



**RACIAL RECONCILIATION  
SUNDAY IS FEB. 12.**

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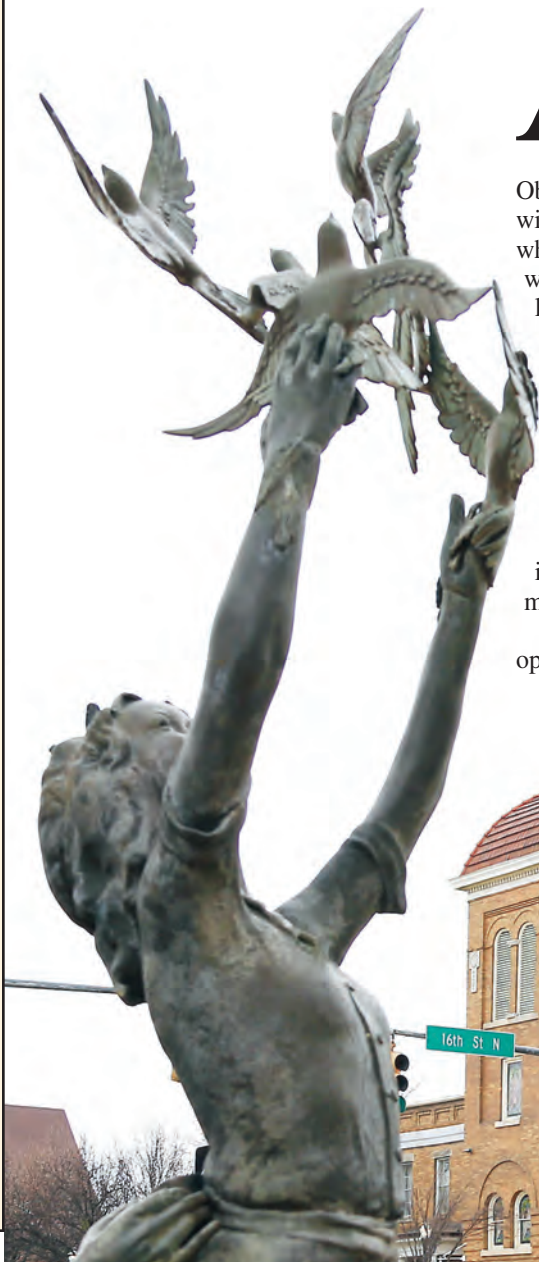


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# Rich heritage

**National civil rights designation offers opportunity to expand church's ministry**



**A** historic section of downtown Birmingham including Sixteenth Street Baptist Church has earned the designation of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument.

That distinction — named in one of Barack Obama's last official acts as president in January — will offer protection to the city's civil rights district, which also includes the historic A.G. Gaston Motel, which Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders used as their campaign headquarters in 1963, and Kelly Ingram Park, where dogs and hoses were turned on civil rights protestors by police. The other church designated is Bethel Baptist Church, headquarters of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.

Arthur Price Jr., pastor of Sixteenth Street Baptist, said he believes the national monument designation will "fortify" Birmingham's place in history — and hopefully broaden his church's ministry.

"One of the things that we have adopted over the years even before

the designation of the monument is a ministry to the thousands of people who want to see the church because of what happened here," said Price, noting that in 1963, the church was the site of a bombing that took the lives of four young girls.

To honor their memory, a core team of retired educators come in and talk to visitors about the history and significance of the church.

**God's saving grace**

"They talk about the climate and mood of Spring 1963 and talk about the bombing and the four little girls who lost their lives," Price said. "But they also talk about the grace, mercy and love of God. They use it as a way to talk about His saving grace."

On any given week, the church may have visitors from places from Ireland to New Zealand to Japan, he said.

The national monument designation was announced Jan. 12 leading up to Martin Luther King Jr. Day and instructs the National Park Service to manage the sites, which may include visitor services and help with preservation.

"As the city with the help of the National Park Service promotes this area more and more, we anticipate expanding our ministry as even more global," Price said. "We believe we are in a position to be able to plant a seed."

Brent Leggs, senior field  
(See 'Historic,' page 3)

SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, BIRMINGHAM

# COMMENT

## Reporting Can Be Dangerous

There is danger when a ministry carries the responsibility of keeping Baptists informed. If people don't like what you report, they sometimes take out their anger on you.

Don't get me wrong. Serving the Lord through the state Baptist paper is a wonderful and important ministry. The paper helps form a sense of identity for Baptists of the state. It enlarges the missions vision. It teaches what Baptists believe and how Baptists work together in churches, associations and conventions.

The state Baptist paper provides biblically based insights into moral and ethical issues — both personal and societal. The state Baptist paper shares what God is doing through Baptists at home and around the world. It promotes what Baptists do together and offers guidance and resources for real life problems.

### Fair and balanced

The state Baptist paper also reports the news in a fair and balanced manner.

Research proves that volunteer organizations like churches have to have a common base of reliable information in order to work together effectively. The state Baptist paper does just that. It is a trusted source of reliable news and information.

Baptist history demonstrates that a strong, vibrant state Baptist paper is a vital part of a cooperative church congregation and a healthy state convention. Serving in this ministry these several years has been a privilege and a pleasure.

But all of the good the state Baptist paper provides does not negate the tendency of some people (including some Baptists) to “shoot the messenger” when they don't like the message.

Such actions raise questions about what type of communications channel Baptists want. Do Baptists want a state Baptist paper that accurately and reliably tries to tell the truth or do they prefer an organ that reaffirms what they already believe?

### Debated stories

In other words, should the state Baptist paper “tell the truth and trust the people” as the old axiom says or should the publication sidestep issues for fear of upsetting someone?

Two major stories raised that question for *The Alabama Baptist* in 2016. One story related to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the other to national politics.

In June 2016 messengers to the SBC annual



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

meeting in St. Louis voted overwhelmingly to call for a ban of displaying the Confederate flag. For many in Alabama, that was a hot-button issue.

### Reliable information

That story could have been omitted from the state Baptist paper but credibility is not earned by telling only “safe” stories. People do not believe a source that is afraid of telling the truth, even if the truth hurts.

The story could have been buried in the back of the publication in a small blurb most people would miss. But Baptists deserve news about Baptists from a Baptist source, not a secular outlet that does not know us or understand us.

At *The Alabama Baptist* we attempt to report news in a way that results in understanding. The story was put on the front page as the most important action of the annual meeting. Excerpts of what was said for and against the resolution were shared to provide context for the final decision. No matter one's personal reaction to the story, readers had balanced, reliable information about the debate.

### Verbal assault

The result of the story was verbal assault and cancellations from certain quarters. Some charged the paper, this writer and staff for personally assaulting Southern heritage through the resolution. Those willing to talk about the story (only a few of the callers and letter writers) seemed surprised when I told them I had not even attended the SBC annual meeting.

In some cases the explanation that the state Baptist paper's mission was to report the news — good and bad — in a fair and balanced manner so readers would know what happened and why it happened fell on deaf ears. These Baptists disliked the story and that meant they disliked the state Baptist paper.

### Presidential candidates

More recently statements surrounding both presidential candidates made national news. Donald Trump's Access Hollywood comments threw the evangelical world into a tailspin. National leaders — including nationally rec-

ognized Baptist leaders — made news for and against Trump.

The prediction that there was no way for the state paper to win by covering this issue proved true. Still we decided the assignment given the paper was to cover important issues that impacted Baptists and this incident certainly qualified.

The paper did one story that wrapped up reactions for and against the candidate based on his statements. The story led with national leaders who supported Trump followed by comments from those who did not.

About a week later, the story broke about comments by Hillary Clinton staff members attacking some Christian believers. In the issue reporting the Trump story, we promised to follow with a story about the Clinton staffers' comments and we did.

As predicted, verbal assaults and cancellations came from both political camps. The first week it was Trump supporters; two weeks after that it was Clinton supporters. Neither was interested in fair and balanced reporting. Neither was interested in how one story related to the other. Neither liked the story about their candidate and that meant they did not like the state Baptist paper.

### Not a new problem

This is not a new problem. It happened during tensions between the state convention and cooperating colleges. It happened during debate over relationships of state convention ministries and SBC programs. It is likely to happen again.

Sometimes people look at one story and do not consider the paper's total coverage of an issue. Despite all the good stories, one story considered inappropriate can result in “shooting the messenger.” That is not good for the individual reader, the state Baptist paper nor the cooperative missions and ministries which Baptists do.

This is not to defend every story. The state Baptist paper runs corrections when errors are made. Occasionally we have printed a second story about a topic when we worked from what proved to be inaccurate information.

### Telling the truth

For the state Baptist paper staff, keeping Baptists informed is a Christian ministry combining our commitment to Christ with the best practices of professional journalism. The staff takes seriously the charge from the Alabama Baptist State Convention to “tell the truth and trust the people.” Telling the truth is of God. And we believe in Alabama Baptists enough to trust them with the news whether good or bad.

Hopefully Alabama Baptists also want this kind of state Baptist paper — one that informs for understanding and perspective, inspires for growth of Christian disciples and connects for missions and ministry. †

**LETTERS**  
TO THE EDITOR

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**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

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# Serving neighbors

## Tennessee requests help from Alabama Baptist DR

By Neisha Roberts  
The Alabama Baptist

**M**uch like any disaster, the wild fires that ravaged parts of Tennessee were a dominating story in the news for days and even weeks. In late 2016 images from the scorched Smoky Mountain areas were shown on news stations across the nation while stories of loss, recovery and hope also surfaced. But after the immediacy of the need for disaster relief wears off there are still the weeks and months that follow — which often hold many needs but fewer volunteers.

That's where Tennessee found itself this January as it called on Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief and other state relief groups for help.

### Willing, ready to go

Ever at the ready, thanks to willing volunteers and donations, state disaster relief teams were sent to the Sevierville and Gatlinburg area Jan. 17, only a few days after being requested.

Chainsaw and skid steer teams from Birmingham, St. Clair and Cleburne Baptist associations, along with a state disaster relief heavy equipment team, served in Sevier County for one week doing chainsaw work and debris removal, according to Mark Wakefield, disaster relief and chaplaincy ministries strategist for the State Board of Missions.

St. Clair Association's disaster relief team leader Glenn Pender said his team of 11 worked hard on its first wildfire relief effort. Pender also served as the team's chaplain while in Tennessee.

"We've been to floods, tornadoes and hurricanes but this was the first wildfire," he said. "Our main goal remains the same though and that is not to just cut down trees and remove debris but to carry Jesus Christ to folks who are in crisis."

### 'Greatest need'

Chris Crain, who's served as director of missions for St. Clair Association for five months, agreed.

"We want to make sure the people who are affected by any disaster will hear the hope of the gospel first, in the right way, partnered with the helping hands of volunteers.

"Everywhere we go the greatest need is a spiritual need," Crain said. ☛



Photo courtesy of Mark Wakefield



Photo courtesy of Mechell Malone

A jewelry box with heirloom rings inside was recovered from the ashes of a survivor's home.



Photo courtesy of Mechell Malone

**Above:** Birmingham Baptist Association Disaster Relief volunteers work on tree removal in Tennessee. **Left:** The three youth serving with Fieldstown Volunteers work on cleanup at a home in Gatlinburg in early January.

## Alabama Baptists step up to serve

**A**longside Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers and many others, individual Alabama Baptists made their way to serve Tennessee on Jan. 4-8 through Fieldstown Volunteers, a newly formed Venture Crew (a division of the Boy Scouts of America).

A team of five served in Gatlinburg in cleanup and helped organize various food, clothing and other household donations given through Volunteer East Tennessee.

One of the volunteers who served on the Fieldstown Volunteers team was a youth member from Emmanuel Baptist Church,

Empire, according to crew adviser Mechell Malone. The team worked alongside volunteers from New York, New Orleans and Florida, she said.

"I'm proud of the hard work the boys put in," Malone said. "One woman drew a sketch of a jewelry box she was hoping we'd find as we worked on her home. The boys sifted through soot and ashes until they found the small jewelry box with the rings inside.

When the woman came by later she burst out crying because it was the one possession she had left, after losing everything." (TAB)

## Historic section of Birmingham 'honors Alabama's rich civil rights'

(continued from page 1)

officer with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, said Birmingham's "vast collection" of civil rights sites should experience increased visitation as a result of the designation.

"National parks are economic drivers for their local communi-

ties," Leggs said. "Civil rights tourism is a growing sector of the \$30 billion heritage tourism market."

### 'Testament' to heroism

As part of his announcement, Obama said the landmarks of the civil rights district "all stand as a

testament to the heroism of those who worked so hard to advance the cause of freedom."

The designation coincided with the naming of the Freedom Riders National Monument in Anniston and the Reconstruction Era National Monument in South Carolina.

Leggs said the monuments "join the ranks of Selma, Montgomery and Tuskegee among our nation's 417 units of the National Parks System. Together these special places honor Alabama's rich civil rights and African-American heritage for all Americans to experience and learn from." (TAB)

Kevin Blackwell prays over pastors and church leaders as they gather to pray over each other at the kickoff session of the FlashPoint Disciple-Making Conference on Jan. 13.

# Making disciples



Photo by Grace Thornton

## FlashPoint conference aims to get back to making disciples like Jesus intended

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**H**e was strung up by his arms in an Asian prison when the man came up to him and asked to know about his Jesus.

“If I tell you, they will beat me even more,” the Christian — who’d been beaten and electrocuted repeatedly — replied.

But the man told him the coast was clear — he’d put something in the drinks of the other guards to knock them out for a little while. He had to know about Jesus, he said — because earlier when the guards had beaten the Christian, his face glowed.

### Spirit of urgency

“That disciple was filled with a closeness with God and a spirit of urgency, and as a result, thousands of house churches were started. It’s like Acts all over again,” said Craig Etheredge, a Texas pastor who leads the FlashPoint Disciple-Making Conference. “Do you have that urgency? Because if you don’t, what you have will never go further than you.”

Etheredge, who also is founder of discipleFIRST, was 1 of 8 speakers at the

recent FlashPoint conference held at Samford University in Birmingham on Jan. 13–14.

The conference was aimed at encouraging churches to get back to making disciples the way Jesus intended for it to be done, said Daniel Edmonds, director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). SBOM co-sponsored the event with Samford’s Ministry Training Institute.

About 200 people from around the state participated.

“It’s a good size for the conference — that’s about the number they want so that it can be interactive and can start a movement,” Edmonds said.

Kevin Blackwell, executive director of MTI, which also hosted the event, said he’s “excited” about what God is doing through FlashPoint.

“You’re empowered with the greatest force in the universe — the Holy Spirit,” he told conference participants during the kickoff session Jan. 13. “We’ve got all the tools and the resources and Jesus gave us a model to use — now we’ve just got to do it.”

Robby Gallaty, pastor of Longhollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tennessee,

and one of the conference speakers, said the Church suffers from one major challenge when it comes to discipleship.

“We’ve taught people how to share their faith, but we haven’t taught them to share their life,” he said. “We invite people to come to Christ, yes — but we also have to invest in those we invite.”

### ‘Catch and consume’ culture

The Church today is a “catch and consume” culture, not a “develop disciples and deploy” culture, Gallaty said.

The resounding answer to all of the world’s problems — from abortion to nuclear weapons to millennials leaving the Church — is discipleship, he said. “If we make disciples, we are going to enact change.”

Sometimes the Church glamorizes Jesus’ disciples when really they were just ordinary men who knew Jesus and invested their lives in others, Gallaty said.

“We are the result of them — that legacy is why we’re here today. What could happen if you got serious about leaving a lasting legacy? What could happen in your staff, your church, your neighborhood, your community? I wonder what God could do if you went all in,” Gallaty said. “I think we’d see a New Testament Church.”

When Christians really know Christ, what happens in the body of Christ will begin to spill out into the world — that’s why Ken Adams, pastor of Crossroads Church, Newnan, Georgia, told conference participants it’s critical for believers to act in love toward each other.

“If we don’t really have love for one another, all these other things we’re doing in Christ’s name are really a bunch of noise,” Adams said. “People ought to look at disciples and go, ‘I want what you’ve got.’ When the family of God can’t get along, why would anyone want to be a part of it?”

West Brazelton, pastor of Grace Bible

Church, Houston, Texas, said in order for Christians to really make disciples, it has to be what their whole lives are about.

“It’s not about fitting discipleship into our busy schedules — God’s work shouldn’t be just shoehorned in there,” he said. “It’s about making everything in our life about discipleship. For example, our jobs aren’t about making money — they’re about making disciples.”

Etheredge said when he trains disciples to be disciple makers, he focuses on the four “fields” of their life where they can invest in others — where you live, where you learn, where you work and where you play.

“Every one of us has these fields, and we have to train our-

selves and our disciples to be intentional to cultivate relationships there,” he said. “You have to have an urgency. You have to be a friend of sinners like Jesus was and live life on life with other people.”

It’s not about having an evangelism program to get people fired up, he said — “it starts with you.”

Set the example by your action and share stories with your church about your own work in your own fields, Etheredge said. “Befriend people who don’t know Christ, care about them and encourage them to explore, connect, grow and multiply as they walk down the road of discipleship with you.”

### Pre-conversion

Discipleship starts pre-conversion, he said, and Christians don’t have the luxury of picking which phases they like better.

Etheredge recounted the story of a pastor who approached him after a conference and asked if it was OK for him to continue the ministry the way he had been doing.

“He said, ‘Can I just meet with a few guys and pray and preach the Word?’ I think in that question he verbalized what a lot of us think. But God is calling us to be intentional about reaching those who aren’t on the path to life. We have to develop that urgency.” ✠



Photo by Grace Thornton

Craig Etheredge leads a breakout session Jan. 14 on how to create a missional mindset in your church during the FlashPoint Disciple-Making Conference.

# National religions

## Official state churches contrast with religious liberty worldwide

By Neisha Roberts  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**he 500-year-long partnership and history bound up between the Church of Norway and its home country makes the recent split something some have called a messy divorce.

After an eight-year process, the Lutheran Church of Norway, the country's largest denomination, separated itself from its country's government Jan. 1 — thus a separation of Church and State. The Church will still receive some support from the State but the Scandinavian government will no longer employ 1,250 clergy and the Church will be considered an independent business.

The separation comes after a Parliament-approved 2012 bill was passed into law in January that amends the constitution, creating a "clear separation between Church and State," according to Jens-Petter Johnsen, head of the Church's National Council.

Other Norwegians disagree.

The revised constitution reads: "The Church of Norway ... will remain Norway's national Church and will be supported as such by the State."

Kristin Mile, secretary general of the National Humanist Association, said, "As long as the Constitution says the Church of Norway is Norway's national Church, and that it should be supported by the State, we still have a State Church."

### 'Culture war' trigger

And although Norway is considered one of the least theistic nations in Europe, it does still have its own Bible belt along the southwest coast. So the constitutional change — from "the state's public religion" to "Norway's national Church" — could "inadvertently trigger a culture war," according to Georgetown University professor Jacques Berlinerblau.

He told Religion News Service (RNS), "Certain anti-secular elements in Europe could point to Norway as an example of the ongoing collapse of Christian culture and Western civilization at the hands of diabolical secularists."

The split will not take effect until June but will allow the Church the authority to name its own bishops and other leaders, without regard to the government's final say, according to news sources. But Norway is not the only country that's seen a split between religion and government.

There are dozens of countries that at one time had a "national religion" but have since been disestablished. According to the New World Encyclopedia, some of those countries are Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Panama, the Philippines, Spain and Wales.

Globally there are still a handful of countries that have a national religion, "State Church" or "official religion" — Afghanistan (Islam), France (Roman Catholic Church), Malta (Roman Catholic Church), Scotland



Unsplash.com

Most Greeks recognize themselves as Greek Orthodox, the national religion. The Greek Orthodox Church pictured here is located in Santorini.

(Church of Scotland), Greece (Greek Orthodox Church), Yemen (Islam) and England (Church of England), to name a few.

These represent religious bodies or creeds officially endorsed by the State. Some countries, according to the encyclopedia, have more than one religion or denomination. And they are endorsed in a variety of ways — from financial support (with freedom for other faiths to practice), to prohibiting any competing religious body from operating to persecuting the followers of other faiths.

The relationship between a national religion and the nation in which it exists varies by location, according to Scott Leveille, executive assistant to the senior pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Birmingham.

Eastern Orthodoxy in countries like Russia, Greece or Romania is "more closely related to each other than in Western contexts," he said.

In Greece, for example, "There's a real sense in which what it means to be Greek as a national identity is to be Orthodox," Leveille told *The Alabama Baptist*.

### Differentiate

Even though the national religion is tied up in a person's identity, Leveille said, "there's a real nominalism ... not so different than in the South (of the United States) where people self-identify as Christian or Baptist but may have never been in a church except for a baptism or a wedding."

In Southeast Europe where Bosnians, Serbs and Croats are "ethnically the same people ... they differentiate themselves based on religion," Leveille said.

"A Serb may not say, 'I'm a Serb,' but instead say, 'I'm an Orthodox.' A Croat will say, 'I'm Roman Catholic.' ... Again the religion becomes a marker of national identity."

In Greece the government pays Greek Orthodox clergy from tax dollars and the Church in turn gives "limited rhetorical sup-

port to the government," according to Gerald R. McDermott, Anglican Chair of Divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham.

There is some distrust between the Greeks and the Church, McDermott said, noting how some Greeks "point to alleged financial corruption by some Church leaders." The Church, however, defends its use of money by noting how it cares for thousands of poor during the ongoing Greek financial crisis.

### Combatting terrorism?

In Russia the Yarovaya Law introduced in 2016 was created to supposedly combat terrorism, but in turn made it illegal to preach, pray or share any religious material (outside certain areas) that are not Russian Orthodox.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom chair Thomas J. Reese said the law will "buttress the Russian government's war against human rights and religious freedom."

Author David Aikman said in an interview with *Christianity Today* that the "Russian Orthodox Church is part of a bulwark of Russian nationalism stirred up by Vladimir Putin. Everything that undermines that action is a real threat, whether it's evangelical Protestant missionaries or anything else."

The measure will leave Russia's evangelical minority at a disadvantage, according to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary church history professor Lloyd Harsch.

"These laws reveal the continuing after-effects of communism, which viewed all religion as the same," Harsch told Baptist Press. "If Muslims are bombing train stations, then restrict the religious activities of Buddhists and Christians [because] all religion [supposedly] is the same."

Some other aftereffects of communism, Leveille said, are why some nations have such an emphasis on religion as it relates to national identity.

"When countries tried to rebuild after communism, they tried to have an identity different than before. ... There was a real re-emergence of nationalism ... and the Church was a part of that (rebuilding)."

A lack of separation between Church and State, however, could mean the government controls the action, practice and bylaws of the Church. It also can mean the religion, whether it's what you practice or not, can play an important role in the society in which you exist — governing laws around marriage, education, employment and countless other policies.

McDermott noted "upsides and downsides" to a country with a national religion.

The upside is that church leaders can speak out on national and international issues from the public square, which "enables the Church to show the relevance of the gospel to public life."

The downside is that the Church "has incentives to support bad State policies that are opposed to the gospel," he said, "and since [church leaders'] salaries are paid by the State, no matter how well or badly they perform, they have no incentive to work hard to evangelize and disciple."

This leads to some religions, although they are considered national religions, maintaining a low "State Church" attendance. In the United Kingdom, for example, less than 1 in 10 people attend church, according to research reviewed by *bbc.com*.

However, if one examines Islam in Afghanistan, more than 99 percent of Afghans are Muslim. Other religions are prohibited, as are items that relate to another religion, like Bibles, crucifixes, carvings or other religious symbols.

The government in places like Afghanistan or Yemen has been "fearful of radical Islamic minorities who seek to overthrow the governments," McDermott said. "They have walked a narrow line," giving verbal support to radical Islamic teaching while hoping the rhetoric pacifies while not allowing them to replace the government with jihadist movements like the Taliban.

This is where some of the genius of America's First Amendment shines through, McDermott said.

### Separation of Church and State

"It prohibits a national religion ... whereby federal tax dollars support a particular religion. No pastor's salary is paid by the government. He or she must work hard to get and keep church members. All in all this is a major reason why American religion thrives."

Leveille, however, noted how the Eastern Orthodox Church has historically exemplified the symbiotic relationship between Church and State.

"Church leaders understood that the State had a particular role to play but so did the Church. And only if they functioned together would the community function in a way that God intended." ✠

# Presbyterians

## Presbyterianism focuses on Bible, sacraments of baptism, communion

By **Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh**  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**P**resbyterians derive their name from a particular understanding of Church government, which is governed at a local and national level by representative assemblies of ordained elders, including pastoral leadership from local churches. Its origins are located in Geneva under the leadership of John Calvin and in Scotland through the ministry of John Knox.

Different Presbyterian groups emigrated from Europe to North America, especially from Scotland and Ireland, and became significant leaders in the 18th century. The only ordained minister to sign the American Declaration of Independence was John Knox Witherspoon, who served as a minister in the Church of Scotland in the early part of the 18th century, and moved to Pennsylvania to become president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).

In 1789 various Presbyterian groups joined together to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Through the years, various divisions have affected this original grouping of churches and today the largest of the denominations are represented by the Presbyterian Church USA with more than 1.5 million, the Presbyterian Church of America with 350,000 members and smaller groups such as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church with 75,000 members. Representative congregations of all these groups can be found in Alabama.

Most people know only a few things about Calvin, principally, that he believed in predestination. For many people the caricature of Calvin as a cruel tyrant, a morose, bitter and utterly inhumane figure is hard to change. At the other end of the scale from Calvin-phobia is the equally biased position of viewing Calvin as the infallible exponent of biblical Christianity. Timothy George, founding dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, suggests, "We do no service to the truth by depicting Calvin as either angelically good or diabolically evil." However, it is clear that the resurgence of Calvinism in Southern Baptist life — through the influence of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky — is a significant movement within the denomination.

### Calvin's influence

Following the death of the first generation of leaders within the European Reformation, Calvin's influence continued to be significant. He was a prodigious writer. Ninety-six editions of Calvin's works had been published in England alone by

1640. He proved to be a seminal figure in European as well as ecclesiastical history, changing the outlook of individuals and institutions as he sought to bring a true reform to both Church and State, which linked the expression of God's rule over the community of saint and sinner alike. Calvin believed that Christianity is not concerned with abstract theology but engages directly with social and political realities.

### Busy pastor

Calvin lived an incredibly busy life. He was not only an academic, but also a busy pastor. He conducted marriages, arranged for baptisms, held appointments with parishioners, engaged in visiting the sick, investigated cases of discipline and preached twice on Sundays and three times each alternating week. Along with his wider work as a commentator and theologian, he was involved in the pastoral concerns of everyday people.

He believed God uses preaching to be a pastoral event and that through regular exposition of the Word souls are brought to an assurance of God's love and forgiveness. Yet pastoral work for Calvin did not end in the pulpit, because he believed pastors should have contact with parishioners. He formulated a rule that nobody was to be ill for more than three days without informing one of the pastors in the city of Geneva to come and visit them. Commenting on the need to not only preach but to pastor, Calvin said people are to be "cared for much more closely and vigilantly" than merely preaching to them.

Philip Melancthon called Calvin "the theologian," and it is undoubtedly in the realm of theology that Calvin made his most important and lasting contribution. It is because he sought to structure his theology as a theology of the Word of God that his influence has been long and lasting, but not without controversy.

One of the main themes which undergirded the whole of Calvin's thought was that of the grace of God, understood within a Trinitarian context: the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The decisive factor of Calvin is not, as many suppose, a view of a sovereign God, but rather a much more biblical view of the essence of God's nature being that of love. Calvin speaks of the grace of God as the "grace of Christ" or as the "grace of the Holy Spirit." He speaks of how, as a result of the grace of God, we experience "communion with Christ" which is accomplished by the "secret energy of the Holy Spirit" by which we come to "enjoy Christ and His benefits." Calvin's emphasis on the grace of God taking the initiative in salvation is seen in his view that faith is a gift of grace:

Christ is the object of faith but "faith itself has no other source than the Spirit."

This emphasis on grace led Calvin to a particular view of predestination and election. This doctrine was not at the heart of his theology. He did not, after all, deal with the topic of election and predestination until the third part of his "Institutes of the Christian Religion." However, many of his followers appear to think otherwise and stress it as a primary aspect of biblical truth.

In 1536 he did not treat the doctrine as a separate one at all and it is only mentioned in two places, although by the final edition it assumes a prominent place. He admitted it was an "awful decree," but said God's inscrutable will must never be questioned.

Calvin's view was not unique in the 16th century.

Apart from some radical Anabaptists, it was a viewpoint that was shared by the majority of the 16th century reformers. Calvin, however, did not shrink from speaking of double predestination, although he was aware of the difficulties it brought to light. He believed God created and chose some people for salvation and created others and chose them for damnation. He argued we should be astounded by the wonder of God's mercy that He has spared any people the retribution which all deserve. He stated that if God had saved all people then His justice would have been suspended. To the question of why He created many only for reprobation Calvin suggested life in the world, even for a short time, was better than nonexistence.

However, Calvin said what we preach is not reprobation but the gospel, which ought to be preached promiscuously, although the doctrine is given to the believer as a stronghold in times of temptation and trials and a way of offering praise and glory to God. He said, "Because we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined or does not belong, our desire must always be that all may be saved."

For Calvin predestination was absolute, particular and double. It was absolute in that it was not conditioned by any outside of God's will. It pertained to particular individuals and not toward groups, and was both for the purpose of salvation and damnation. If foreknowledge determined predestination, then it would only be a foreknowledge of merit, and this would be opposed to the message of the Bible.

Although he always understood the election of human beings was founded on the grace of God, he also stressed that the

proximate cause of reprobation was man's sin and rebellion. He wrote that "when God adopts severity toward men, He indeed does so willingly, because He is the judge of the world: but He does not do so from the heart, because He wishes all to be innocent."

Calvin's views on election brought many people to doubt whether they were indeed saved. Yet, Calvin argued we should not seek to look within ourselves to see if we are one of the elect, but respond in faith to the promises of God. With regard to assurance of salvation, Calvin pointed people to Christ and their relationship with Him and the comfort that came through the Word and sacrament. He spoke of how Christ is the only mirror in which we ought to "contemplate our election" and "if we are elected in Him, we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at Him apart from the Son."

Calvin's theology was captured in the 17th century in the Westminster Confession

of Faith, which is still viewed by most Presbyterians as a statement of doctrine whose authority lies subordinate to the Scriptures. Teaching elders, however, are required to subscribe to its teachings.

Presbyterianism focuses its worship on the Bible and the sacraments of

baptism and communion. They practice the baptism of infants and also baptize believers who were not been baptized as infants. They celebrate communion on a regular basis, believing that those who receive the bread and the wine are nurtured in their faith as they experience the presence of Christ in a special way through this act of worship. Calvin believed the benefits which God grants His people in the Lord's Supper are nourishing, refreshing and confirming them in their faith by a vivid re-enactment or renewal of the ratification of the covenant in Christ's blood.

### 'Kirk session'

In its organization for church government, Presbyterians believe local teaching elders and lay elders come together in a "kirk session; to administer the spiritual life of the congregation." Representative lay elders and teaching elders are then appointed to attend local area meetings called presbyteries. The presbytery then sends representatives to a broader regional or national assembly, generally known as the General Assembly. This is representative of the entire denomination and seeks to discern the will of God for the denomination as a whole on issues relating to mission, theology and moral and ethical issues. Like many mainline denominations, Presbyterians have suffered decline in membership and issues such as human sexuality have caused divisions within the movement.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh is professor of religion at Samford University in Birmingham and serves as pastor for preaching and teaching at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham. ☛*

## WHO are the evangelicals?

Part 4 of 8



CALVIN

# Mommy WARS

## Pressures of motherhood

Kendra remembers hearing news reports when she was growing up about extremely competitive mothers cited for bullying or physically hurting their daughters' competition. One mother even went as far as attempted murder over a cheerleading spot for her daughter.

Kendra has always been thankful she didn't have to grow up in those situations and now that she and her husband have their first child on the way she wants to keep life in perspective just like her mom did. However, Kendra is already feeling her own level of pressures and the temptation to compare herself with others. She isn't worried about becoming one of those mothers she heard about in the early '90s, but she is concerned about balancing it all.

Will she be a good mother? Will she be able to do well in her job while also keeping up with all that has to be done at home? Will she be able to focus on her family solely without worrying about what others around her are doing or are saying she should be doing?

The advice — most of it unsolicited — is pouring in from so many people. How does she avoid getting overwhelmed?

## Moms should focus on building each other up instead of competing

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**elevision shows from the 1950s and '60s often depicted families with a dad who went off to work every morning, a mom who stayed at home all day cooking and cleaning and kids who headed off to school or out to play each morning with a "see you later" and a quick kiss on the cheek.

Though some look back on that period with nostalgia, the "traditional" family shown on television was less common than you might think. According to Pew Research Center, in 1960 just half of children were living in a household with a working father and a stay-at-home mother who were in their first marriage. By 1980 only 26 percent of

children lived in such a household, and by 2014 only 14 percent of households fit the "Leave It To Beaver" model.

As children increasingly grew up in dual-income families where both parents worked, a battle began to brew between moms who stayed at home and moms who worked outside the home. A 1986 book coined the phrase "mommy wars" to describe this choice faced by many women. Since then, however, the phrase has been used to describe differences of opinion on everything from how a baby is born to how it is fed to how it is put to sleep.

For most moms, the advice begins as soon as others are aware of the pregnancy.

"I was never more keenly aware of others people's opinions than while I was pregnant with my first child," said Lisa Keane, clinical director of Pathways Professional Counseling. "Even a common well-intentioned question like 'When is the baby due?' could take a rapid negative turn. Once I

told a sweet woman that I was six months pregnant, and she responded, 'Oh, really? You look like you could have that baby tomorrow!'"

After her baby was born, Keane said other issues quickly became hot topics of conversation and criticism.

### Unrequested advice

"When I talked to other new moms, I heard the same questions: 'Is your baby sleeping through the night yet?' 'Are you breastfeeding or formula feeding?' 'Are you working or staying home?' 'Is she a good baby?' And it seemed that each of my answers were quickly followed with unrequested advice or personal opinions about what I should be doing based on what that person felt was best," Keane said.

Christine Hoover, blogger at [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org) and author (*See 'Traps,' page 9*)





# WEED OUT

## unhealthy words

123rf.com

### Professional counselor encourages moms to let God, His Word be their measuring stick

By Lisa Keane  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

**M**ommy wars are nothing new to our current society. They are birthed out of the traps of comparison and have been around for ages. The reality is that all parents have different life stages, circumstances and situations that dictate what they can and cannot do as a parent. There are working moms versus stay-at-home moms, breastfeeding versus formula feeding and sleep trainers versus nonsleep trainers. This is just a short list of groups who are often pitted against one another in these wars of comparisons and opinions.

#### Justifying choices

Why do we do this? Because we want to be able to justify our choices as being the best and to accomplish this sometimes we feel the need to put down the choices of others. We typically act this way without even realizing we are devaluing that person's choices. Most families are doing all they can to keep their heads above water and make it through each day. When they are put down or judged for how they are handling different parenting crossroads, this can cause undue stress, which is especially

unhelpful because many moms are already stressed.

An exhausted parent whose child is not sleeping well does not need to hear about how your child has always slept all night or all your great ideas for getting that child to sleep. What they do need to hear is that you know they are trying their best. Maybe you could ask questions that would invite advice or offer to watch the baby while they nap. There are many ways we as moms can support, love, pray for and be there for one another regardless of what parenting choices we make. This is how we neutralize the mommy wars and fend off the daggers of comparison and judgment.

While you may make a choice to keep your opinions and advice to yourself, what will you do with all the unsolicited advice or influences of social media that will come your way? We cannot control what other people do or say, so it is vital to filter these communications and make sure you are not allowing your own internal mommy war to take place. We all internalize the things that we hear and see and allow them to influence

how we feel. But an important step in that process is to weed out the words that are not healthy and not based in truth.

As a therapist, I see firsthand the damage of unfiltered words or social media comparisons on a person's psychological health. One counseling technique I found myself using as a new mom was to focus on Philippians 4:8. If I left a conversation feeling overwhelmed or judged, I would try and measure those thoughts against Paul's advice: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

If my thoughts did not align with these guidelines, I knew I needed to replace those thoughts with something true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable or worthy of praise. It was not an easy task to do as an exhausted new mom, but it was a necessary step to keep the internal mommy war at bay.

When I became a parent, I gained a new,

deeper understanding of my need for Christ in my everyday life. Parenting is hard regardless of circumstances. Parenting is exhausting and some days the only fuel I have comes from Scripture or prayer. What I know to be true as a therapist and as a parent is this: All you can do is the best you can with what you have.

#### Spending quality time

Be fully present with whatever time you have with your children. Make sure they know that you love them, not just by your words, but also by spending quality time with them. Take care of yourself so that you have something to give to your children when you are with them. Don't allow other people's opinions or ideas dictate how you feel about yourself. Instead let God and His Word be your measuring stick.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Lisa Keane, LPC-S, is the counseling clinical director for Pathways Professional Counseling, a ministry that helps individuals and families seek solutions to their problems through professional, affordable counseling from a Christian perspective. Pathways is a ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. For more information, visit [pathwaysprofessional.org](http://pathwaysprofessional.org) or call 1-866-991-6864.*



# 'TRAPS of comparison'

## Through Christ, God offers moms grace in mothering

(continued from page 7)

of the article "The End of Mommy Wars," asserts "there is an inherent danger in gathering moms in a room: we immediately compare notes regarding our children's milestones, personalities and sleep habits. Really though we are comparing ourselves, wondering if we are good moms and if our children reflect that."

Keane said she felt judged as each comparison made her wonder if she was making the right choice for her baby. Her confidence in her own mothering skills faltered, but her counseling skills also kicked in.

"Quickly I realized all of this could lead me down a wrong path of feeling like a bad mom who was going to ruin my child forever if I made one wrong choice. All the pressure felt heavy and overwhelming, and it was unnecessary," Keane said.

Many mothers find themselves with similar feelings about their life choices. In a 2014 study, Barna Group reported that a majority of women (59 percent) are dissatisfied with their balance between work and home life. Among moms with children still at home, the rate of dissatisfaction increased to 62 percent. The study found that 8 in 10 moms feel overwhelmed by stress and 7 out of 10 say they do not get enough rest.

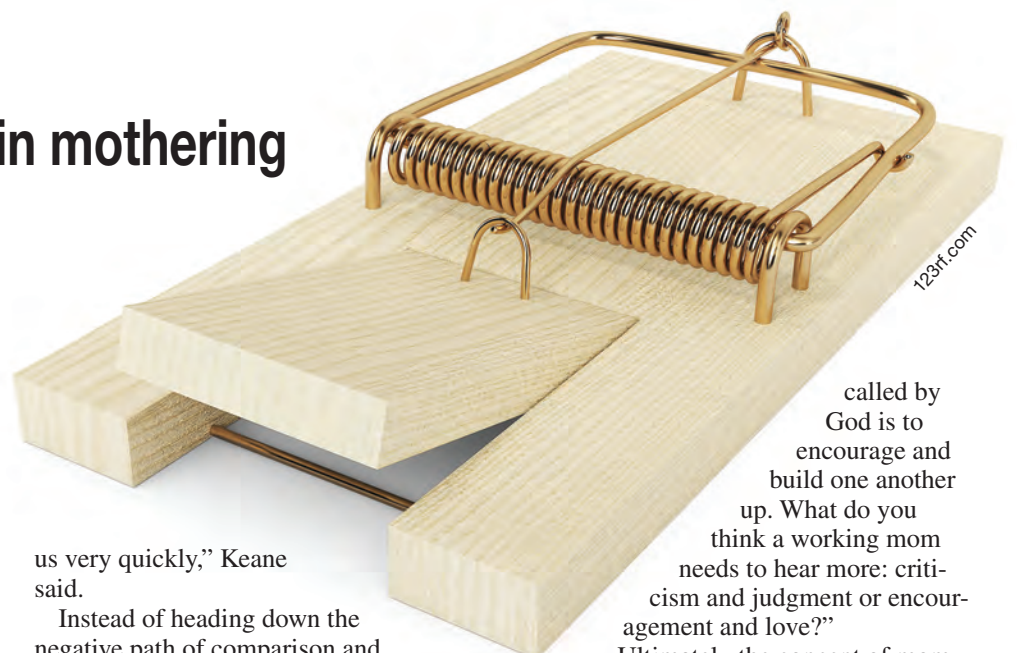
Christian women are not immune from the comparisons, according to Barna. The same study found that when practicing Christians compare themselves to their friends, they are 13 times more likely to

say they are better than their friends when it comes to parenting skills. They also feel superior in physical appearance and overall quality of life.

"The traps of comparison can ensnare

**"When we know God's grace, we stop looking for validation from others for our method."**

**Christine Hoover  
blogger at DesiringGod.org**



us very quickly," Keane said.

Instead of heading down the negative path of comparison and criticism, Keane said moms should be looking for ways to help each other strike a better work and life balance.

### 'Encourage one another'

"As moms, we should be focusing on building one another up and supporting one another," Keane said. "In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul says, 'Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.' He was reminding the Church to live their lives as God had called them to live. Part of living a life

called by God is to encourage and build one another up. What do you think a working mom needs to hear more: criticism and judgment or encouragement and love?"

Ultimately the concept of mommy wars is a spiritual issue, Hoover argues.

"The gospel of Christ holds no place for comparison. We are all equally in need of grace and we all equally receive it as a gift from God. In regards to mothering, the gospel clearly applies: None of us are good enough mothers," she writes.

Fortunately, through Christ, God offers moms grace in mothering just as in other areas.

"He has given us principles in Scripture as a framework for mothering. He also has given us the Holy Spirit to individually lead and guide us in mothering our unique children," Hoover writes.

### Knowing God

A Christ-following mother shares a single goal with other Christ-following mothers, Hoover writes — "that our children know and worship God."

"To end the mommy wars in the Church, we must learn to apply the gospel to our own mothering and also to the mothering methods of others," she says. "When we know God's grace, we stop looking for validation from others for our methods and we are able to extend grace to others. We celebrate and respect the different gifts and styles of mothering as we move toward a common goal." ✠

TIPS

## Stop the mommy wars

- 1. Think before you give your opinion.** Better yet, listen to a mom. She might just need a sympathetic ear to hear her struggles.
- 2. Stop trying to compare your life to others.** Your life is different. You have different circumstances, choices and abilities. There is no exact comparison.
- 3. Leave judgment behind.** When judgmental thoughts arise about choices other moms are making for their children, remind yourself that you are an outsider with only a glimpse of their lives. Replace the judgmental thoughts with a prayer of thanks for that mom and the love she has for her children.

Source: Birmingham mommy Lisa Keane

## Additional resources

▶ **“Missional Motherhood: The Everyday Ministry of Motherhood in the Grand Plan of God”** by Gloria Furman

▶ **“The Mission of Motherhood: Touching Your Child’s Heart for Eternity”** by Sally Clarkson

▶ **“Face-to-Face with Lois and Eunice: Nurturing Faith in Your Family”** by Janet Thompson

▶ **“Beyond Bath Time: Embracing Motherhood as a Sacred Role”** by Erin Davis

▶ **“Set-Apart Motherhood: Reflecting Joy and Beauty in Family Life”** by Leslie Ludy

(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)



# Motherhood

# in the BIBLE

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## Being a mom: ‘honorable position, one designed, appointed by our own heavenly Parent’

By Kathi Macias  
Adapted from her book on motherhood

**T**he Bible relays to us the lives of a multitude of amazing women like Rebekah, Hannah, Elizabeth and Mary who grappled with the issues of motherhood. Many of these individuals would have considered themselves failures as mothers, even as we sometimes do today. Yet God included their varied stories in the Scriptures for several reasons, one of which I’m sure is to help us navigate our lives today and stand with sure footing as we lead children, grandchildren — even others’ children in our communities of caring — down the right paths.

Motherhood is an honorable position, one designed and appointed to us by our own heavenly Parent. True, the responsibilities of wearing the title of mom are great, no matter our age — but the rewards are even greater.

One Scripture familiar to mothers is Proverbs 31. However, one of the biggest problems we have as women when we read Proverbs 31 is the feeling that we can never measure up to this anonymous yet seemingly perfect woman who is pure and godly, devoted to her family and com-

munity, successful in her business ventures and tireless in her efforts to serve everyone and everything around her. When we read her glowing description and then look in the mirror, the inevitable comparison for us “not-so-perfect” wives, mothers and women can be more than slightly discouraging. It doesn’t have to be.

When we take time to carefully examine this remarkable woman’s life and begin to understand who she really is — or at least who she represents — we can then begin to find great comfort in having her as a role model.

### ‘The perfect woman’

Perhaps the most likely explanation for the fact that such a prominent woman of the Old Testament is left unnamed is that she is simply too perfect to be any one particular individual. Instead she may be an ideal composite of the perfect wife, mother and businesswoman, embodying most of the admirable traits of other Old Testament women and typifying what we as modern-day women also would like to reflect in our own lives.

Understanding this “perfect woman” as more of a composite of many women, rather than a portrait of one, makes looking in the mirror and searching for her reflection

a lot less discouraging. And yet we can still find ourselves coming up as seriously deficient in the comparison game if we aren’t careful to remember one very important point: Even the most devoted wife, woman, mother and/or businesswoman can’t do it all — and certainly not all at once. In fact, God never designed it to be so and doesn’t intend for us to try.

We all have seasons in our lives and we may very well find ourselves in different seasons than those with whom we compare ourselves — and particularly so when that comparison is with the Proverbs 31 woman. Remember this woman had financial means that many of us don’t possess. She had servants so she may not have had to make all the beds in the morning or fix breakfast for the kids before they left for school or water the plants or take out the trash or remember to toss something in the slow cooker before rushing off to work.

Life is busy and we all get caught up in it. Living in a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps,” “I can do it myself,” “more is better,” “time is money” society, it’s easy to become deceived into thinking we have to “do it all” and “be it all” all the time and at any cost, when in reality successful life is more about timely priorities and wise choices.

I can’t help but believe that if I had a chance to ask this virtuous Proverbs 31 woman the question about how to handle the changing seasons of life with grace and wisdom — something she was quite obviously good at doing — she would answer something like this: “Slow down. Enjoy the season you’re in and stop trying to rush through it to the next one, for it will arrive soon enough.”

### Be faithful today

No one person can live in all seasons at once. But God can and He does. Knowing this fact enables us to breathe a big sigh of relief, to stop living in regret, gazing in the mirror and seeing a big “F” for failure stamped on our forehead because we think we don’t measure up. It enables us to realize that all we have to do is be faithful today, in the season and circumstances of life where God has planted us.

*EDITOR’S NOTE — Kathi Macias is a speaker and award-winning author of more than 40 books, many of which are available at [newhopepublishers.com](http://newhopepublishers.com). This article was adapted from “Mothers of the Bible Speak to Mothers of Today” by Kathi Macias. Copyright 2009, New Hope Publishers, Birmingham. Used by permission. †*



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# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

To submit news items, email [news@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:news@thealabamabaptist.org) or call 205-870-4720, ext. 112, at least three weeks prior to the event.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **Fullness Christian Fellowship, Vestavia Hills**, will host the Coming Back Stronger men's conference Jan. 27-28, an event geared toward encouraging men to come back even stronger from life's defeats. Stephen W. Brown of Key Life Network, David Zahl of Mockingbird Ministries and Dudley Hall of Kerygma Ventures will speak. For more information visit [comingbackstronger.com](http://comingbackstronger.com). Bart Brookins is pastor.

## GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will host the 39er's CLUB on Feb. 14, 11 a.m.-noon. Kim Tate from Carmel Assembly of God Church, Bonifay, Florida, will perform special music. If you have been involved in the 39er's CLUB contact your table hostess to make or cancel your reservation by Feb. 7. If you would like to attend but have never been before call the church office at 334-684-9617. Steve Wegmann is pastor.

## JUDSON

► Members of **Camp Springs Church, Columbia**, honored **Bob Pemberton** and his wife, Evelyn, on Dec. 11, 2016, for his service

as the church's interim pastor for more than six months in 2016 while the church sought its new pastor, Kevin Freeman (noted in the Jan. 19 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*). Kenneth Burkett, chairman of deacons, presented the Pembertons with a plaque for their service on their last Sunday.



PEMBERTON

## MORGAN

► **Southwest Church, Hartselle**, will dedicate its remodeled worship building Jan. 29, 11 a.m. Lunch will follow the service. For more information call 256-773-5994. Greg Burcham is pastor.

## MUSCLE SHOALS

► **Faith Church, Moulton**, will host revival services every Thursday in February at 6:30 p.m. Speakers will include Daven Watkins, pastor of First Church, Pelham (Feb. 2); Roger Willmore, former president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention (Feb.

9); Daniel Wilson, pastor of First Church, Pleasant Grove (Feb. 16); and Kevin Hamm, pastor of Gardendale First Church (Feb. 23). For more information call the church at 256-974-9351. Jeff Griffis is pastor.

## RANDOLPH

► **Charles "Chuck" Potts** resigned from his role as pastor of **High Pine Church, Roanoke**, on Dec. 25, 2016. He began serving in April 2016. He also served as a part-time paramedic and is a retired training officer in Roanoke.

## SALEM-TROY

► **Salem-Troy Association** will host Man Up 2017 on Feb. 11, 2 p.m. at the Troy Recreation Department. Guest speaker will be Troy Ruiz, editor and producer for the television show "Primos Truth About Hunting." Bring a canned

food item to be eligible to win a free quail hunt. For more information call 334-566-1538. Kenneth Baggett is director of missions.

## RUSSELL

► **Marty Holley** is the new director of missions for **Russell Association**. He previously served as church development director for Covington Association. He also served at Living Water Church, Titus. He and his wife, Shari, served as International Mission Board missionaries to Brazil from 1999 to 2005. They have three children and three grandchildren. †



HOLLEY



## Theology 101

will return next week.

# 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](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org). Copy deadline is two weeks before publication.

## CHURCH POSITIONS

### PASTOR

Flint Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama. Submit resumé to Peggy Cobb at [flintbaptist-church@att.net](mailto:flintbaptist-church@att.net).

### YOUTH MINISTER

First Baptist Church of Talladega is searching for a part-time youth minister. Please send resumé to: [wcoll@bellsouth.net](mailto:wcoll@bellsouth.net) or call 256-362-0081.

### ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

New Hope Baptist Church, located in southern Lauderdale County, Mississippi, in the Clarkdale community, is an actively growing church. We are prayerfully seeking to fill a new full-time staff position of associate pastor of education and families. Those who are passionate for God and passionate about developing and ministering to church families, please email a resumé to: [\[cassocpastorsearch@gmail.com\]\(mailto:cassocpastorsearch@gmail.com\).](mailto:nhb-</a></p>
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### BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Bayside Baptist Church in Lillian, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 533, Lillian, AL 36549 or email [tboharris@gmail.com](mailto:tboharris@gmail.com).

### BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR

Calvary Heights Baptist Church, Alexander City, Alabama, is receiving applicants for a part-time, bivocational music director. Resumés and inquiries may be sent to: [CalvaryHeightsBaptist@gmail.com](mailto:CalvaryHeightsBaptist@gmail.com).

### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Taylorville Baptist, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, seeking full-time administrative assistant. Knowledge of Microsoft Office, ACS, QuickBooks and financial experience preferred. Email resumé to: [\[son@taylorvillebaptist.org\]\(mailto:son@taylorvillebaptist.org\).](mailto:jnel-</a></p>
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# LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



## CORPORATE WORSHIP

I want to respond to one section of the Dec. 15, 2016, article "Why is there Less Congregational Singing." Under heading No. 4, "The lighting communicates performance rather than participation." I agree with Thom Rainer when he says bright platform light and low light for the congregation "fail to communicate that worship by singing should include everyone present." Rainer's statement should be a given in the matter of corporate worship.

I totally disagree with Michael Adler's response. He said in the article: "[Millennials] feel that glaring light showing everyone in the room opens the opportunity for posturing and posing in the congregation when they just want to be alone with God. I tend to agree."

I have been worshipping in auditoriums and sanctuaries and rooms since I was an infant. Never have I ever seen anyone taking advantage of the light as an opportunity to posture or pose. I cannot conceive of what kind of corporate worship behavior Adler is speaking of.

The statement, "They just want to be alone with God," is severely

problematic. By nature, the worship of the church body gathered is corporate worship.

If individual Christians want to be "alone with God," they should do this during their private, personal quiet time and gain this aloneness in the secret place of their hearts in some place where they can withdraw from everyone else.

There is a place for being "alone with God" but that place is not where the church is gathered for public worship.

In corporate worship we gain strength from being with one another, seeing one another, hearing from one another and sharing through voices united together singing hymns and psalms and spiritual songs about the common faith and doctrine which makes us strong.

Have your "alone" time alone. Publicly worship in full company with your brothers and sisters.

Howell W. Burkhead  
Houston, Mo.

## RUSSELL MOORE

Russell Moore (president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) is misrepresented by

many in the media as speaking for Southern Baptists. As a Southern Baptist deacon/church member for well over 60 years, I believe this to be a lie. Southern Baptist officials are elected at every level of our denomination and all of our churches are autonomous — owning our own property, calling our own pastors, electing our own deacons.

We have no popes, cardinals or bishops to lord over us. We give or do not give through the Cooperative Program as we choose. Each level of our associations and/or conventions depend upon local churches for funds.

Moore is an employee of one of our convention's entities. The Southern Baptist Convention is not a political organization. However, we make a stand on moral issues, which spills over into political realms.

We did not hire Moore as our spokesman. I strongly advocate defunding the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

James J. Kirksey  
Robertsdale, Ala. ☙

## in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends



### Ralph Henderson Langley FBC Huntsville pastor emeritus dies

Ralph Henderson Langley, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Huntsville, and popular conference preacher, died Jan. 13. He was 94.

Langley served as pastor of First, Huntsville, from 1979 to 1990 when he was named pastor emeritus. In 1990 he started the Annual Langley Invitational Golf Tournament benefiting student ministry missions at First, Huntsville. He also served churches in Texas, Florida and Georgia and served on the board of directors of *The Alabama Baptist*.



LANGLEY

While in college, Langley also worked as a counselor at the Alabama Baptist Children's Home in Troy and helped organize the Youth Revival Movement that began in Waco, Texas.

He held a bachelor's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, a master's degree from Princeton Seminary in New Jersey and a doctorate from Southwestern Seminary.

He is preceded in death by his son, David, and first wife, Grace.

He is survived by his second wife of 19 years, Eula; one child; four grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; and two step-children. (Hannah Muñoz)

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# Dramatic decline

## Abortion rate hits all-time low in US, report shows

**T**he abortion rate in the United States declined to an all-time low while the number of lethal procedures dropped below a million for the first time since 1975, according to a new report.

The Guttmacher Institute reported Jan. 17 the rate fell to 14.6 abortions per 1,000 women 15 to 44 years old in 2014, which is a decline of 14 percent since its most recent survey in 2011. In its census of all known abortion providers in the country, Guttmacher found abortions totaled 958,700 in 2013 and 926,190 in 2014.

The abortion rate reached its zenith at 29.3 in 1980 and '81, and the total number of abortions peaked at more than 1.6 million in 1990, according to Guttmacher.

### Dramatic decline

Pro-life advocates welcomed the report and pointed to the work of pro-life citizens and legislators as a reason for the dramatic decline.

"The falling abortion number is due to the ceaseless advocacy and ministry of the pro-life community

in neighborhoods all around this country," said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). "The pro-life movement advances by calling out to consciences with the truth of what unborn human life is and matching that call with real ministry to women in crisis.

"While a lower rate is undoubtedly good news, the violent taking of the life of even one unborn child ought to cause us to weep and redouble our efforts to protect every human life and contend against the predatory abortion industry," Moore said.

Americans United for Life (AUL), the country's leader in helping state legislators pass pro-life laws, cited such policies as

well as technology in explaining the trend.

AUL Acting President Clark Forsythe said in a written statement, "Research has shown that

**"The falling abortion number is due to the ceaseless advocacy and ministry of the pro-life community."**

**Russell Moore  
president, ERLC**

life-affirming laws do have an impact on lowering the number of abortions, and with all the life-affirming laws passed since 2010, we have a reason to celebrate the number of lives saved and women protected.

"But another factor in lower[ing] the number of abortions is the power of beautiful pictures of life inside the womb through ultrasound," he said.

In 2016, 43 states considered more than 360 abortion-related measures, according to AUL's annual report released Jan 10. Bills introduced included such measures as bans on government funding of



123rf.com

abortion, restrictions on late-term abortions, ultrasound requirements and prohibitions on abortions based on sex, race or genetic abnormality.

### Use of contraceptives

The Guttmacher Institute, which is affiliated with the abortion rights movement, suggested the improved use of contraceptives attributed to the falling rate and total, but it also acknowledged state regulations and the declining number of abortion clinics may have contributed.

The good news for pro-lifers came only five days before the anniversary of Roe v. Wade — the Supreme Court's Jan. 22, 1973, decision that legalized abortion nationwide — and the observance of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

It also arrived shortly before the second annual Evangelicals for Life conference Jan. 26-28 in Washington. The conference — co-hosted by ERLC and Focus on

the Family — features more than 50 speakers addressing not only abortion but also adoption, end-of-life care, ministry to those with special needs, human trafficking, service to immigrants and refugees and the development of a pro-life worldview.

The report also found:

► Forty-five percent of all abortions in the first nine weeks of gestation were performed using pills.

► The abortion rate declined between 2011 and 2014 in all but six states and the District of Columbia.

► Ninety percent of all U.S. counties in 2014 contained no abortion clinic.

► Five states — Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming — had only one abortion clinic each in 2014.

► Abortion clinics made up 16 percent of all abortion facilities in 2014 but provided 59 percent of all abortions. (BP)



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## Faith leaders call for meeting with Trump

**M**ore than 2,400 self-identified faith leaders are calling for a meeting with President Donald Trump to address issues of "moral" concern, according to The Christian Post.

Those leaders and nearly 10,000 others identified as "moral activists" have asked for the meeting in an open letter created by interfaith coalition Repairers of the Breach.

"Since your election, our communities have been fractured by harassment and intimidation. People of color and religious minorities are afraid. Poor working people ... are disappointed that you have attacked their union leaders while appointing Wall Street elites ... to your Cabinet," stated the letter. "And while we know no [one] is perfect, we wish to speak with you about these ... issues because far too much is at stake for you to succumb to your worst demons while in public office." (TAB)

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 29

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

**WILLING SERVANTS**  
**Judges 4:4-10, 12-16**

God raises up unlikely leaders in due season. In light of new leadership in our nation, believers wonder with anxious anticipation what God is doing in the midst of political upheaval. How is God at work in Washington, in Montgomery, in your hometown? What are you doing to join Him in the work?

In His perfect timing, God calls out willing servants who must depend upon Him. He uses men and women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated for His purposes in order that the name of Jesus is exalted in the state, the nation and to every people on earth.

**An Updated Request (4-7)**

Judge Deborah summoned Barak for an update as to why he had not obeyed God's command to mobilize the Israelite forces at Mount Tabor since God had promised victory. As it turns out, Barak was a coward — so it seems — who did not want to take on the responsibility entrusted to him. He would only go if Deborah went with him.

Why is it that we receive clear instructions from the Lord and then we try to barter a better deal? Why do we think obedience to God is one of several options for a follower of Christ? Do we really believe we are God's equal? Is it pride, arrogance, ignorance or a combination thereof?

Whether or not we have leadership responsibilities, God expects us to serve Him and serve others. When we have a word from God, our proper response is to do what He says.

**A Deal Struck (8-10)**

Barak explained he would deploy if Deborah accompanied him. Deborah agreed, reminding Barak he would not be honored as the victor because of his timid

response. Deborah accompanied Barak and the army to Mount Tabor. As it turns out, the victory would come by another woman. In this honor/shame culture, it was shameful the general of an army of men would find deliverance from their enemy by a woman's hand. Later on we discover the woman prophesied about was Jael (vv. 17-22).

**The Orders Issued (12-14)**

General Sisera received word that Barak's troops were assembling so he summoned his chariots to face Barak. The prophetess Deborah reminded Barak of God's promise and then directed him to engage with Sisera's army. Barak led the army down from Mount Tabor to pursue Sisera's invading army.

**The Victory Won (15-16)**

God caused Sisera's army to become confused and the warriors abandoned their chariots. Barak and his troops pursued Sisera's army until Sisera's army was utterly defeated. God granted victory to Israel's army in this battle but deliverance came through the leadership of Deborah and the shrewdness of Jael.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, build one another up and encourage one another that the body of Christ may be unified and the world will know we follow Christ. Let us learn from one another as we grow as disciples and disciple makers.

When we think of leaders, we may think of politicians, heads of state or masters in industry. God has a place for His people to serve in these capacities, just as He does for those called to vocational ministries and missions. Godly leaders must follow God's Word, His commands and directives. Regardless of our doubts God always remains true to His promises. Followers of Jesus have confident assurance God completes His purposes. †

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

**SHARING WITH JOY**  
**Philippians 1:12-21**

**We can share Christ with joy in spite of hardships. (12-14)**

"I want you to know" was a conventional formula for signaling the body of a letter and thus pointing to the letter's purpose. Paul's purpose was to inform the Philippians of his circumstances as a prisoner. He does not speak first about his personal prospects but instead considers the prospects of the gospel, and in this matter he has reason for joy. Paul assures his concerned friends in joyful tones his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel. His boldness encourages fellow believers to share the Word of God more fearlessly. It was Christ who strengthened fellow Christians so the arrest of their leader actually increased the work of the Kingdom. Only through Christ can believers experience that miraculous shift of attitude from assuming Christianity is an escape from suffering to realizing that in spite of the reality of suffering the Lord empowers us to overcome any trial.

The "praetorium guard" was originally the Praetor's tent in the camp. Hence it came to mean the governor's residence (see Matt. 27:27) or perhaps the soldiers' barracks. Soldiers going to and from the apostle most likely spoke about him to others, and shared he was imprisoned "for Christ."

**We can share Christ with joy in spite of critics. (15-19)**

Paul goes on to acknowledge that some were proclaiming the good news with differing motives. Scholars suggest that those who preached "from envy and rivalry" were the Judaizers who are mentioned in Philippians 3:2. Paul does not criticize the content of their preaching. The problem was not doctrine; it was inappropriate par-

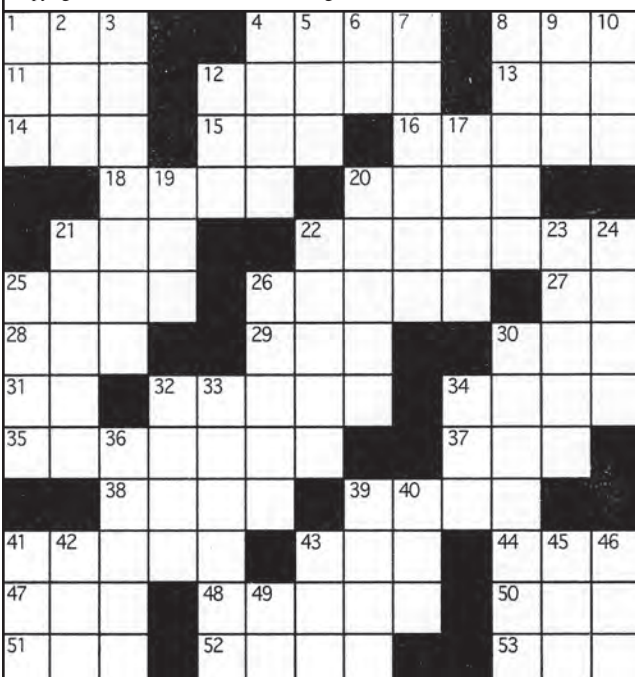
tisanship. In spite of the ill will, Paul rejoices they were at least preaching the gospel. Is Paul saying this with a shrug? Or is this old soldier too weary to fight such partisanship? By no means. Paul did not approve such motives; he had renounced the shameful things (see 2 Cor. 4:2). What Paul realizes is the power of the gospel is not contingent on the motives or feelings of the person preaching. In spite of charlatans and "peddlers of the gospel" (2 Cor. 2:17), we can rest assured the gospel has its own life and efficacy. Because of this assurance, William Barclay declares Paul "had lifted the matter beyond all personalities; all that mattered was that Christ was preached."

**We can share Christ with joy in both life and death. (20-21)**

With robust confidence, Paul is certain of the outcome of the events that are out of his control: He will be "delivered." His language here is an echo of Job 13:16-18. He means deliverance or salvation in a sense larger than release from prison. The deliverance he has in mind is not contingent on his being released or executed. Paul is not filled with dread. His mood is one of "eager expectation," literally of stretching one's head out a window with anticipation and hope. Whatever the outcome, the apostle's deepest hope is that Christ would be magnified. In practical terms, Paul does not want to be ashamed, but rather to exhibit full courage because of his faith in the One who saves us from this world to life eternal. Paul's disposition is the opposite of Hamlet's "To be or not to be, that is the question." Hamlet found life so disillusioning he considered suicide, yet the unknown realm of death was so frightening he drew back. Paul did not desire death as an escape from life; he saw death as entrance into the greater fullness of a life already full. †

## Christian Crossword

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**Across**

1. "There is a way which seemeth right unto \_\_\_\_." (Prov. 14:12)
4. "Whereby we cry \_\_\_\_, Father." (Rom. 8:15)
8. Harness part.
11. "Why make ye this \_\_\_\_ and weep?" (Mark 5:39)
12. "\_\_\_\_ down all thy strong holds." (Mic. 5:11)
13. Alphonso's queen.
14. Still.
15. Trav. org.
16. Mother of Ishmael.
18. The month of April. (Ex. 13)
20. Telegram.
21. Grad. degree.
22. "\_\_\_\_ cumi." (Mark 5:41)
25. "Thou shalt lay up \_\_\_\_ as dust." (Job 22:24)
26. "A great gulf \_\_\_\_ between us." (Luke 16:26)
27. Printer's measure.
28. One. (Scot.)
29. Before. (poet.)
30. "Will do all that thou shall \_\_\_\_ us." (2 Kings 10:5)

**Down**

31. Pronoun.
32. Planted.
34. Complete.
35. "For by him were all things created, ... whether they be \_\_\_\_." (Col. 1:16)
37. Office holders.
38. Camel's \_\_\_\_.
39. "In \_\_\_\_ will I call them my people." (Rom. 9:25)
41. Fire. (Sp.)
43. Egg. (comb. form)
44. "Thou shalt put \_\_\_\_ away iniquity." (Job 22:23)
47. Reply. (syn.)
48. Not in your wildest dreams.
50. A son of Caleb. (1 Chron. 4)
51. Earl Grey, for example.
52. Wither.
53. Number of Joseph's brothers who went to buy corn in Egypt. (Gen. 45)
- Barabbas." (Matt. 27:16)
4. An evil king of Israel.
5. S.A. country.
6. "First" name of nursery rhyme character.
7. Short time.
8. "Take ye wives, \_\_\_\_ sons and daughters." (Jer. 29:6)
9. Actress Claire.
10. \_\_\_\_ paper.
12. A group of Asian languages. (var.)
17. Parched.
19. Good. (colloq.)
20. "For this people's heart is \_\_\_\_ gross." (Matt. 13:15)
21. Sivan, the third \_\_\_\_." (Esther 8)
22. Bores.
23. "And if children, then \_\_\_\_ of God." (Rom. 8:17)
24. Aunt Bea's nephew.
25. Manner of walking.
26. "To the \_\_\_\_, ye shall give the less inheritance." (Num. 33:54)
30. "That ye might have a second \_\_\_\_." (2 Cor. 1:15)

**32. Rise above.**

33. "Melons, leeks and the \_\_\_\_." (Num. 11:5)
34. Compete.
36. Son of Zorobabel. (Luke 3:27)
39. Preposition.
40. Term of address.
41. Physical trait of Mrs. Sprat.
42. Chemical suffix.
43. Female cell. (pl.)
45. Linking verb.
46. "Rejoiceth as a strong man to \_\_\_\_ a race." (Ps. 19:5)
49. Shoe width.



## Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram  
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

One day when I was teaching my Wednesday night class at church, we were discussing salvation and the goodness of the Lord. One young lady asked me a question that not only had I never been asked before, I had not ever really considered and I will never forget it. She said, "Mrs. Jenni, I love Jesus and I do believe He is the Son of God and that He will save me from my sins, but I have a question: Who made God?"

I was ashamed that I did not have an immediate answer for her other than: "He is eternal, He has no beginning and no end" (Ps. 90:2). There was never a cause for me to question His existence, He just was.

So I think in order for us to really know God we have to understand that God is not bound by time. God has always been. Linear time began when He formed the earth. God is not matter — meaning He has no form; He is a spirit (John 4:24).

He came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ and resides with us now in the being of the Holy Spirit — the Comforter. We cannot think of God in the same way we think of other people. He is the great "I Am" (Ex. 3:14), meaning He is everything and the only thing we need.

God is infinite in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three are one and They love us beyond a human capacity. There is an infinite capacity to forgive, love and guide. We are the ones bound by time. One day, our time on this earth will be over and we will go to meet Them. Are you ready? #

# NAVIGATING TAB's new website

[www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org)

The Alabama Baptist (TAB) officially launched its new website Jan. 2. Now you can more easily share more than 35,000 articles with your friends and followers on social media, post your own content about what God is doing in your area, submit your questions and suggestions and manage your account. Here are some helpful tips about navigating the new site.

### How to set up your login credentials:

#### For subscribers of TAB's print and/or digital editions:

- ▶ Click on the gold "Login" button at the top of the site.
- ▶ Click on the first "click here" option.
- ▶ Note whether you subscribe as an individual or through a church. If it's through a church, include the name of your church.
- ▶ You will receive an email with your username and password.

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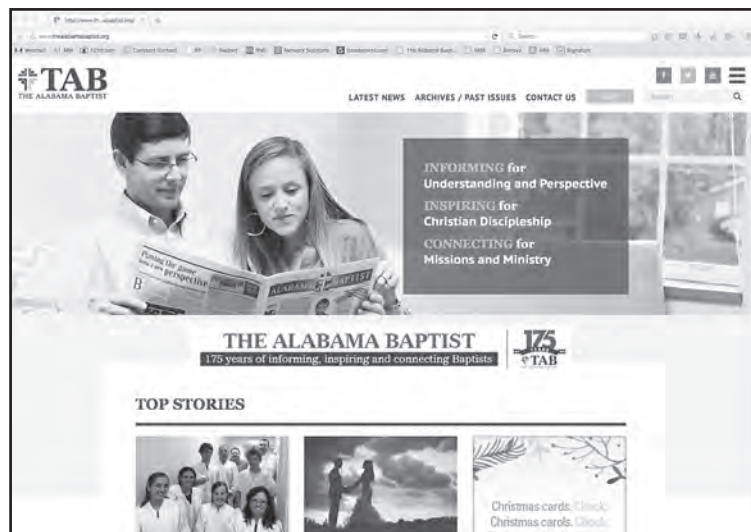
- ▶ Click on the gold "Login" button at the top of the site.
- ▶ Click on the second "click here" option to subscribe to TAB and receive complimentary website access or click on the last "click here" option if you only want to subscribe to the website.
- ▶ You will receive an email with your username and password.

### How to update your church's subscription list:

- ▶ Scroll to the bottom of the page (or open the menu bar) and click "Manage My Account" under "Navigate."
- ▶ Log in to the web portal. If this is your first time logging in, be sure to select "group" for the login type.
- ▶ Once logged in, you can view your church's subscription list, change a member's address or information and add or delete a subscriber. You also can view your church's invoices and payment history. To make a payment, however, call 1-800-803-5201 at any time to pay with a credit card.

### What's the difference between Latest News and Archives/Past Issues?

- ▶ Latest News is current news reported daily by TAB — articles that may not be in the weekly paper.
- ▶ Archives/Past Issues holds all the content that has been printed in TAB since 2000.
- ▶ Breaking News items will scroll across the top of the site.



*"We are excited about the look and user friendliness of our new site and the potential for how it will build an expanded community with our readers."*

Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB editor-elect

## REFLECTIONS

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# Leader by actions

## Lookouts catcher seeks to glorify, honor God

By Bill Sorrell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**T**aking a swing with his baseball bat, Stuart Turner got a hit but not where he aimed.

Splitting his eye open, he went to a nearby veterinarian to get the cut glued shut so he could get back in the game.

"I played that night," said Turner, who was nine at the time.

A catcher for the Chattanooga Lookouts, Turner continues to play for a cut above.

"I pray that I glorify and honor Him in all that I do so others see Him and not myself," said Turner, a Eunice, Louisiana, native. "Jesus is my Lord and Savior. He died on the cross for my sins to where I can live a Christian, holy life glorifying and honoring Him, knowing that I have a spot in heaven."

Since he was 12, Turner has played as a diabetic. He was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when he was in the seventh grade.

"I try to stay on top of it. I try to do the best I can with managing the blood sugar. I check my glucose and take shots as needed every day," said Turner, 24. "I have made it this far with it. I like to say that it doesn't affect or challenge

my game in any way. If you manage it, you should be good."

As a professional baseball player he has faced challenges on the field. His 2016 batting average of .239 was not where he wanted it to be. But he did hit six home runs, scored 40 runs, had 41 RBIs and 22 doubles among his 77 hits and had an on-base percentage of .322 and slugging percentage of .363.

After winning the Southern League championship in 2015, Chattanooga, the Double-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins, failed to make the playoffs this past season while finishing 75-65. The Lookouts won the North Division title in 2014.



Stuart Turner

Photo by Mark Meeks and Todd Norris

"It's definitely fun to make that run in the playoffs," he said.

"Times like through this season you experience the low of the lows. This season was one of those in the fullest sense (with) major ups and downs.

"You always pray and know that He has a plan for you. Just the game of baseball has plenty of struggles. It is a daily mental grind."

Chattanooga third baseman Niko Goodrum said of Turner, "He is always ready to play. In ways he is the captain, controlling the pitchers, controlling the

energy on the field. He is always giving 100 percent, a great effort every time."

Turner said, "I try to be a leader by actions and let my play take over on the field and be the best catcher I can be. Sometimes it's tough trying to control yourself and control your anger on the field but that is what I strive to do."

During the National Anthem, Turner prays.

He hopes by his actions and the "kind of person" he is off the field that people will see that his faith is strong.

His parents, Randy and Mindy Turner, have been role models.

"They have laid the path out for me and showed me what it is like to go about my business in the right way and be a Christian. I was pretty much

raised in the church (New Hope Fellowship Assembly of God, Eunice, Louisiana). I can remember going to Sunday School with my parents every weekend. They have a strong faith in Christ Jesus. I always had it instilled in me," Stuart Turner said.

His family and friends provide inspiration.

"They want to see me succeed," said Stuart Turner, whose strengths are "hard work and belief."

"I think it (God's plan) is to be at this level and continue to put His story out there. My goal is to continue to play as long as I can, be the best that I can be and let others see Christ in me and not myself. I want to be a better person and help lead others to Christ."✠

**"I think it (God's plan) is to be at this level  
and continue to put His story out there."**

Stuart Turner  
catcher, Chattanooga Lookouts



### First synagogue opens in Palermo, Sicily

PALERMO, Sicily — More than 500 years after the Jews were expelled from Sicily, a tiny Jewish community opened its first synagogue in the island's capital city of Palermo.

At an official ceremony held Jan. 12 the Catholic Archdiocese of Palermo transferred to the Jewish community a chapel, the Oratory of Santa Maria al Sabato, which was built above the ruins of the Great Synagogue that once stood in the center of Palermo.

The Sicilian Institute of Jewish Studies and a Jerusalem-based organization, Shavei Israel, requested the transfer. It formally took place on the anniversary of the decree that demanded the expulsion of Jews from Sicily during the Spanish Inquisition: Jan. 12, 1493. Sicily at the time was ruled directly by the kings of Spain via governors and viceroys.

Archbishop of Palermo Corrado Lorefice described the initiative as a "gesture of hope" designed to build dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

Shavei Israel, which is committed to rebuilding Jewish communities around the world and reinforcing their links with Israel, said the Palermo synagogue would revitalize the local community.

The synagogue, which includes a study center (Beit Midrash) and a Jewish heritage center, is operated primarily by Shavei Israel and overseen by Rabbi Pinhas Puntarello, the former chief rabbi of Naples. (RNS)

### Missionary in Timbuktu abducted for 2nd time

TIMBUKTU, Mali — A Swiss Christian missionary abducted more than a year ago by gunmen is reportedly in good health, according to a video released recently by Al-Qaida.

Beatrice Stockly, who lived in an area of Timbuktu known to be a home for jihadists, was kidnapped in January 2016 during a raid on her home. It was her second abduction — the first occurred in 2012 and lasted 10 days, according to The Christian Post.

The two-minute video released by Al-Qaida shows a woman with a black veil over her head who identifies herself as Stockly, notes that she is in "good health" and greets her family. Her voice was barely audible, according to the Post.

In an Open Doors USA report released Jan. 11, Mali ranked No. 32 on the list of countries where Christians are most persecuted, rising 12 spots from No. 44 in 2016.

"This is directly linked with Islamic radicalism and violence," Open Doors reported.

"Since the Islamist takeover of northern Mali in mid-2012 and the subsequent French-led effort to restore Malian authority to the entire country in early 2013, civil liberties and political rights have yet to return to pre-2012 levels in both the north and south of the country." (TAB)

### UK changes how it grants religious asylum

LONDON — The United Kingdom (U.K.) government is now assessing the claims of asylum seekers differently after humanitarian groups expressed concern that a number of Christian converts from hostile nations were being sent home, according to The Christian Post.

The way U.K. officials had previously been processing claims for religious asylum had resulted in a number of Christians from nations like Pakistan and Iran being deported, even though returning to their country would risk their lives.

The U.K. government now says it will assess "the credibility of the claim rather than the personal credibility of the claimant." Asylum seekers who had recently turned to Christianity were previously asked questions that many Western Christians might not be able to answer, such as to name the Ten Commandments or list the books of the Bible.

New training for caseworkers should help prevent authentic Christian converts from being denied asylum, but it may take some time to implement, the Post reported. (TAB)