scriptures indicate is the status of the immaterial or spiritual component of the person whose body is now lifeless.

Present with the Lord

As we noted last week, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 speaks of being absent from the body and present with the Lord, saying, “We are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” A believer whose body has been left behind at death is indeed present with the Lord. Hence, we can say that the intermediate state is a time in which departed loved ones are in the Lord’s presence.

Some religious groups contend that the intermediate state is to be a time of soul sleep until the resurrection of the dead. This teaching is that such a state is one of being unaware or unconscious. We might do well to recall that Jesus spoke of a rich man who died. He

portrayed that rich man as conscious and conversant; he was aware of torment and capable of making a request. The rich man requested that a certain beggar be dispatched to bring him relief from his torment.

From Jesus’ portrayal of the dead rich man, we might glean that the intermediate state, while being a disembodied one, is not a time of sleeping but one of consciousness, albeit for believers not a consciousness of torment but of blessedness in the very presence of Christ.

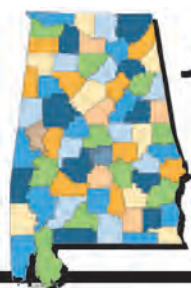
Earthly house or tent

The testimony of the apostle Paul helps us get a clearer understanding of the intermediate state. For that testimony we turn again to 2 Corinthians 5. Paul began this testimony by referring to his physical body as an earthly house or a tent. By contrast, he spoke of his future resurrection body as a building from God (v. 1).

The contrast between a house and a tent is itself instructive about a believer’s ultimate hope. He then referred to his future resurrection body as a habitation from heaven and testified that upon receiving it, he would not be found naked (v. 2).

The contrast between clothed and naked also helps us grasp further understanding about the intermediate state. Being disembodied is compared to being naked, while receiving a resurrection body is compared to being clothed. However, being clothed with a body like Jesus’ resurrection body awaits His return, a topic that awaits us next time. ✠

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.



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **Rock Hill Church, Honorville**, will hold VBS on June 20-24, 7-9 p.m. nightly. Dinner will be provided. The theme is LifeWay’s “Submerged.” To register call 334-382-3025 or 334-383-0008.

RUSSELL

► **Ladonia Church, Phenix City**, will host the Russell Association Disaster Relief (DR) Awareness Conference on July 14, 7 p.m. EST. Mel Johnson, DR strategist for the Alabama State Board of Missions, will speak. David Howle is pastor.

SAND MOUNTAIN

► **Raymond “Ray” Clark** died May 19 at the age of 85. He was a member of **East Brow Community Church, Flat Rock**. Clark helped start the Sand Mountain Association Disaster Relief (DR) teams with his wife, Joanne, and Direc-

tor of Missions David Patty. The Clarks have served on several missions teams to Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico as volunteer missionaries with the North American Mission Board. Clark also was active in Constructors for Christ and served as men’s ministry director and building/grounds director at Ebenezer Church, Bryant, and as men’s ministry director for the association.

He earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of Kentucky in Louisville. He also served in the United States Navy during the Korean War from 1951 to 1955. Clark is survived by his wife of 62 years, four children, 10 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. ✠



CLARK



Federal ‘guidance’

Transgender restroom directive epitomizes Obama administration’s overreach, Strange says

By Attorney General Luther Strange
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Approximately one month ago — curiously on Friday the 13th — the Obama administration issued what may be its most bizarre and overreaching edict to date. The U.S. Department of Education and the Justice Department sent all schools a sternly worded “guidance” letter effectively ordering them to open campus restrooms, locker rooms and showers to any student who so chooses, regardless of their sex.

By way of an eight-page memo the federal government has taken control of restrooms from local school systems and turned decision making over to Washington bureaucrats. What’s worse, it doesn’t care what safety concerns the order causes non-transgender students who now are forced to share restrooms, locker rooms and showers with pretty much anyone. The government’s response: Deal with it.

The federal guidance bluntly says schools “must allow transgender students access to such facilities consistent with their gender identity.” Birth sex does not matter, only a

student’s self-identified gender. If schools refuse to comply with the mandate they could risk losing federal funding. Principals and teachers in Alabama already employ considerable discretion over how to accommodate transgendered students. These cases are usually resolved in consultation with the student’s parents, teachers and principals. Most often the result is for the student to use a single-occupancy restroom. However,

even that common sense solution isn’t acceptable to the administration which states “a school may not require transgender students ... to use individual-user facilities.”

Needless to say the guidance letter has caused an uproar among parents and school systems who rightly feel the Obama administration is legally out of bounds. The joint Education-Justice Department letter bases its controversial order on an erroneous interpretation of a four-decades-old

federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in school programs and activities. The letter claims Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 also applies to discrimination based on a student’s gender identity. This is a ridiculous legal contortion that will not stand up to a court challenge.

Title IX as passed by Congress clearly forbids discrimination in school programs “on the basis of sex,” not gender preference. Furthermore the 1975 regulation that implements Title IX expressly authorizes “provid[ing] separate toilet, locker room and shower facilities on the basis of sex.” To underscore the meaning of the law, Congress itself debated the question of men and women using the same facilities as a consequence of the new law. To clarify its intent Congress passed an amendment declaring that “nothing contained herein shall be construed to prohibit any education institution ... from maintaining separate living facilities for different sexes.” There is no ambiguity.

‘Radical social experiment’

What seems clear is the Obama administration’s intent upon pushing a radical social experiment as far as possible during its waning months of power. After the Obama administration’s surrogates in Congress were unsuccessful in passing similar legislation promoting transgender access to school facilities, it has taken a familiar course — go around Congress and impose its agenda by executive fiat. However, this tactic has its limits.

While Congress has been hamstrung by the Obama administration’s end-run maneuvering, America’s conservative attorneys general have not. We have formed coalitions

to fight the administration’s illegal power grabs in federal court and have been successful in halting some of the Obama White House’s more egregious actions, including the granting of amnesty to illegal aliens and imposing draconian water use limitations on private property owners.

As attorney general of Alabama, I swore an oath to enforce the law. If the law is being applied in an illegal manner, it is my duty to challenge those who are acting in defiance of the law. Accordingly, I have joined with 10 other states in taking the Obama administration to federal court over its illegal

transgender school restroom order. Since we filed our lawsuit two more states have expressed interest in joining us.

Understandably my office has received numerous inquiries from educators and others across Alabama about how to respond to the federal guidance letter. On May 26, I wrote the State Board of Education giving my advice that Alabama educators simply ignore the federal edict until our federal lawsuit is resolved.

This administration has too often abused the levers of power to force its will on the American people. Decisions as consequential as those promulgated by the administration’s guidance letter deserve to be scrutinized and approved by Congress with the input of the people, not forced on the public by unaccountable bureaucrats. †



STRANGE

“If the law is being applied in an illegal manner, it is my duty to challenge those who are acting in defiance of the law.”

**Luther Strange
attorney general of Alabama**

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Photo courtesy of Samford University’s MTI

As part of your subscription to *The Alabama Baptist*, you will receive a complimentary lecture taught by Kevin Blackwell, executive director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University, for the next few weeks. Use your Aurasma app to watch the seventh lecture on Philippians by placing your mobile device over this photo. App instructions noted on page 8.

Phenix City’s Emmanuel Baptist breaks ground



New construction

Photo courtesy of Alan Griffith

Emmanuel Baptist Church, Phenix City, holds a groundbreaking celebration March 12 on property the church bought in 2008. The new building will be more than 7,000 square feet with a worship center that will seat 275, church offices and classrooms. Pictured here are Pastor Alan Griffith (front row, left, in hat), and members of the church. The church hopes to have the new building completed by the end of 2016 and is grateful to North Phenix Baptist Church for allowing Emmanuel Baptist to use its facilities since January.

National Center for Health Statistics says teen birth rates in nation, Alabama on steep decline because of economy

The trend in teen birth rates is continuing to decline along with teen pregnancy and abortion rates among teens.

According to a new report from the National Center for Health Statistics, the birth rate among all teens has dropped by 42 percent since its peak in 2007. Nonwhite and younger teens have led in declining birth rates in recent years, according to Pew Research, and the declines among Hispanic (50 percent), Asian or Pacific Islander (48 percent) and black (44 percent) teens have outpaced the national average while white teens are at 36 percent. Birth rates among younger teens ages 15–17 have fallen faster, dropping by 50 percent compared to a 39 percent decline among older teens ages 18 and 19, according to Pew.

A striking statistic for Alabama from a few years ago is that the southern state ranked No. 1 out of 51 states (including the District of Columbia) on 2011 birth rates among teens ages 15–19, according to the Office of Adolescent Health of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Ranked No. 1

Of the 333,746 teen births in the United States in 2011, Alabama was the home of 6,704 of those births. Of those births, 4,626 were from teens ages 18 or 19 and 95 were from teens under age 15.

New Mexico ranked the highest in teen birth rates in the nation in 2012 with 47.5 out of 1,000 teens giving birth, according to a 2015 Center for Disease Control (CDC) report. New Hampshire, in

comparison, had the lowest teen birth rate in the nation in 2012 with 13.8 teens out of 1,000 giving birth.

The most recent data from the National Survey of Family Growth shows a significant decline in the percentage of never-married teens that report they have ever had sex, from 51 percent in 1988 to 44 percent in 2011–13. Of those who have had sex, 79 percent of girls and 84 percent of boys report using a contraceptive method.

In Alabama, 58 percent of teens grades 9–12 in 2011 said they have had sexual intercourse. And 57 percent of students who were sexually active in grades 9–12 used a condom and 14 percent said they did not use any kind of contraceptive method.

When looking at a state's sexual health, the CDC report found that Alabama has double the amount of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis cases as compared to the nation. In 2012, Montgomery County had four times the national average of these sexually transmitted diseases.

Looking at specific counties in 2014, Walker, Calhoun, Hale, Tallapoosa, Chambers, Clarke, Butler and Crenshaw counties had between a 50 and 99 percent higher teen pregnancy rate than the state rate of 22.6 percent, according to the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Also in Alabama, 3,356 of the total teen births in 2011 were from white teens; 2,817 were from black teens; 485 were from Hispanic teens; 25 were from American Indian or Alaska Na-

tives teens; and 20 were from Asian or Pacific Islander teens.

Although the teen birth rate among blacks and Hispanics nationwide has fallen faster than whites, both Hispanic and black teens ages 15–19 had birth rates at least twice as high as the rate among white teens in 2014, Pew reported.

Causes for decline

The nationwide teen birth rate has seen a steep decline since the early 1990s with exception to a brief uptick in 2007.

Pew reported that the economy could be a possible force behind the trends. Birth rates for teens fell faster than they did for all females ages 15–44 from 2007 to 2014.

More effective use of contra-

ception, less sex and more information about pregnancy prevention are other factors that affect birth rates, Pew said.

The CDC report found that teen birth rates in Alabama had decreased by 41 percent from 1990 to 2012.

When it comes to abortions, the nationwide rate for teens ages 15–19 has fallen from 43.5 percent per 1,000 teens in 1988 to 16.3 percent in 2009. In Alabama the abortion rate for pregnancies of teens ages 15–19 dropped 66 percent from 1988 to 2008.

Of the roughly 700,000 teen pregnancies in 2009 in the U.S., about 58 percent were live births, 25 percent ended in abortions and 17 percent were miscarriages or stillbirths, according to Pew. (TAB)



Alabama Baptist GIVING	
Year to Date through May 31, 2016	
MAY 2016	
CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,333,333.33
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$2,785,179.00
Under Goal for Month.....	\$548,154.33
YEAR TO DATE	
CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$16,666,666.67
CP Challenge Budget Gifts.....	\$16,605,065.00
Under Goal for Year.....	\$61,601.67
<small>The monthly and year-to-date totals include CP base, CP state causes and SBC causes.</small>	

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- 7** Each week when TAB arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

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



'Apostle to the Germans' Boniface began missions work 1,300 years ago

Boniface (c. 675–754), the “Apostle to the Germans,” established Christianity in the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire.

This year is the 1,300th anniversary of Boniface leaving England in 716 to do missionary work.

He was born Winfrid around 675 in Wessex (now Devon), England. After completing his studies at Exeter and Nursling monasteries, he became head of the school at Nursling. When Nursling's abbot died, Winfrid declined to be his successor because of Winfrid's call to missions.

In 716 he and two companions left England for Frisia (now the Netherlands). Working with a local missionary, Willibrord, they preached until a war stopped their work. In the autumn of 716, Winfrid returned to Nursling.

To be an effective missionary Winfrid needed a direct commission from Pope Gregory II. In 718, with recommendations from the bishop of Winchester, he met the Pope, who changed his name from Winfrid to Boniface. Gregory II gave him a commission to preach the Word of God.

Boniface traveled through Bavaria into Hesse (western Germany) and then back to Frisia. He labored three years under Willibrord until his death. He declined to become Willibrord's successor as bishop of Utrecht. Returning to work in Hesse, he ministered to two local princes who became zealous Christians. They gave him a grant of land on which he founded the monastery of Amoeneburg.

On Nov. 30, 722, Gregory II consecrated Boniface bishop of parts of Germany and gave him a letter to present to Frankish

Duke Charles Martel. With that letter, Boniface got Martel's military protection.

Boniface returned to Hesse to rid the pagans of their superstitions, including the worship of trees. With the people gathered to watch, he and two of his followers attacked Thor's sacred oak that stood at the top of Mount Gudenberg. After a few blows the huge tree crashed. The tribesmen expected their gods to intervene. When nothing happened, they realized their gods didn't exist. Most of them converted to Christianity and Boniface built a chapel on the spot.



BONIFACE

He established a second monastery at Ohrdruff. Because of a lack of teachers, he appealed to English monasteries and convents. Many monks and nuns answered his call and he built new monasteries.

In 731, Pope Gregory III appointed Boniface archbishop of all Germany beyond the

Rhine. A few years later he was named legate, representative of the Pope. He organized four dioceses in Bavaria and four in Germany. He founded the abbey at Fulda in 741 as the center of German monastic culture.

Boniface spent five years in Gaul, Germany, carrying out many reforms and restoring the Church to its former greatness. With the help of Boniface, the Archbishop of Canterbury adopted many of the reforms passed in Gaul.

In 747, Boniface became the archbishop of Mainz, Germany.

Boniface returned to Frisia and he and his 53 companions brought the gospel to tribes people who had never heard it. While awaiting converts for a confirmation service in Dokkum on June 5, 754, a band of armed thieves killed him and his companions. Boniface's remains are entombed at Fulda Cathedral, previously the abbey church. ✠

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Sand Mountain Association holds first Associational Missions Week of Prayer

Sand Mountain Baptist Association held its first Associational Missions Week of Prayer on May 16–20. Director of Missions (DOM) Chris Guinn presented the idea to the association when he became the new DOM in February.

Each day of the week members of the association's churches prayed for a different emphasis. The topics included: praying for the associational staff including Guinn and his administrative assistant, Michelle Stiefel (Monday); “unity and a spirit of cooperation among the churches and that God will use our churches to build the kingdom of God” (Tuesday); pastors of the 30 associational churches (Wednesday) and Vacation Bible School (Thursday). The Friday emphasis focused on the lost in the community: “that God will use our churches to penetrate the darkness that is in our communities. Pray that the lost will see their sin and the need for forgiveness. Pray that God will convict



Photo courtesy of Sand Mountain Baptist Association

and move in the hearts of those who need to invite Him into their lives. Pray that our churches work together to reach the lost. Pray that our churches will become revitalized to reach the lost.”

and move in the hearts of those who need to invite Him into their lives. Pray that our churches work together to reach the lost. Pray that our churches will become revitalized to reach the lost.”

On May 18, 14 churches were represented at a luncheon held at the associational office, where pastors and administrative staff gathered to pray and fellowship together. (Hannah Muñoz)

Giving increases, baptisms decline in 2015

(continued from page 1)
baptism for every 52 members.

“God help us all. In a world that is desperate for the message of Christ, we continue to be less diligent in sharing the good news,” said Frank Page, SBC Executive Committee president and CEO. “May God forgive us and give us a new passion to reach this world for Christ.”

Meanwhile the Assemblies of God, the world’s largest Pentecostal denomination, is continuing to see increases in the U.S. The latest stats released in early June indicate a 1.4 percent rise in U.S. adherents, from 3,146,741 in 2014 to 3,192,112 in 2015.

Immigration

Hartford Seminary sociologist of religion Scott Thumma said changes in denominational totals are driven by birthrate, retention of children as they reach adulthood and immigration. He said the Assemblies of God are benefiting from immigration much more than the SBC.

Thumma also said some of the

drop in interest in SBC churches could be from a growing preference for nondenominational congregations.

“Nondenominational churches have most of the same characteristics in terms of theology and worship style as SBC churches but without the denominational baggage of its reputation or pronouncements,” Thumma said.

According to the recent Pew study, the share of evangelical Protestants who identify with Baptists has decreased from 41 percent in 2007 to 36 percent. This occurred while the percentage identifying with nondenominational churches increased from 13 percent to 19 percent.

However, LifeWay President and CEO Thom S. Rainer said, “The ACP report shows many faithful Southern Baptists continue to worship, share the gospel, give generously and live in community with other believers. We praise God for these efforts every year.

“While a decrease in baptisms is very disappointing, we don’t take for granted 295,000 baptisms,” he

said. “We should rejoice with each of those individuals who chose to follow Christ.”

An increase in the number of churches, aided by Southern Baptists’ church planting efforts, also is something to celebrate, Rainer said.

Building momentum

“People underestimate the importance of momentum,” he said. “It only takes a few people in each church being intentional about sharing their faith for some new momentum to build.”

Southern Baptists increased giving in 2015. Total and undesignated church receipts reported through the ACP increased 3.51 percent and 4.64 percent respectively.

Total missions expenditures declined by 2.03 percent, but the report shows four Baptist state conventions — Alabama (for the first time), California, Georgia and Oklahoma — did not ask churches for this data. Great Commission Giving, which represents total giving to denominational

causes, was down 3.81 percent to \$613 million, with five state conventions — Alabama, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Southern Baptists of Texas (for the first time) — not reporting that data.

Giving through Southern Baptists’ Cooperative Program (CP) missions initiative is not included in the ACP annual report. Those totals are more accurately available through Baptist state conventions and the SBC Executive Committee, which processes the missions gifts. CP gifts forwarded from state conventions for SBC causes in fiscal year 2014–15 were 1.39 percent more than the previous year. CP gifts received by the SBC Executive Committee for the first eight months of the 2015–16 year were reported to be 6.13 percent above the year-to-date budgeted projection.

Individual congregations report statistics for the national ACP to their local associations and/or state conventions. National totals are compiled and released after all cooperating state conventions have reported. (LifeWay, BP, RNS, TAB)

Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

Since I’ve been married I have picked up a tradition — when I am ending a conversation with someone I love or heading out to go somewhere, I tell that person (or people) that I love them. This makes so much sense to me because we are told in Scripture, “[The day and the hour are unknown] but about that day or hour no one knows not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36). We are not promised one more day, one more hour, one more breath. Wouldn’t you like to be assured that the last words you speak to someone are words of love?

God tells me every day that He loves me. For me, at times it’s a beautiful spring dawn or the fact that I get up and move around a bit unassisted or a surprise blessing — you get the idea. Most often it is when I am reading Scripture and this overwhelming feeling of peace and love pervades my soul. When that happens I know the Holy Spirit’s comforting me. How do I know? Because before Jesus was crucified He told the disciples: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Some of the teachings from Jesus that the Holy Spirit reminds me of when I need the assurance of God can be found in Matthew 5:44, John 15:13, Romans 13:10 and of course the golden rule: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 19:19).

If you want any more proof that God loves you, think about the fact that before you or I were born He sent His Son to die a horrible death to ensure that we would not eternally suffer for our sins. His sacrifice ensures that upon our acceptance of Him, we will reside in heaven. The time is coming soon when Jesus will call His children home. Don’t miss the call of the Savior. He is knocking on that sinful, hard heart. Let Him in. Accept His love and His peace. #

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PASTOR

Stave Creek Baptist Church in Jackson, Alabama (Clarke County), seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Stave Creek Baptist Church, ATTN: Rickey Manchester, P.O. Box 685, Jackson, AL 36545.

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 resúmes to: 2919 Co. Hwy. 39, Oneonta, AL 35121. 205-274-9232. bbarnett@otelco.net.

MUSIC MINISTER

Northside Baptist Church in Calera, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational minister of music. Please send resumé to: nick@northsidecalera.org. For more information, call 205-410-6418.

BIVOCATIONAL SONG LEADER

East Huntsville Baptist Church is searching for a bivocational song leader. Send resumé to: Personnel Committee, 808 Mayssville

Rd., Huntsville, AL 35801.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Morgan Baptist Association is accepting resúmes through June 30 for director of missions. Send to: DOM Search Committee, 1410 State Street North, Hartselle, AL 35640.

CHURCH SECRETARY

Deerfoot Baptist, Trussville, Alabama, is seeking a part-time church secretary, M-Th., 24–28 hours per week, minimum 5 years experience. You must have office/church office experience in Microsoft Office, ACS and general office duties and report to senior pastor. Self-motivating, work in confidence, organize/planning skills, personable, preferred. Interact with members and guests in a friendly atmosphere. Please include cover letter with resumé ATTN: Personnel, email: churchoffice@deerfootbaptist.org. USPS: 5450 Mt. Olive Church Road, Trussville, AL 35173.

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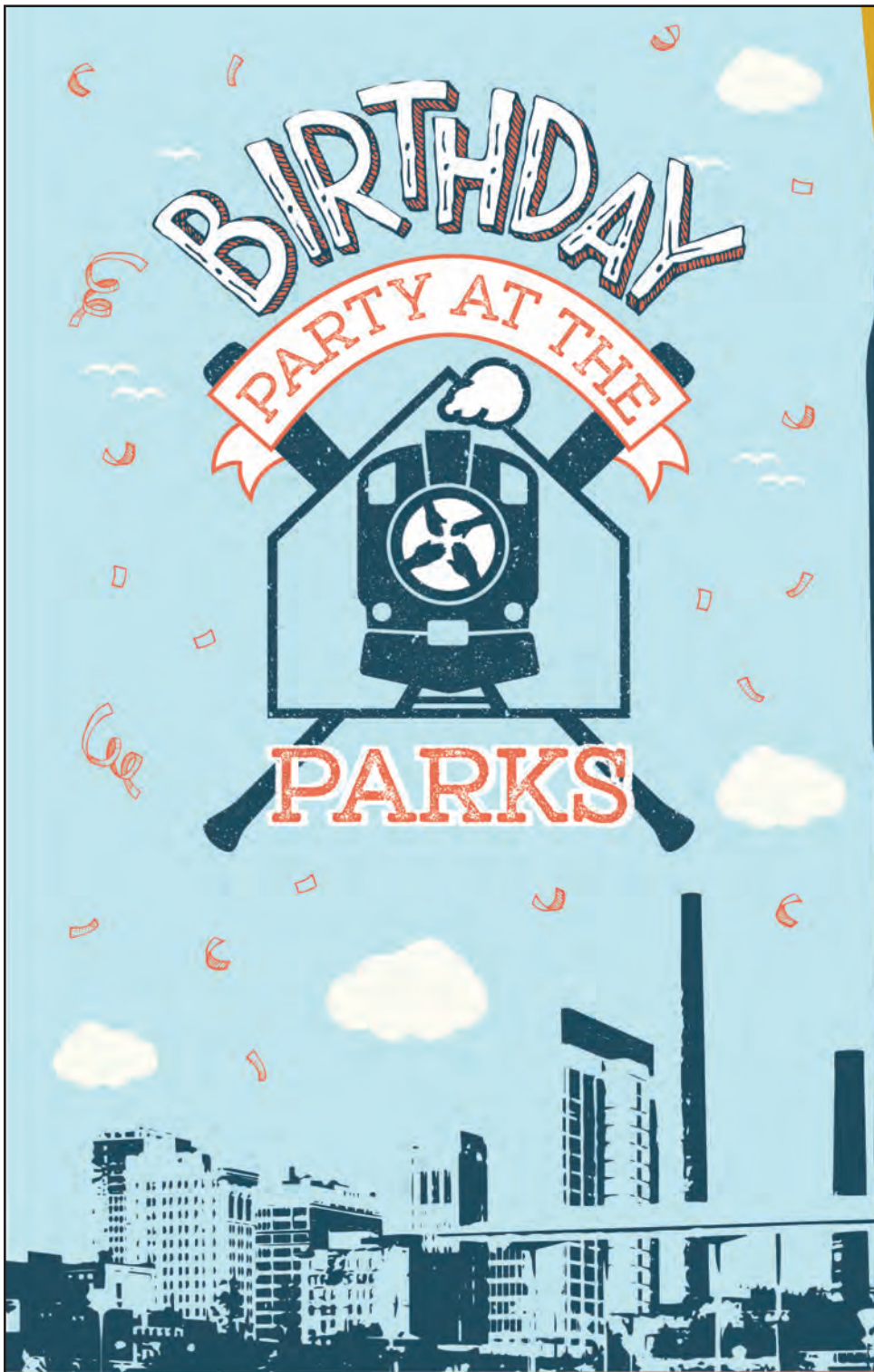
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MISCELLANEOUS

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

Austin, Robert, Sr., Trussville: Marjorie Kay Nix, Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce

Barkley, Rev. Thomas Brooks, Gallion: Bethel Baptist Association, Sandra Mitchell, Kristie Heary, Wendy Pope

Bedsole, Bobby, Gallion: Providence BC of Gallion

Brooks, Robert, Sr., Jackson: County Line BC of Pine Hill

Brown, Lamittice Jo, Montgomery: Levonne McGee

Cook, Floyd M., Salem: Pleasant Grove BC of Salem

Hansen, Patricia, Pensacola, FL: Eureka BC of Franklin

Herrmann, Sara Kathryn "Boo", Selma: Ken & Betty Schroeder

Littleton, Alan, Salem: Mrs. Evelyn Gullatte, Pleasant Grove BC of Salem

Long, Bruce, Brewton: Mr. & Mrs. Ed. Grouby

Newman, Bob, Decatur: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce

Parker, Jimmie, Jackson: Wayne & Faye Parker

Pruitt, Harold, Gallion: Providence BC of Gallion

Reynolds, Herman Lee, Guntersville: The Don Reynolds Family

Rieben, Ella Mae, Bay Minette: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette

Spurlin, Charles, Opp: Ottis & Betty Reynolds

Stephens, Pauline, Linden: Providence BC of Gallion

Vick, Gerald, Thomaston: Bethlehem BC of Linden

Watford, Sylvia G., Bay Minette: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette, Mr. & Mrs. Carlton Sharpless

Zeigler, Gene, Lake City, FL: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce

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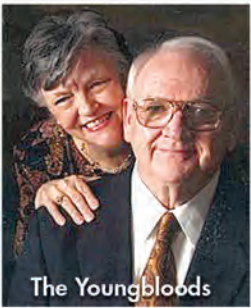

Syrian refugees cross the border from Syria to Jordan.

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World Refugee Day urges awareness, solidarity

The refugee crisis, described as the worst since World War II, has resulted in more than 4.8 million Syrians being registered as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Another 6.6 million Syrians have fled their homes to other parts of their country because of the violence, according to the U.N.

And worldwide there are 19.5 million refugees, more than 50 percent of which are children, according to UNHCR.

The numbers are staggering, and no one organization can handle the enormous task of helping and ministering to this group. That's why UNHCR is working to bring awareness to the refugee crisis through the annual World Refugee Day on June 20.

"On World Refugee Day ... we commemorate the strength, courage and perseverance of millions of refugees," UNHCR says.

One way to increase awareness is through the #WithRefugees petition that calls on governments around the world to "do their fair share" for refugees.

"Now is the time to show world leaders that the global public stands #WithRefugees," according to UNHCR.

The petition — which advocates education, safe living arrangements and work opportunities — will be delivered to the UN headquarters for its general assembly Sept. 19.

According to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

(ERLC), Southern Baptists have a long history of refugee care such as during the refugee crisis following World War II. Then the Southern Baptist Convention urged Congress to pass legislation which eventually opened the doors for 400,000 refugees to be resettled in the United States.

ERLC President Russell Moore has said of refugees,

"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."

For more information about World Refugee Day or the #WithRefugees campaign, visit unhcr.org/refugeeday. (TAB, BP)

World Refugee Day is June 20.

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the BAPTIST FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 19

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

WORTHY

1 Samuel 5:1-6; 6:11-16

The Holy God (5:1-5)

In Chapter 4, the Philistines capture the Ark of God and Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, die in battle. Upon hearing the news, "Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died" (4:18). With that, God fulfills the promised judgment on Eli's family (3:10-14).

The Philistines then place the Ark in the temple of Dagon (vv. 1-2). In no way would God allow the Ark to be placed next to a false god in a false temple. The Ark was a symbol of the presence of the one, true God. There is no other god that can stand in the presence of the God of the universe, the One who created the heavens and the earth. This is symbolized in how on two occasions the Philistines wake up to Dagon having fallen face down before the Ark, the second time with his head and his hands having been cut off (vv. 3-5).

This event also shows that we are not to worship God alongside false gods. He is the only one worthy of our worship. He is the true God of the universe, the One who took on flesh, died and rose from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of the Father. He is the one before whom all will "bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

We either worship Him alone now or when He descends from heaven we, like Dagon, will fall prostrate before Him and be judged.

Judgment Experienced (5:6)

Because the Philistines failed to worship God, He afflicted the area of Ashdod with tumors (v. 6). But opposed to repenting of their idol worship, the men of Ashdod decided the Ark must not remain among them, for God's hand was against them and Dagon their god (v. 7). God continued to inflict punishment wherever the Ark was moved until the Philistines finally decided to return the Ark to Israel (vv. 8-12).

In God's dealings with the Philistines, we see that the failure to worship the God of the Bible only brings death and judgment.

Instructions Followed and Worship Offered (6:11-16)

After receiving instructions, the Philistines returned the Ark to the Israelites (vv. 10-12). When the Ark arrived, the Israelites rejoiced and worshipped God by offering sacrifices and burnt offerings.

First Samuel 6 provides a valuable lesson: there is only one God, the God of the Israelites.

Understanding this text in the larger story of the Bible, we see that the God of Israel is the same God who became man to save sinners.

As the Gospel authors so carefully argue, He is Yahweh in the flesh. It is only by worshipping Him that we have life. Worshipping any other god only brings judgment and death.

You also cannot add Jesus to your pantheon of gods. He is not one among many gods. He is the only God.

When you believe in Jesus, you leave behind your idolatrous past and misconceptions about a god that you have fashioned in your own image, and stand in awe of the One who created you and now has saved you. Only He is worthy of praise. Only He is worthy of our worship. ✠

Bible Studies for Life By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh, Ph.D. Professor of Religion, Samford University

TRANSFORMED IN MY POSSESSIONS Matthew 6:19-24

The Bible is fairly realistic about material possessions. John Wesley spoke of money in a sermon when he said, "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

Money can do much, but it cannot bring to us what we really want and need. Money is a necessary part of life. We all have it. Some have more, some have less. But whether we have little or much, it is still our responsibility to assign money its place in our lives.

We all know the story where a young man turned down the invitation to follow Jesus — and it was because he had many possessions.

Invest in eternal treasures. (19-21)

Jesus is not telling us to be reckless and never to make investments. However, we all need to learn that "there are no pockets in a shroud." We don't take a single penny with us when we leave this earth. Only character is a garment that we can weave in this world and wear in the eternal Kingdom.

Stock markets rise and fall and the value of our 401(k)s can dissipate overnight. Treasures on earth in the 21st century are as susceptible to corrosion and thieves as they were in the days of Jesus.

The key statement of these verses is found in verse 21: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." How much of our interest in money comes from our need to seek and find security? A lot of self-imposed anxiety would leave us if we would relax into the divine promise that God will never leave us or forsake us.

The proper object of our trust as human beings is not a thing called money but a

person called God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy.

Keep a clear focus. (22-23)

The focus of these verses is to have clarity of spiritual vision, maintaining a clear concentration on God and the life of godliness. This will ultimately lead us to share our resources with others.

Karl Marx once gave a speech in which he called for a society which could inscribe on its banners, "From each according to his ability to each according to his need."

Have you ever wondered where he got those words from? He got them from the book of Acts. Whatever our political and economic convictions may be, these principles are biblical principles to which we should hold fast, focusing on God (which Marx did not do) and the needs of others (which God always does).

Stay totally committed to God. (24)

Our Lord concludes this section on money by warning us against covetousness and urging us to seek contentment. He speaks very plainly when He says you cannot serve God and money.

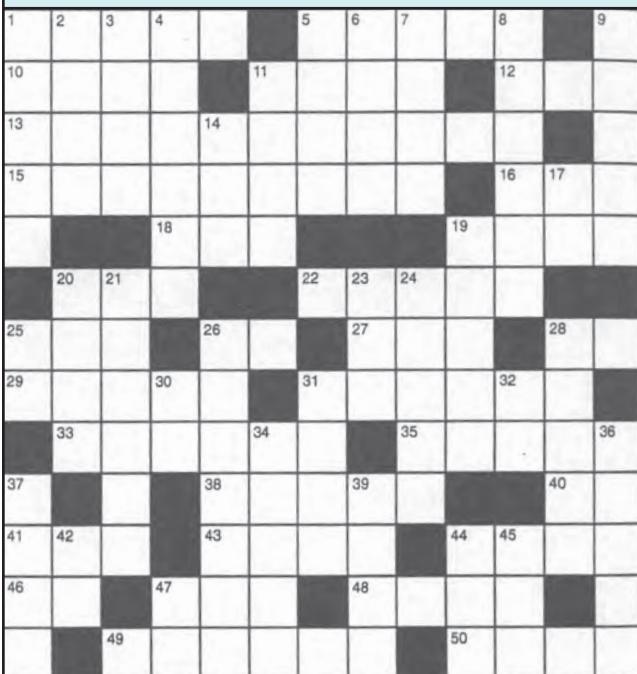
If you're a lover of Charles Dickens you will know that it is he who has described more clearly than in any other literature the covetous character par excellence — Ebenezer Scrooge. At the beginning of the book, Dickens describes him as a "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheeks, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice."

That's the description of a covetous person. He is focused only on himself — not God and certainly not the needs of those around him. ✠



Christian Crossword

By Karen Bush Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. He shall send His ___ before thee. (Gen. 24:7)
5. Three strands intertwined, typically hair.
10. For every head shall be ___. (Jer. 48:37)
11. A toothed wheel.
12. I and my Father are ___.
13. Like a high wall in his own ___. (Prov. 18:11)
15. Children of Israel ___ the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:63)
16. A young person.
18. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a ___.
19. Plural of 18 across.
20. Shall he ___ in harvest. (Prov. 20:4)
22. Love of ___ is the root of all evil. (1 Tim. 6:10)
25. Behold, the ___ is become as one of us. (Gen. 3:22)
26. An expression of acknowledgement.
27. Abbreviation for a washroom.
28. ___ he went and took

- Gomer. (Hosea 1:3)
29. And ___ and Abihu. (Lev. 10:1)
31. Our fathers did eat manna in the ___.
33. River in Lebanon.
35. Put on the ___ of light. (Rom. 13:12)
38. Suitable for a king.
40. ___ prophet is accepted in his own country. (Luke 4:24)
41. Even as a ___ tree casteth. (Rev. 6:13)
43. Genuine.
44. To write specifications.
46. And there appeared ___ angel. (Luke 22:43)
47. Nickname for Theodore.
48. Book of the Bible following Joel.
49. Flushes with water.
50. Crafty.

Down

1. Who shall ___ in thy tabernacle? (Ps. 15:1)
2. How excellent is thy ___.
3. A wise son maketh a ___ father. (Prov. 10:1)

4. Border.
5. ___ your plowshares. (Joel 3:10)
6. To value.
7. Excessively dry.
8. Immediately you will find a ___.
9. Blessed is he who ___.
11. Ye blind guides, which strain at a ___.
14. From the breath of God ___ is made. (Job 37:10)
17. For ___ was dry upon the fleece only. (Judg. 6:40)
19. I ___ knew you. (Matt. 7:23)
20. Take the prophets of ___.
21. Opposite of "beginning."
23. Bravo.
24. Of or relating to the nose.
25. Symbol for manganese.
26. Sing, ___, thou that didst not bear. (Isa. 54:1)
28. Shall not leave in thee one ___ upon another. (Luke 19:44)
30. But ___ the end it shall speak. (Hab. 2:3)
31. If a man shall ___ pit.

- (Ex. 21:33)
32. Ream. (abbr.)
34. God shall supply all your ___.
36. And the other seed fell on ___ soil. (Luke 8:6)
37. From a great distance.
39. ___ master! For it was borrowed. (2 Kings 6:5)
42. When they couch ___ their dens. (Job 38:40)
44. For they neither ___ nor reap. (Luke 12:24)
45. Greek letter following chi.
47. Tone following La.





Photo by Jake Harsh/Harsh Media

Southern gospel group Cana's Voice is made up of Jody McBrayer (left), TaRanda (center) and Doug Anderson (right).

"You help more people by showing them your scars than showing them your trophies. There's healing in knowing you're not the only one."

Jody McBrayer
Cana's Voice

'Powerful stories'

New group Cana's Voice aims to help others by sharing 'uncomfortable reality'

By Grace Thornton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It wasn't the way the story was supposed to go, and TaRanda was angry.

After her husband, Tony, began battling renal failure, she gave him one of her kidneys, and he came through the surgery with flying colors.

"I was a perfect match," she said.

Then a year later, he died.

"I thought we had our miracle. I thought everything was going to be fine," TaRanda said. "I got pretty angry."

And she lost herself and lost touch with God for a while, she said.

"I didn't recognize myself in the mirror. I couldn't get out of bed in the mornings," TaRanda said. "My mom was raising my two little girls, and I felt guilt, shame and felt pretty useless."

Finding healing

It was a long time before she found healing, but over time and through counseling, "God completely turned me around," she said, and she also remarried in March. "I always promised God that I would share with anyone I could that there's no place He can't reach."

That's the message she shares now that

she's a part of southern gospel trio Cana's Voice, a new group whose album debuted at the end of May.

"I think the places that Doug and Jody and I come from, even though it's not the same, it's a similar place emotionally and spiritually," TaRanda said. "The three of us have been through things and questioned God. We've asked questions like, 'Why me? How can God's Word be true when this is happening to me?'"

Cana's Voice wants to be the voice for the broken, said group member Jody McBrayer, who spent 13 years in the contemporary Christian group Avalon.

"That's our heart as Cana's Voice," he said.

"If you are at your wit's end, you need to know that there is hope and that God is doing something, so don't give up."

McBrayer himself has been in that spot before.

"In 2011, I was so deep in depression because I had heart disease," he said, ex-

plaining that the two often go together. "We were at the beach, and I went down to the water one morning and stood at the base of the ocean with the idea that I was going to walk into it and not come out."

But somehow the Holy Spirit got him back to the house from the edge of the water, he said, "and the next day I realized what I had been thinking, and I was shocked."

He called a friend who connected him with a counselor.

"I told the counselor my whole story, and he said, 'I can help you as long as you're still breathing, but I can't if you stop breathing,'" McBrayer said.

So he focused on breathing.

"God is faithful, and I'm grateful that He's sustained me and sustained us," he said. "My family is thriving and we are in a great place now."

But McBrayer said that as a group, Cana's Voice knew they wanted to wear the scars of where they'd been.

"We [made] a conscious decision that we

wanted to be real, even though some of that reality might make people uncomfortable," he said. "You help more people by showing them your scars than showing them your trophies. There's healing in knowing you're not the only one."

It's a message that began from their very first time singing together, said Doug Anderson.

'A God thing'

"When we first got together, we sat down at a piano and started singing, and within the first 30 seconds I knew it was a God thing," said Anderson, formerly of the group Signature Sound. "We spent three hours around the piano crying our eyes out and telling each other testimonies of what God had done in our lives."

Out of that place, the group's songs are worship focused and ministry minded, Anderson said.

"The basic underlying theme is that God loves you and He's not done with you yet," he said. "Our songs are powerful stories of what we've come through. We're all comfortable with where we are — we aren't trying to be somebody else. And we want our songs to resonate with others."

For more information, visit canasvoice.com. #





LifeWay photo

The 7-foot-tall depiction of world famous evangelist Billy Graham is scheduled to move from LifeWay Christian Resource's Nashville campus to Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in North Carolina.

ICONIC sculpture

Billy Graham statue to move to North Carolina

LifeWay Christian Resources is moving a larger-than-life statue of Southern Baptist evangelist Billy Graham from its downtown Nashville location to a LifeWay retreat center in the North Carolina mountains, a few miles from Graham's home. The move is prompted by the 2015 sale of LifeWay's 15-acre Nashville campus.

The iconic bronze sculpture will be dismantled and placed in storage until a new site is ready this fall at the entrance to LifeWay's 1,300-acre Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center, near Asheville, North Carolina.

'Perfect location'

"Ridgecrest is a perfect location for the Graham statue," said Thom S. Rainer, LifeWay president and CEO. "It is only a few miles from the home where Mr. Graham has lived most of his life, and it will welcome nearly 70,000 men and

women, boys and girls who come to Ridgecrest every year for spiritual training and retreat."

The sculpture features a 7-foot-tall depiction of the world famous evangelist standing beside a 17-foot cross. Graham's arms are stretched wide, and a Bible rests in his left hand. At the foot of the cross are three nails and a stone inscribed with the words of John 3:16.

Sculpted by bivocational pastor Terrell O'Brien, the statue was donated to LifeWay in 2006 by two Southern Baptist businessmen from Atlanta, Chris Fryer and Matt Samuelson. It was unveiled at the 2006 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, and placed on the northeast corner of LifeWay's property that December.

At a dedication ceremony, O'Brien said his vision for the statue was to pay tribute to Graham and his life's ministry, but "my heart's desire is to also honor the

gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

During the dedication, Cliff Barrows, longtime music director for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, said the sculpture captures Graham's passions for the Word of God, gospel preaching, the invitation and the cross.

215 million people

The 97-year-old Graham has preached the gospel to an estimated 215 million people in live audiences in more than 185 countries and territories. Hundreds of millions more have been reached through television, video, film and webcasts.

Graham has written 33 books and has been listed as one of the "10 Most Admired Men in the World" for more than 50 years. Now in frail health, Graham resides in the home he shared with his wife, Ruth, who died in 2007, and their five children in the mountains of western North Carolina. (BP)

"Ridgecrest is a perfect location for the Graham statue. ... It will welcome nearly 70,000 men and women, boys and girls who come to Ridgecrest every year for spiritual training."

Thom S. Rainer
president and CEO, LifeWay Christian Resources



**World of
RELIGION**
Compiled from Wire Services

UK rejects asylum to recent refugee Christian converts

LONDON — United Kingdom authorities are not granting asylum to several refugees who recently became Christians. The reason? The new believers cannot "prove the authenticity of their Christian faith" because they cannot answer basic Bible questions, according to The Christian Post.

According to BBC News, an international religious freedom group is defending the new Christians, arguing that Bible trivia (like reciting the Ten Commandments) does not prove one's faith.

One Iranian convert to Christianity told The Post, "One question they asked me was very strange — what color was the cover of the Bible," he said. "I knew there were different colors. The one I had was red. They asked me questions I was not able to answer — for example what are the Ten Commandments. I could not name them all from memory."

Many churches across Europe have recently reported a growing number of Muslim refugee converts, with mass baptisms taking place.

The British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) said many Christian converts are being ejected on "very spurious grounds," The Post reported.

In some instances, genuine converts are being turned down while other "bogus" Christians are able to learn and recite passages of "Bible trivia" in order to secure asylum, according to a recent report from an international freedom group.

Wilson Chowdhry, chairman of BPCA, said, "Our expertise is in the area of Pakistani Christians who make up less than 120 applicants for asylum in the U.K. each year. Less than 50 percent attain leave to remain in the U.K. on initial application and appeals yield little success."

Other rejected asylum cases include individuals who were unable to detail the books of the New Testament; unaware of the Catholic rule of abstinence on Fridays; or unable to name the last book of the Bible (in this case, the individual answered correctly in Farsi, but was misunderstood). (TAB)

Catholic Church looks at ordaining women deacons

VATICAN CITY — In an opening with historic significance, Pope Francis said he wants to study the possibility of ordaining women as deacons, a step that could for the first time open the ranks of the Catholic Church's all-male clergy to women.

The order of deacons was reinstated in the Catholic Church after the reforms of the 1960s, and while deacons cannot celebrate the Eucharist like a priest, a deacon can preach at mass, preside at weddings and funerals and perform baptisms.

But in restoring the diaconate the Church also restricted ordination as a deacon to "mature married men" over 35.

Many protested that limitation, saying the earliest Christian texts also speak of "deaconesses" and arguing that the modern Church also should allow women deacons.

St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI were both theologically conservative pontiffs who said that such a move was unjustified and could undermine the concept of the all-male priesthood.

But Francis said May 12 he agreed the matter should be given more careful consideration, telling hundreds of nuns from around the world that he himself always wondered about the role of deaconesses in the early Church.

Francis noted that deaconesses played a different role in the early Church from that of deacons, an office established by the apostles to focus on caring for widows and the poor so the apostles could focus on preaching.

Francis also has repeatedly said — as he reiterated in early June — that he wants to see women assume greater and more authoritative roles in the Church, but he does not want to "clericalize" them by reducing such growth to mimicking jobs done by men.

Whatever happens, the fact that Francis has opened the door to the debate and the possibility of ordaining women makes it a landmark moment. (RNS)