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NAMB photo by John Swain

Sharing tea, and the conversations around it, build bridges for Kim Carr with refugees through the International Learning Center in Jacksonville, Florida. Carr has acquired an impressive collection of tea sets for use in making connections and building friendships.

'Beautiful thing'

NAMB replicating refugee learning, ministry center in 'Send' cities

Almost 20 years ago, while sitting with her daughter at a mall food court, Kim Carr noticed internationals in exotic clothing surrounded them. She asked her daughter, "When did they all get here? Where are they from? Who is reaching them?"

Armed with a new sensitivity and prompted by the Holy Spirit, Carr felt led to learn more. She began to ask questions and along the way she met a former International Mission Board journeyman who had been praying just hours before for someone to help with international refugees.

Carr's journey had begun. She got her English as a Second Language certification and immediately started looking for students. Surely Jacksonville, Florida — 1 of America's 30 refugee intake centers — would have people needing to learn English, she thought. And she felt God leading her to help unreached, unengaged people groups (UUPG).

Growing project

She started teaching classes at Chinese restaurants until the YMCA had a plan for what would become a growing project.

Fast forward two decades and today the International Learning Center (ILC) of Jacksonville has taught English and citizenship to more than 6,000 people from 108 countries. It has its own 10,000-square-foot building and a thorough curriculum that the North American Mission Board (NAMB) hopes to see implemented in cities throughout North America.

More than 1,500 students have made professions of faith while establishing more than 94 house groups. And God has done this through a woman who hated English as a subject in school. With a bachelor of science in nursing degree, Carr's professional expertise was starting and running medical businesses.

"I kept trying to talk God into a clinic and He kept saying English," Carr said.

Jacksonville is one of the smallest intake centers in the United States but the flow of refugees into the city is diverse. Carr believes most cities have the same mix of immigrants and could use an ILC.

New refugees face many obstacles once they arrive. Most don't know English or America's culture and many left their homeland penniless.

Many flee to America because of threats on their lives, mostly coming from countries where they are leery (See 'Annie,' page 19)

'Annie' season underway; gifts 'important'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

C lay Holcomb said if the city where he serves were in another country then "we would almost be considered an unreached people group."

Where he serves in Portland, Oregon, there's only one Southern Baptist church to every 27,000 people, making it one of the most unchurched cities in North America.

That's why he and his wife, LeAnn, moved there several years ago to plant a church as part of the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Send Cities initiative, which focuses on 32 metro areas.

And that's why Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), says the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) is so important.

"Gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering impact lostness across North America as you assist in the funding of church plants across our nation," she said.

Every year since 1895, (See 'Consider,' page 19)

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR North American Missions

March 5-12, 2017

Alabama goal: \$6.1 million
National goal: \$70 million

North American Mission Board
ANNIE ARMSTRONG
EASTER OFFERING

COMMENT

The Message of the Cup

Holding a cup before His disciples, Jesus said, “This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

The Gospel of Luke says Jesus called the cup “the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).

The irony of Jesus’ words must have filled the room where the disciples had gathered. They had assembled to observe Passover, the holiest of Jewish remembrances. On that night hundreds of years earlier their kindred had been protected by blood swabbed on the doorposts of their homes while the death angel claimed the firstborn of all not under the safety of the blood.

The writer of Hebrews described the event as “the sprinkling of blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch Israel’s own firstborn” (Heb. 11:28).

The disciples understood sprinkling of blood. It was part of the Jewish sacrificial ritual. The Torah, specifically the Book of Leviticus, provided detailed instruction about the sprinkling of sacrificial blood.

On the Day of Atonement the blood of bulls and goats was spread on the covering of the Ark of the Covenant (the Mercy Seat) seven times as a sacrifice for the sin of the people. Part of the ceremony involved sprinkling the sacrificial blood on the people to show they were covered by the sacrifice (Lev. 16).

The Book of Leviticus also outlined in Chapter 14 how the blood from an individual’s sin offering was to be sprinkled by the priest on the one offering to show that person’s sin was covered by the blood.

And the disciples understood sprinkling of blood to seal a covenant. Exodus 24 describes how Moses sealed the covenant between God and the Hebrews with blood. Half of the blood from the animals offered as sacrifices was reserved for God. Moses sprinkled the other half on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (v. 8).

The disciples understood blood offerings were a part of their covenant with God as well



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

as their individual forgiveness of sin.

But the night Jesus spoke, the disciples had trouble understanding what He meant by a new covenant, about His blood being poured out for the forgiveness of sin. That would come only after Jesus died on Calvary’s cross, was buried, raised to new life through the resurrection and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

The apostle John would write, “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7) and add in Revelation 1:5 that Jesus had freed us from our sins by His blood.

The apostle Paul would declare God presented Jesus “as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of His blood — to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:25).

The writer of the Book of Hebrews developed the analogy most completely. There Jesus is called “the Mediator of a new covenant” (Heb. 12:24). Entrance to the Most Holy Place is “by the blood of Jesus” (Heb. 10:19). Jesus is described as the Christ “sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Heb. 9:28).

In Hebrews 9:14 the writer recalls the work of the Jewish sacrificial system and then asks, “How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself

unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from the acts that lead to death?”

Twice the writer of Hebrews uses the imagery of sprinkled blood to refer to the sacrifice of Jesus. In Hebrews 12 he writes, “You have come ... to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood” (v. 24).

In Hebrews 10:22 he writes, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.”

The apostle Peter uses similar imagery when he writes that Christian believers have been “sprinkled with His blood” (1 Pet. 1:2).

Each reference to Christians being sprinkled by the blood builds off the Jewish sacrificial system. Just as those offering sacrifices were sprinkled by the blood of the sacrifice, so all who accept the Father’s invitation to salvation are sprinkled by the blood of the Son for the forgiveness of sin.

Because of His love for lost humankind, the Father chose to make the sacrifice for sin through His Son. And now the blood of that sacrifice is sprinkled on the hearts of all who believe in Jesus. The imagery signifies the believer’s sin is taken away by the blood sacrifice of the Son.

Still the words of Jesus remain. Holding the cup He said, “This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for

many for the forgiveness of sins.” Just as Jesus’ sacrifice was a once-for-all sacrifice (“He sacrificed Himself” — Heb. 7:27), so His blood is sprinkled on the hearts of believers once for all for the forgiveness of sin.

One is not made right with God by partaking of the elements of the Lord’s Supper again and again.

But the Lord’s Supper does commemorate the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary’s cross. It is through the elements that sacrifice is re-enacted and remembered. Taking the bread and the wine speaks of a sealed relationship between God and the Christian believer.

In that way, every time the cup is taken it is a public testimony that the one partaking of the cup has been sprinkled by the blood sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament is fulfilled in every way. The cup symbolizes a new covenant not based on the blood of bulls and goats or the ashes of heifers. No, Jesus entered the presence of God “once for all by His own blood thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

That is the message of the cup. ☩

“Taking the bread and the wine speaks of a sealed relationship between God and the Christian believer.”

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

DEALING WITH GRIEF

I just wanted to thank Bob Terry for his thoughtful and compassionate editorial “Companion the Grieving” in “Thoughts” in the Feb. 9 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

When I struggled after the death of my precious husband for whom I was

the caregiver 24/7, I was accused by some of being “very dark inside.”

My heart was torn in two and because I was exhausted and in pain, my salvation and relationship with the Lord was called into question.

I’d lost my husband and it felt like they were trying to take my Lord away from me too.

Over time I have gotten past most of that but your words gave me so much assurance and affirmation.

Name withheld
Madison, Ala. ☩





"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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Preparing for Easter

'There's little popular appeal' in observing Lent for majority of Americans

During the season of Lent, some Americans give up chocolate or another favorite food. Others dump guilty pleasures like binge-watching television or social media.

But most give up Lent.

Three-quarters of Americans (76 percent) say they don't typically observe Lent, according to a survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research released Feb. 15.

Unlike other Christian traditions like celebrating Easter or Christmas, Lent seems to lack crossover appeal, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. It remains a religious event, he said, rather than one that appeals to a broader public.

That's in part, McConnell suspects, because Lent focuses on giving things up in order to gain spiritual benefits in preparation for Easter. There's no social benefit to Lent like giving gifts or getting together with family.

It's a religious tradition that remains focused on personal devotion, McConnell said. "Lent is not about having your best life now," he said. "Those who observe it believe they are giving up things they want in order to focus on what God wants. There's little popular appeal in that."

Lent, which begins Ash Wednes-

day (March 1) and ends during Holy Week, is traditionally seen as a time of preparation for Easter. Part of that preparation for some includes various forms of fasting as a spiritual discipline — a practice that dates back to the early Church. Lent traditionally lasts for 40 days (excluding Sundays), a time frame established after the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

Catholics (61 percent) remain most likely to observe Lent, according to the survey. Protestants (20 percent) and those with evangelical beliefs (28 percent) are less likely.

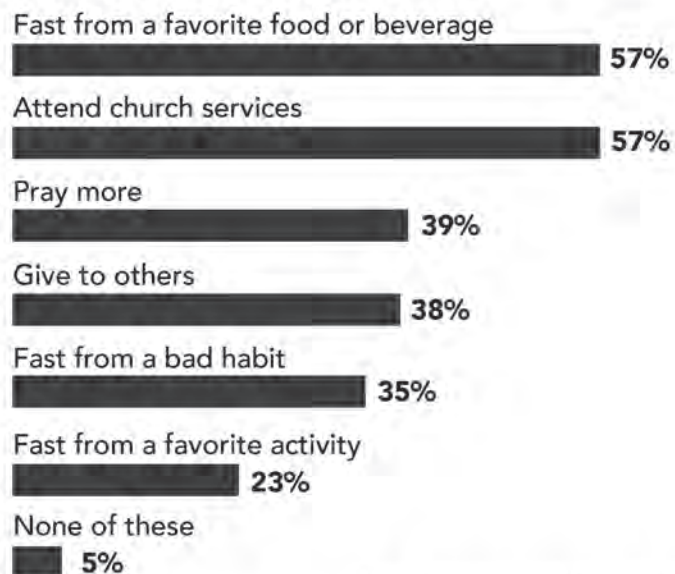
Attending services

Forty-three percent of those who attend church at least once a month observe Lent. That includes 82 percent of Catholics who regularly attend service as well as 30 percent of Protestants.

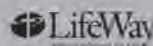
Older Americans, those over 55, are more likely to observe Lent (30 percent) than those under 55 (20 percent). Hispanic Americans (36 percent) and Christians in general (35 percent) also are more likely to observe Lent. Those from non-Christian faiths (12 percent), "nones" with no denominational affiliation (4 percent) and those who attend services less than once a month (15 percent) are less likely.

Among Americans who observe Lent

How do you typically observe Lent?

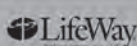
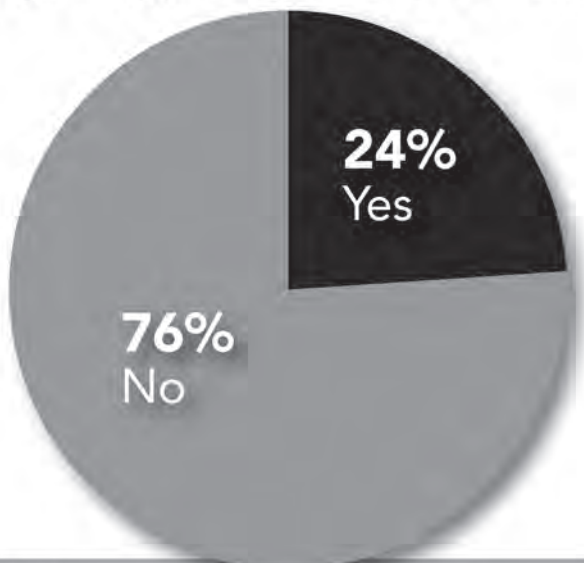


Note: Respondents could select all that apply



LifeWayResearch.com

Among Americans Do you typically observe Lent?



LifeWayResearch.com

McConnell said the degree of popularity of Lent among those with evangelical beliefs is surprising. Lent is often associated with Catholics and Mainline Protestants from more liturgical denominations.

But it holds appeal for evangelicals as well, he said.

For one pastor, however, Lent stirs reticence.

Rob Pochek, pastor of First Baptist Church, Park Street, in Charlottesville, Virginia, wrote in a 2015 blog, "It seems to me that any attempt I may make [to observe Lent] does not memorialize the death of Christ as much as it trivializes it."

Pochek — who respectfully noted his mother's side of the family is Catholic, including three great-aunts who are nuns and a great-uncle who is a priest — wrote, "In one sense, the death of Christ was the most horrific thing in all of human history. ... At the same time it was the most glorious of all deaths. In the death of Jesus, God reconciled the world to Himself."

Fasting from a favorite food or beverage (57 percent) and going to church (57 percent) are the most common ways to observe Lent.

Additional prayer (39 percent), giving to others (38 percent) or fasting from a bad habit (35 percent) also are popular.

Fasting from a favorite activity is less common (23 percent).

Fasting from a favorite food or beverage is more common in the West (62 percent) than the Northeast (42 percent). Young Americans, those 18 to 24, who observe Lent are more likely to choose this option (86 percent) than those over 65 (43 percent). Catholics (64 percent) are more likely give up a food or drink than Protestants (43 percent).

'Giving things up'

Those with evangelical beliefs (71 percent) are more likely to go to church during Lent than those without evangelical beliefs (54 percent).

Those who attend church at least once a month go to church more during Lent (76 percent) than those who don't (32 percent).

"There's a lot more to Lent than giving things up," McConnell said. "Americans who observe Lent also take other steps — like praying, giving and going to church more — to practice their faith." (BP)

Young leader initiative targets 'disconnected'

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) are launching a young leader initiative to better engage pastors between the ages of 25 and 45.

The network's goal will be to provide a sense of brotherhood for those already participating in Southern Baptist life and find ways to engage those who are disconnected or minimally involved.

"A look at the research and a look around the room at most SBC meetings tells you we must do a better job at engaging and including young leaders," said Kevin Ezell, NAMB president.

"I know there are thousands of young pastors who have a great contribution to make to our Southern Baptist family,"

he said. "We want to serve them better and let them know they are loved, valued and needed."

Frank S. Page, president and CEO of the EC, added his hope that the initiative will lead to increased young pastor participation.



AKIN

"The Executive Committee is delighted to partner with the North American Mission Board in this process of engaging younger pastors and churches," Page said.

"Our driving imperative is to do whatever it takes to see every man, woman, boy and girl have the opportunity to hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe this partnership helps make that possible by encouraging those who need to be at the table."

Connecting pastors

The EC has hosted or sponsored several events and efforts under Page's leadership to connect with young leaders, including the Southern Baptist Young Leader Network and formation of talkCP, a blog geared toward younger Baptists with the goal of fostering greater understanding of and participation in the Cooperative Program.

Ezell said the EC and NAMB will form a diverse group of advisers that represent an ethnic and theological mix.

"We simply want to connect the disconnected pastors and provide opportunities for younger pastors to see the value of being a part of this family we call the SBC," Ezell said.

Jonathan Akin will join NAMB's staff to lead the joint effort. He is transitioning from his role as pastor of Fairview Church, Lebanon, Tennessee.

The entities plan to launch the initiative midway through 2017.

Page said, "This summer will serve as a launch date for a new day in how the SBC mobilizes our next generation of pastors." (BP)



'Duty & privilege'



Samuel Henderson: Southern pastor, editor

By Elizabeth Wells
Special to The Alabama Baptist

In November 1852, Samuel Henderson appeared as the new editor of the *South Western Baptist*. Former editor A.W. Chambliss sold the paper to "a stock company who promises to spare no pains or expense to make it all the denomination may desire."

There was change. The three-person stock company — members of First Baptist Church, Tuskegee — urged their pastor, Samuel Henderson, to become the editor. Henderson reluctantly took the job. With associate editor Albert Williams, they moved the newspaper from Marion to Tuskegee.

Henderson and Williams were well qualified to fill the editorial shoes. Williams, a former Mercer University professor, had served as pastor of Georgia churches prior to coming to Alabama. Before becoming a pastor Henderson was trained as a "practical printer," working with his father, John Henderson, editor of Talladega's political paper, *The Patriot*.

Though the owners and editors of the *South Western Baptist* lived in Tuskegee, the newspaper was printed by J.J. and T.F. Martin, of Montgomery, in an office "near the Montgomery courthouse ... just over McBride's New Drug Store." After one year the stock company purchased a press and moved everything to Tuskegee in an office over Morton's and Steven's store.

Remaining doctrinally Baptist and basically religious, the newspaper broadened its scope to include more secular information. The new editors promised true reporting of all topics but did not promise to please the audience all the time, advising their readers that should comments offend or insult them they could discontinue taking the paper.

'Southern cause'

Samuel Henderson dominated the editorial pages. One friend described him as a man of "decided convictions and opinions ... who threw himself with all his heart and energy into the Southern cause." Another wrote: "A master of all current questions leading in the advocacy of every denominational enterprise [and] powerful in Christian controversies."

Though associate editors left and there was no financial Alabama Baptist Convention support, Samuel Henderson



Photo by Neisha Roberts

Files of microfilm of *The Alabama Baptist* from 1843 to 1939, when it was called *Alabama Baptist* and *South Western Baptist*, are housed at Samford University's Special Collection Department in Birmingham.

remained and became part owner. Eventually he was joined by Harden E. Taliaferro, his brother-in-law, with Willis B. Jones in charge of promotion. Taliaferro was a capable preacher, tanner and farmer by trade and a former writer for the *Virginia Baptist Preacher*. Like Samuel Henderson he was a frank, forceful writer, a Southern conservative and a dedicated Baptist.

The newspaper reported the nation's financial uncertainties, Westward expansion and the vigorous debates over slave or free states. Simultaneously readers were aware of the plight of Indian reservation schools and Martha Foster Crawford's work in China. They read the proceedings of Alabama and Southern Baptist conventions, recalled the history of local churches and were urged to pray for the Lord's work.

After almost seven years the dual role of pastor and editor became too heavy. Samuel Henderson's "Valedictory" appeared in July 14, 1859. With Taliaferro, a competent manager and writer himself, ably assisted by John E. Dawson, he could leave and dedicate himself solely to his pastoral duties.

Taliaferro and Dawson assumed ownership and editorship of the paper July 31, 1859. Taliaferro was the "senior editor" but Dawson wrote most of the more spirited denominational and secular commentaries.

In 1860, Taliaferro took readers with him in "on the road" writing about visits to Alabama churches and communities. His travels throughout Alabama and into Tennessee and Georgia described the scenery, the people, mines and river travel. Returning home he bid adieu to ailing Dawson.

Taliaferro constantly reported the tumultuous state of affairs in the country. Finally in the Jan. 17, 1861, issue appeared "The Act of Secession: An Ordinance to Dissolve the Union between the State of Alabama and Other States United under the compact styled 'The United States of America.'"

News from the war front

During the Civil War, Taliaferro filled columns with news from the front. However, on March 6, 1862, Taliaferro resigned as senior editor. He was financially hurting and his staff had joined the Confederate Army.

Enter a new editor April 3, 1862. Samuel Henderson had decided he could keep the paper going. He pledged accurate coverage and articles regarding churches and the war effort with Taliaferro as contributing editor.

By the latter part of 1864 and spring of 1865, the two-page paper was published bimonthly and the April 8, 1865, issue reported Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. Henderson published the April 16, 1865, issue — the last issue — later explaining: "Gen. Wilson's army passed through Tuskegee and that General placed me under bond of \$20,000 to issue no more papers. I was relieved of that bond, but with the financial condition of the country, made it imprudent, if not impossible, to commence at that time."

Would there be an *Alabama Baptist*? Samuel Henderson would remain quiet for a season, for a new day was emerging for Alabama and the South. ✠

David Boudia uses his platform as an Olympic diver to point others to Christ and 'share the hope that comes through Christ alone — not in fame, fortune or even a gold medal.'

'Greater Than Gold'

US Olympic medalist challenges students to use their gifts, talents to point to Christ

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

David Boudia had big dreams — so big that they played themselves out on the stage of the Olympics. He'd trained for years for that dive and when he took it something happened.

He came up with a handful of medals that couldn't fill his empty heart.

"Being in the Olympics was a dream of mine since I was a kid," said Boudia, who tried out a number of sports before he landed on diving.

But when he did, he trained hard.

'Is that it?'

He was USA Diving's male athlete of the year in 2008, the year he made it to his first Olympic Games in Beijing.

He dived and he came home. And when he did, he thought — "Is that it?"

The little boy who had dreamed Olympic dreams found himself at the top of his

game — and all he felt was emptiness, he said.

"I've tasted a lot of things that the world would say is satisfying," said Boudia, who later won a gold and bronze medal in London in 2012 and silver and bronze medal in Rio in 2016. "I've tasted the fame and the wealth and I was never truly deeply satisfied by it."

At first, after Beijing, he took that emptiness back with him to college at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and fell into greater depression. But one day during his sophomore year, the state of his heart hit him like a ton of bricks. He reached out to his diving coach, Adam Soldati, who along with his wife shared with Boudia about who God really was and what He could do in his life.

"I grew up going to church with my family but going to church was more like



Photo courtesy of Zico

a chore to me and was more about being a moralistic person rather than a faithful person," Boudia said.

Up until that point he'd seen the American dream as the place where he wanted to invest his life, but "pursuing this American dream was beginning to take control of my life and was over-promising and under-delivering every time," he said.

So Boudia said he finally laid it all down and gave his life to Christ — the only One who would always satisfy.

"Pursuing your dreams without God will leave you with a longing for something more every time," he said. "It may not be immediate but it will always come back and show you it is fleeting. Only God can fill that void."

That's the message he shares through his book, "Greater Than Gold: From Olympic Heartbreak to Ultimate Redemption,"

which he co-wrote with Tim Ellsworth, associate vice president for university communications at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee.

'Using his platform'

It's also the message he wanted to share with students at the Pursue conference put on by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) on Feb. 17-18 (see story, this page).

Chris Mills, state missionary with a focus on collegiate ministry for SBOM, said Boudia's story resonates with the 2017 conference theme, "My Place in His Purpose."

"He is literally using his platform as an Olympic diver to point others to Christ and share the hope that comes through Christ alone — not in fame, fortune or even a gold medal," Mills said. "Our hope is that students heard his story and walked away challenged to use their gifts and talents to point to Christ."✠

For more
information, visit
davidboudia.com.

Pursue conference aims to help students understand God's plan, purpose



Photo by Bethany Rogers

Around 650 college students and young adults from across the state gather at Pursue conference to explore the different ways God might be calling them to serve Him with their lives.

The recent Pursue conference had a lot of great sessions, great music and great speakers, Chris Mills said — including Olympic diver David Boudia (see story, this page). The theme — "My Place in His Purpose" — was communicated well through the messages, he said.

Having conversations

But even so, the thing that Mills said got him the most excited didn't happen in the worship center or the breakout sessions themselves.

It happened in the hallways. "The highlight for me was getting to overhear students in their conversations with missionaries from all over the world and hearing the questions they were asking," said Mills, state missionary with a focus on collegiate minis-

try for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). "So many were asking good questions — for instance, if they were interested in videography, they were asking about ways they could use that to serve through missions work."

Pursue, held Feb. 17-18 at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, gathered around 650 college students and young adults from across the state to explore the different ways God might be calling them to serve Him with their lives, according to state missionary Mike Nuss, director of SBOM's office of collegiate and student ministries.

"From the beginning, our desire was to help folks at Pursue understand that God does have a plan and purpose for their lives and that their plan — who they

are, what they're studying, what they hope to become — really can sync up with God's plan and have life-changing, Kingdom-impacting consequences," Nuss said. "In the end it's up to us to be willing to use our education, career plans, skills and passion for His service."

And by the end of the weekend a number of students had followed through, completing and turning in applications to serve as summer missionaries and sending Mills texts and emails with follow-up questions.

Mobilization event

"My prayer, my desire for the weekend has been that God would use it as a key mobilization event for students around the state," he said. "And we're seeing that already happening even just a few days after." (TAB)



Rashional THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist



SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Called for a specific moment

We built this city, we built this city on rock and roll." When I read Nehemiah, Jefferson Starship's 1985 Grammy Award-winning song "We Built This City" pops in my head.

I wonder how the lyrics might have been written in 445 B.C. during the 20th year of King Artaxerxes in the Persian city of Susa (capital city of Elam), specifically as they would have applied to the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah.

Brokenhearted over the broken walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah was granted leave from his position of managing, protecting and serving the royal family's wine. His heart was full of compassion and desire to help rebuild the walls around the Israelites' holy city.

Even though Nehemiah was born during the Babylonian captivity outside Jerusalem, he still loved his people and their home city. The lyrics might have gone something like: "We built this city, we built this city on grief and prayer."

After much grief over the situation, Nehemiah turned to prayer as he prepared for his journey to Jerusalem, organized the work to be done and watched the walls come together. Prayer became the foundation for every move he made.

The Book of Nehemiah is thought to be a collection of his memoirs, which leads many to believe he is the author. However, some believe Ezra could be the author because the two books were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible.

Together they tell the story of the restoration of the returned remnant from exile in Babylon. Ezra deals with 2 of the 3 parts of the experience — returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. Nehemiah deals with the third part — rebuilding the city walls, something he accomplished in an astonishing 52 days.

Related to the Christology

of the book, we see Jesus portrayed in the restoration act of what Nehemiah does with rebuilding the city walls.

Just as Nehemiah was the restorer of the walls for Jerusalem, Jesus is the restorer of communion with God for mankind. Nehemiah also was committed to the goal and stayed focused on it despite the ridicule and opposition that came, just like Jesus did during His earthly ministry and ultimate sacrifice to pay the sin debt owed by the human race.

Leadership skills

Nehemiah's leadership and organizational skills are what draw me to this book. Here is a respected layman already demonstrating his character and work ethic by achieving a role not allowed for just anyone and taking it to the highest level by earning the trust and confidence of the king.

It would have been easier and much more comfortable for him to continue in his position and ignore the yearnings of his heart. After all he did not seem to have an extraordinary experience or explosive vision from the Lord. It reads more like a sense or call, so no one else would have known if he did not answer the call.

But Nehemiah knew he was the one chosen to help the others and he could not get away from that quiet yet powerful tug. His resolve is inspiring. His energy and unselfishness can only happen because of his total dependence on God. His integrity, his humility, his love — they are models for how we all should live.

Nehemiah had a heart for the people and the project. He believed in it, cared for them and kept the faith. He knew God had called him to this moment and he gave the credit back to God rather than taking it for himself.

"He built this city, he built this city on heart and soul." ✠

RASHIONAL Extras ...



'We Believe' — Psalm 1:1–3

By the Newsboys

When was the last time you had an extended, uninterrupted conversation with someone face to face — without checking for text messages or taking a call?

For a lot of us, we'd have to think for some time to come up with an answer. And even if you have enjoyed such a moment in recent days, you likely will still agree there's so much noise — too much perhaps — in the world around us.

It's hard to stand still when we're all so busy. It's difficult to stay centered when we're pulled in so many directions. The same can be said of our spiritual selves when so many forces vie for our attention and our affection. When our lives spiral out of control and we can't make sense of the circumstances we are in, we often find ourselves longing for a solid place to stand, to find rest and make sense of it all.

In the song "We Believe" (by the Newsboys), we're given a musical reminder of what it is that is essential to our Christian faith. When we find ourselves on the periphery without hope, we can find something to center us in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. When we find ourselves arguing about things that don't matter, we can remember we all are united as children of the same Heavenly Father.

"'Fight For You' emphasizes the fact that marriage and love are a choice, and it's a choice that you have to commit to love one another and to fight for one another each day. ... The world has so many things trying to work against you and trying to pull

"We believe in God the Father / We believe in Jesus Christ / We believe in the Holy Spirit / And He's given us new life / We believe in the crucifixion / We believe that He conquered death / We believe in the resurrection / And He's coming back again / We believe."

These lyrics provide a musical creed for us that tether us to the central hope of the Church. Placing these central truths in our mind and heart will allow us to stand strong when the uncertainty of life attempts to move us away from what truly matters. The Spirit at work within us will keep us strong and we can help by creating space to recall what is true about God and His work in our lives.

The beautiful opening to the first Psalm gives us a picture of someone who remains firm despite the whirlwind around them.

May you become like a tree planted firmly, rooted in the deeper truths of God. May we remember and reflect on what it is that we truly believe and carry that in our hearts as we step back into the chaotic moments of the world around us. Centering ourselves on the core of our faith allows us to bloom with the fruit of God's kingdom and offer love and beauty to a world that needs it.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This devotional by the Newsboys first appeared on www.biblereading.com and was shared on Facebook by Chris Barton, Phil Campbell. ✠

Lead effectively with these 5 traits

In order to be a complete leader, those in charge must possess certain character traits. Workers need leaders whom they can admire and respect. It should be no surprise that many of these foundational traits can be developed through religious teachings.

The five most important character traits are:

Integrity — Proverbs 11:3 and 2 Corinthians 8:21.

Decisiveness — James 1:6–8. Also part of decisiveness is praying for knowledge and wisdom (Eph. 5:15–17), seeking counsel from others (Prov. 15:22) and submitting to the Lord's will (Prov. 19:21).

Work ethic — Colossians 3:23 and Matthew 5:16.

Discipline — Titus 1:7–9.

Courage — Joshua provides a great example.

— Major General Michael J. Diamond, U.S. Army (retired), author of "The Diamond Process"

Guarding your mind

By Shea Lowery
shealowery.com

We are instructed to meditate on the Word of God daily. However, oftentimes we allow ourselves to become distracted by the enemy's plots and schemes. The adversary's mission is to ensnare us into believing one lie after the other about ourselves, our purpose and even our callings. ... While difficult times send many conflicting messages, God's Word brings

calm in the midst of confusion.

"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2).

The greatest battle we will ever fight is the battle of the mind. So gird up and get ready and refuse to allow the enemy to influence your thoughts. Instead allow Jesus Christ to control you. Remember you will walk according to your mindset. ✠

you apart. As a married couple, if you don't choose to fight for each other then no one else will. That song came from a place where we wanted to look into our marriage and ... encourage others."

— Grayson Reed
Contemporary Christian duo

Follow me on Twitter
@RashionalThs or
email me at jrash@thealabamabaptist.org.

Upcoming Events

ESL workshop

If you've got a heart for international people and reaching them with the gospel, St. Clair Baptist Association might have an upcoming event you'd be interested in — its English as a Second Language (ESL) workshop March 10–11 at the associational office in Ashville. March 10 sessions will be held 5:30–9 p.m. and March 11 sessions will be held 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

By the end of the 11-hour workshop you will be ESL-certified to teach throughout the association or other ministries. You do not have to speak a foreign language to participate in this workshop.

For ministry inquiries, call Director of Missions Chris Crain at 205-594-5173 or Mary Ann Burttram at 205-467-6534.

Registration deadline is March 3. To register, email Beth Jones at csprjones@gmail.com or call 205-594-5030. (TAB)

Complete: A gathering for teen girls

At Complete: A gathering for teen girls, Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) will devote the weekend to girls and their leaders "who want to learn more about how to be godly women in an ungodly fallen world," according to alabamawmu.org.

Hosted by First Baptist Church, Prattville, on March 10–11, Complete seeks to "encourage, equip and inspire teen girls."

Bible studies will be taught by Tracie Griggs and the worship leader will be Anna Sailors.

The event will begin Friday at 5 p.m. and will conclude Saturday at 3:30 p.m.

For more information, visit alabamawmu.org/complete or call 1-800-264-1225 ext. 224 or email mford@alsbom.org. (TAB)

ALABAMA

UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

Pastor Wasden serves same Greenville church for 50 years

Carl Watson Wasden never wanted to be in ministry. He loved construction but he realized God had a different plan.

"Eventually I ended up in the hospital with almost a nervous breakdown until I surrendered to the ministry," he recalled, and Jan. 7 marked his 50-year anniversary as pastor of Antioch West Baptist Church, Greenville — the only church he's ever attended.

Through the years Wasden has learned that "remaining humble and always digging in the Word of God" are key to serving those around him. "And a lot of praying," he added.

In the 11 years prior to serving as pastor Wasden was both music director and a deacon at Antioch West Baptist. From 1975 to 2000 he served as clerk-treasurer for Butler Baptist Association.

A Korean War veteran, Wasden worked in civilian life in construction, lumber and building supplies. He received his education from the Baptist Bible Institute (now The Baptist College of Florida) in Graceville, Florida.

In January the church held a special service and planted a tree in Wasden's honor.

He and his wife of nearly 64 years, Grace, have two daughters (one of which is deceased), three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. (Maggie Walsh)

Alabama Baptist pastor retires after 58 years of service

Franklin Delano Sims recently retired from his pastoral role with Crossway Baptist Church, Bessemer, where he served for eight years.

Sims, who has been in ministry for 58 years and served in different pastoral roles at churches across Alabama, started his ministry in 1958 as the youth director for his hometown church — Central Baptist Church, Tarrant.

Before heading into full-time ministry, Sims attended Samford University in Birmingham for his undergraduate degree.

He later earned his master of divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Sims said he is thankful for his time in ministry, adding that his greatest lesson has been to "put God at the center of everything and desire what the Lord desires."

While Sims has retired from Crossway

Baptist, he hopes to continue working as an interim pastor for a church in need. He can be reached at frankdsims1@gmail.com or 205-527-4517. (Caleb Jones)

State missionary Steve Stephens retires after 37 years

After 37 years of service with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, state missionary Steve Stephens retired Jan. 31.

As an associate in the office of global missions, Stephens has focused on men's ministry through the years. He directed the work of the Royal Ambassadors, Challengers and Men's Ministry/Brotherhood and also was responsible for Alabama Baptist Boys Camps around the state. He served as the SBOM liaison for Campers on Missions as well.

SBOM Executive Director Rick Lance said, "Steve Stephens personified what giving of oneself really means. He has gone the second mile in seeking to disciple men and boys in Great Commission ministries."

Stephens holds a bachelor's degree from Troy State University (now Troy University) and a master of religious education degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to his ministry with SBOM, he has served as minister of youth and education for various churches including Ozark Baptist Church; Shiloh Baptist Church, Sardis; Salem Baptist Church, Brundidge; and First Baptist Church, Gretna, Louisiana.

He and his wife, Tamara, are members of New Bethel Baptist Church, Braggs, and have three sons. (Maggie Walsh)

ABHC's Berg marks 10 years as executive director

As executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission (ABHC) for the past 10 years, Lonette Berg has learned from the past while dreaming about the future.

One of the things she's learned? "Sometimes the most powerful, moving and encouraging stories and testimonies are told by the most modest and unassuming people," Berg said. And the impact of those stories is not determined by the size of the congregation or the amount of resources a church has, she added.

That's been her favorite part of her role as executive director — learning the many ways of how God has been faithful to Alabama Baptists and the ways Alabama Baptists have in turn "shared, served, sacrificed, worked, given and cooperated to serve the Lord and further His kingdom."

Berg, who has a bachelor's degree in history from Samford University in Birmingham and a law degree from Samford's Cumberland

School of Law, previously served as 1 of the 16 volunteer ABHC commissioners from 1998 to 2003. She was named chair of the commissioners in 2002 and served in that position until she was hired as special assistant to then-executive director Frances Hamilton in 2003.

Berg has a passion to serve and support Alabama Baptists and their churches by preserving, remembering and retelling their stories. "I dream that someday the Historical Commission will have been able to preserve written material and pictures for every one of our more than 3,200 Alabama Baptist churches and 75 associations, so that the story of what God has done in and through Alabama Baptists will be protected as fully and completely as possible."

For more information on ABHC, visit abhconline.com or call 1-800-325-9863. (Maggie Walsh)

East Gardendale Baptist pastor Davis retires after 17 years

Allen Davis, pastor of East Gardendale Baptist Church, Gardendale, for more than 17 years, retired Feb. 26.

In 1978 while serving as youth director at Fellowship Baptist Church, Birmingham, Davis said he was called to pastoral ministry and began serving in 1981 as bivocational pastor of Westside Baptist Church, Warrior.

He later served in the adult education department of Gardendale First Baptist Church and as interim pastor of East Gardendale Baptist in September 1999. He then became pastor there in January 2002.

He holds a bachelor's degree from Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, a master's degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a doctorate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary through an extension center at Samford University in Birmingham.

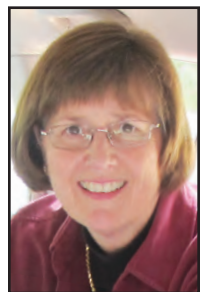
Davis and his wife of nearly 45 years, Donna, have three children and three grandchildren. (Hannah Muñoz)



WASDEN



STEPHENS



BERG



SIMS



DAVIS

Want to see your news in
The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@
thealabamabaptist.org.

Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

BESSEMER

► **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will host southern gospel and bluegrass group Brighter Day in concert March 3, 7 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. for food and fellowship. A love offering will be collected. Scott Bush is pastor.

BETHLEHEM

► **Enon Church, Atmore**, will honor and celebrate the retirement of Pastor C.L. Langford on March 11, 2 p.m.–4 p.m.

CLARKE

► **Fred Odom** is the new pastor of **Elam Church, Thomasville**. He previously served as pastor of Springfield Church, Jakin, Georgia. He holds a bachelor's degree from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville and has taken additional courses from New Orleans Seminary. Odom and his wife, Sheri, have two children and one grandchild. ► **First Church, Coffeerville**, will celebrate homecoming March 19, 10:30 a.m. Johnny Collins will speak and Glory Road and Billy Harrison will perform special music. A covered dish lunch will follow the service. Brent Fuller is pastor. ► **Evergreen Church, Jackson**, will hold a tent revival, "Jesus ... The Chain Breaker," with Mount Sinai Church, Jackson, on March 17, 3 p.m. and March 18, 9 a.m. on Gainestown Road. There will be preaching, testimonies and worship bands. Lunch will be served on Saturday. John David Stewart is pastor of Evergreen Church.

COFFEE

► **County Line Church, Enterprise**, will hold revival services March 10–12. Friday and Saturday services will be at 7 p.m. and Sunday services will be at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Ed Scott will

preach and worship will be led by Brad Price of First Church, Slocomb. The Ladies Ensemble from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville will perform special music in the Sunday morning service. For more information call 334-347-6082. Danny Wiggins is pastor. ► **New Hope Church, Brundidge**, will host 11th Hour gospel singing group March 24, 7 p.m. For more information and directions call Joe Wilson at 334-735-3343. Lanny Shepard is pastor.

MUD CREEK

► **Lawrence Brooks** is the new pastor of **Big Creek Church, Adger**. He previously



BROOKS

served as associate pastor of Pine Ridge Church, Bessemer. He also served at Williamsburg Church, Adamsville, and as an evangelist for 15 years including six years of preaching with Jimmie Hale Mission in Birmingham. Brooks and his wife, Ginger, have six children, 14 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

COLUMBIA

► **Malvern Church** will hold a night of worship with The Mark Trammell Quartet on March 10, 7 p.m. A love offering will be collected. Refreshments will be served following the singing. Hosea Parker is pastor.

FRANKLIN

► **Brent Palmer** is the new bivocational pastor of **Rockwood Church, Russellville**. He was ordained into ministry Feb. 12 at Bethlehem Missionary Church, Russellville. Palmer and his wife, Ashley, have two children.

MARION

► **Marion Association** will host a wild game dinner March

4, 5 p.m. at First Church, Guin. T.W. Norman of Treynor, Iowa, will speak. There will be domestic food, door prizes and fellowship. Kenny Hatcher is pastor. Keith Box is director of missions.

MONTGOMERY

► **Trinity Memorial Church, Montgomery**, will host the Dixie Echoes in concert March 18, 6 p.m. Stanley Holt is pastor. ► **Catoma Church, Montgomery**, will hold a children's ministry indoor yard sale March 11, 7 a.m.–12 p.m. A special sneak preview sale will be March 10, 5 p.m.–8 p.m. Donnie Dickens is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Enon Church, Morris**, will hold a wild game feast March 17, 6:30 p.m. Brodie Croyle will speak. Russ Quinn is pastor.

SIPSEY

► **Sipsey Association** will hold the associational evangelism rally at Big Hill Missionary Church, Gordo, on March 4, 6 p.m. Dan Lanier, pastor of Northcrest Church, Meridian, Mississippi, will be guest speaker. Trey Kelley is pastor of Big Hill Church. Gary Bonner is director of missions.

WEST CULLMAN

► **Tom Richter** is the new pastor of **First Church, Cullman**, as of March 26. He previously served as pastor of New Hope Church, Queens, New York. He holds a bachelor's degree from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky, and a master's degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. He and his wife, Jackie, have three children.✠



RICHTER

Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

Plano's Prestonwood Baptist escrows CP funds

PLANO, Texas — Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, Texas, has decided to escrow Cooperative Program funds temporarily in order to evaluate future support of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) causes. The funds will amount to approximately \$1 million annually. Other churches have reportedly taken or are considering similar action over concerns related to multiple SBC entities

At issue for Prestonwood Baptist are what the congregation calls "various significant positions taken by the leadership of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) that do not reflect the beliefs and values of many in the SBC," according to a statement the church released to Louisiana's *Baptist Message* newsjournal.

The Wall Street Journal interviewed Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist, in December 2016 and he told them the church was "considering making major changes in our support of the SBC."

In the interview Graham said the issue was the alleged "disrespectfulness" by ERLC President Russell Moore toward evangelical supporters of President Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign.

Moore, who publicly opposed Trump during the primary and general election cycles, said in a December 2016 blog post he never intended to criticize all evangelicals who supported Trump.

Graham is a member of Trump's Evangelical Executive Advisory Board. Graham, also a former SBC president, said Prestonwood is engaging in "an internal evaluation" of its giving, "and our desire is not to seek publicity so we can make the right decision for our church and Southern Baptists."

Graham told the *Message* he is "not angry at the SBC." He wants Prestonwood to remain "a cooperating partner [with the SBC] as we have been for many years" but cited "uneasiness" among church leaders about the "disconnect between some of our denominational leaders and our churches."

Moore said, "I love and respect Jack Graham and Prestonwood Baptist Church. This is a faithful church with gifted leaders and a long history of vibrant ministry working and witnessing for Christ." (BP)

CP escrowing by churches draws study

NASHVILLE — The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) recently continued a discussion about churches' escrowing or withholding Cooperative Program (CP) funds during its Feb. 20–21 meeting in Nashville.

The EC's actions came less than a week after it was reported that Dallas-area Prestonwood Baptist Church would escrow CP funds (see story, above) over "various significant positions taken by the leadership of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission." Other churches have taken or are considering similar action over concerns related to multiple SBC entities, according to reports received by the EC.

In light of such reports, the EC's CP Committee unanimously adopted a motion "that the chairman of the Cooperative Program Committee form a subcommittee ... to study and recommend redemptive solutions to the current reality in Southern Baptist life of churches' either escrowing or discontinuing Cooperative Program funds, with the report being brought back to the September 2017 Executive Committee meeting."

CP Committee chairman Rolland Slade said the "concern of the committee is anything that's negatively impacting the Cooperative Program," Southern Baptists' unified channel for funding missions and ministries in North America and across the globe.

"We need to know about [such challenges] and be on top of creating redemptive solutions," he said, noting the ad hoc subcommittee likely would be appointed by Feb. 25.

During a Feb. 21 plenary session, EC member Tony Crisp requested that EC officers "monitor the activities of our various Southern Baptist entities since our last convention ... in relation to how those activities might adversely affect" CP. He requested a report to the full EC at its June 12 meeting in Phoenix. (BP)

— Correction —

In the Feb. 23 article "Alabama Baptist Hispanic church to make history with its own church plant," the ministry facility at 100 Oaks community is maintained by North Jefferson Baptist Association. Several area associations partner to assist with the ministry but North Jefferson Association operates and maintains the facility.

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

Email your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-879-6026 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.



Alabama Baptist Convention **State Board of Missions**



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REASONS TO CELEBRATE

Sometimes I think Christians do not celebrate enough.

I can say that, when I served as a pastor, I missed some opportune times to pause and thank the Lord for His bountiful blessings because, as a pastoral leader, I was busy looking at the next thing on the agenda.

As a state missionary, that oversight has been a challenge for me as well.

In the spirit of celebration and expressing gratitude to the Lord and to His people called Alabama Baptists, I would like to mention a few matters worthy of celebration.

Last November, Alabama Baptists at our state convention voted unanimously, with enthusiasm, to adopt a plan to exchange keys (deeds) with Baptist Health. They are to build us a new facility, approximately 45 percent the size of our current

one on their property in Prattville.

In turn, we will deed our current property in Montgomery to them.

As many of you know, this current property and facility are located next to Baptist Medical Center South.

In a recent telephone conversation, a friend and fellow Alabama Baptist said to me, "The decision we made to exchange keys with the Baptist hospital is something we need to celebrate. I don't think we have done enough of that. Let's celebrate it."

My friend is correct. We do need to celebrate this gift from God. Let us celebrate the fact that the work on the new facility has begun and that reports to the State Board of Missions will be made



By Rick Lance
State Missionary

as progress continues.

By next convention meeting in Huntsville, the building will be almost complete. We will occupy it by the first working day in January, if not before that time.



State Board of Missions and convention leadership gather at the building site of the new Great Commission Ministries Resource Center in Prattville on Feb. 2 to pray and participate in a groundbreaking ceremony.

Let me be confessional with you. I have walked the halls of our current facility and thanked God for the foresight of my predecessors, such as A. Hamilton Reid, who led us in the past to locate here on South Boulevard. I am grateful to George Bagley, Earl Potts and Troy Morrison for utilizing this facility in Great Commission ministries during their times of service.

My prayer for some time has been, "Lord, lead us to a new facility where we can better serve Alabama Baptists in a more cost-effective way."

Of course, others have prayed as well. I cannot and I need not go into detail about this move. However, I must say that this whole episode has been providential in my opinion. I do not use that word often, but I truly believe it applies here in this situation.

Another reason to celebrate is that 2016 gifts through the Cooperative Program were slightly higher than the year previous. That may not sound like much, but we should put this into perspective.

Since the Great Recession, the contributions through the Cooperative Program have not normally increased from year to year. In 2016, Alabama Baptists gave more than \$370,000 dollars through the Cooperative Program than the previous year.

I thank the Lord that the giving pattern for CP is moving in the right direction.

The inaugural year of our state missions offering named for Martha Myers and Kathleen Mallory exceeded our goal of \$750,000. The amount given to the Myers-Mallory State

continued on page 10

continued from page 9

Missions Offering exceeded \$950,000.

This is a real cause for celebration among our Alabama Baptist family. Our \$1 million goal in 2017 is definitely reachable, and we ought to be able to exceed in a hallelujah fashion.

We are still receiving reports concerning baptisms. We do know that almost 5,000 professions of faith were made in Vacation Bible School. This is a PTL cause for celebration.

Lives have been changed, and the Kingdom of God has been advanced. Let us celebrate these new members of the family of believers.

I could go much further in citing reasons to celebrate and to offer gratitude to the Lord.

Among them I would remind us that Alabama Baptists remain a pacesetter in Cooperative Program giving as a state convention in SBC life. We are equally known for sacrificial giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

We should never celebrate out of a sense of self-serving pride. No, never! But we should celebrate what the Lord has done in and through us as His people on mission with the Great Commission.

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for your exemplary service in Great Commission ministries.

Thank you, Lord, for being a God who blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.



Why I Believe in the Cooperative Program

Eastern Shore Baptist Church supports the Cooperative Program because we believe in the Great Commission.

The Cooperative Program provides an avenue for an ordinary church member to actively partner with missionaries at home and abroad.

Our CP giving unites our church to all other generous churches around the globe as we seek to make disciples and baptize believers in the name of Jesus Christ. Our church chooses to give,

because it increases our dependence on God's faithfulness.

Yes, there are months when it would

be easier to keep the money at home and invest it in our ministries and programs.

However, giving generously through the Cooperative Program stretches our faith and keeps our eyes focused on the Holy Spirit's work of saving people all over the world.

We believe in the Cooperative Program, because we have witnessed firsthand the lives being changed because our missionaries do not have to come home to raise their support.

Rather, these exceptional Kingdom warriors are able to stay on the mission field full-time.

Because of our giving and countless other

churches' giving, these men and women are able to teach, preach, worship, fellowship, minister and evangelize without fear of where their next meal will come from or how they will provide for their families.

The Cooperative Program is a true blessing, and we believe it is straight out of the heart of God.

Stuart Davidson serves as senior pastor of Eastern Shore Baptist Church, Daphne.



DAVIDSON



ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries



FREE
EVENT!

Senior Adult Revival Thursday, March 16, 2017

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FAIRHOPE
9:30 a.m.-Noon

Join us at First Baptist Church, Fairhope, in lifting praise to God through song and praying for revival.

Senior adults will hear messages delivered by **Jerry Henry**, retired pastor of First Baptist Church, Fairhope, and **Chris Bell**, lead pastor of 3Circle Church, Eastern Shore. **Ronnie McC Carson**, pastor to adults 55+ at Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, will lead the worship music. You will also be blessed by special music led by UnAshamed, the Gospel quartet from Cottage Hill.

Be sure to look at the various ministry displays in the fellowship hall prior to the session. Then come and enjoy the pre-session music, which begins at 9:15 a.m. ~ **NO MEAL IS PROVIDED.**

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

ONEMISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION

Tuesday, March 28, 2017
10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Westwood Baptist Church,
Alabaster

Cost: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

Registration Closes: March 23, 2017

Learn about a proven formula to achieve your goals. Dan Garland, director of church partnerships at LifeWay Christian Resources, will lead as you learn how to apply these disciplines for success in your church.

Want to know more?

Visit alsbom.org/4disciplines

For more information, please contact State Missionary Daniel Edmonds at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 285, or (334) 613-2285, dedmonds@alsbom.org.

THERE IS A LOT OF TALK ABOUT CHURCH PLANTING ACROSS THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION LANDSCAPE. Did you ever wonder what all this has to do with you and your church?

Perhaps there is an underserved group of people within driving distance of your church gathering who do not have adequate



access to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You may be saying, "I would not even know how to start a new church!"

Well, here is a training event to answer all those questions about how to serve as the sending, sponsoring, mothering church for a new church plant:

Churches Planting Churches Training, Friday and Saturday, April 28-29, 2017, First Baptist Church, 1203 W. Pushmataha St., Butler

Churches Planting Churches Training is designed to examine the values underlying the rationale for becoming a sending church. This training is designed for a church that is seeking to learn how to start a new church or churches from the "sending" church perspective. The six steps necessary to make this a reality will be taught in detail. Many people are fearful of the whole idea of planting a church because they have no idea as to how they would go about it. Information dispels anxiety. Sessions will begin on Friday at 6 p.m. with dinner and conclude on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. This event is planned in partnership with Terry Long, director of missions, Choctaw Baptist Association.

Cost: \$25 per person for the two-day training. Registration is required.

Alabama Church Planter Network Dinner, Sunday, November 12, 2017; 4-8:30 p.m., Essential Church, 1806 University Dr., Huntsville

Church planters and wives or anyone interested in planting are invited to this event. **SPEAKER:** Tommy Duke, lead church planter coach. Tommy is currently the connection pastor at Calvary Baptist Temple in Savannah, Ga. He has not only served as pastor of churches in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Florida but also planted new churches in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Boca Raton, Fla. Tommy has had five-

plus years' experience of training, resourcing and coaching church leaders as vice-president of training for Church Leader Insights and Nelson Searcy. Alongside Searcy, Tommy co-taught the Launch Conference to 500-plus church planters. Since 2014, Tommy has trained over 150 men in Coaching Networks across the state of Alabama. Tommy and his wife, Amber, live in Savannah. They have two children.

This event is promoted as a family reunion of church planter types across our state. We have also had participants from as far away as Montana, Kansas and New York City. Come and hang out with some truly Kingdom-minded missionaries right in our midst.

By Lamar Duke
State Missionary



For more information or to register for either of these events, please call **1-800-264-1225**: State Missionary Lamar Duke, lead church planting strategist, ext. **332**, or **(334) 613-2332**, lduke@alsbom.org or Ministry Assistant Whitney Delashaw, ext. **244**, or **(334) 613-2244**, wdelashaw@alsbom.org.

55th Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries

Annual Conference

Blessed
to be a
Blessing

*"And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."
Genesis 12:2b (ESV)*

March 5-8, 2017
Shocco Springs

General Conference Leader: April Pearson

Worship Leaders: Todd Holcomb & Anthony Lindsey

Website: alabamabaptistsecretaries.com

Facebook page: Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries

Make plans now to join us for a time of spiritual, professional and personal growth through worship, study, fellowship and educational breakout sessions.

For more information, please contact AABS President Sonya Burtis at (256) 796-5346.



Transitional Pastor Training
Meeting the Needs of Alabama Baptist Churches

April 10-12, 2017, Shocco Springs

Begins at noon Monday, concludes Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.

Cost per person: \$219 (double occupancy), \$269 (single occupancy). Prices include two nights' lodging, seven meals and program fees.

This is a three-day training event for interim pastors. Transition ministry is a specialized ministry that brings specific skills and experience to the church by supplying basic pastoral care and leadership during a transition period.

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

For more information, please call 1-800-264-1225: State Missionary Mike Jackson, ext. 210, or (334) 613-2210, or Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, ddickey@alsbom.org.



Mom & Me Spring Fling

for girls in grades K-3 and their moms

Friday and Saturday, April 7-8, 2017, WorldSong Missions Place, Cook Springs

COST: \$60 per person (includes lodging and meals) ✂ REGISTRATION DEADLINE: March 24

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

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

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

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

INTER link

Interlink Youth Ministers Retreat ✂ April 27-29, 2017, GULF SHORES BEACH RETREAT

Come and worship with us in a distraction-free environment. Learn from other men and women serving in youth ministry. Leave healthier, energized and more driven to make disciples in ministry.

Cost: \$50 (includes two nights' lodging and all meals) ✂ **Online Info:** ymlink.org

For more information, please contact State Missionary Scooter Kellum at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 280, or (334) 613-2280, skellum@alsbom.org.

UP link

Uplink On the Road

UP Link is providing an opportunity for practical, intensive training that can be applied to your ministry. Each year, we will bring in different speakers to train and equip youth ministers and their team of leaders in their specialization. Montgomery in the spring and Birmingham in the summer. This will also provide a time of networking that is beneficial to all who attend.

Thursday, August 24, 2017, 5-9 p.m.

Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham

Online Info: ymlink.org

For more information, please contact State Missionary Scooter Kellum at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 280, or (334) 613-2280, skellum@alsbom.org.

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

Senior Adults Singin'

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover

10 a.m. - Noon

COST: \$10 per person (includes lunch)

Psalm 96:1-2 (NIV) says to

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name, proclaim his salvation day after day.

Join Frank Jones as he leads senior adults from churches all over Alabama in four locations to sing hymns to the Lord. You may have been singing the hymns since you



were a child, but each time you sing them, your praise to God is new again!

ONLINE INFO AND REGISTRATION:

alsbom.org/senioradultsingin

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

Sunday through Wednesday, April 10-12, 2017
Shocco Springs

Spring Senior Adult Retreat

THEME: FULLFILLED

Come and worship the Lord with us. Hear messages from Sammy Gilbreath, state missionary and director of the Office of Evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The celebration speaker will be Max Roden from Arab. George Weeks, minister of senior adults at Gardendale First Baptist Church, will lead the worship music.

There will also be many different sessions led by knowledgeable speakers on topics that will especially relate to senior adults' lives.

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

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

JULY 7-8, 2017
SHOCCO SPRINGS

An
Interactive
Leadership
Conference



Cost: \$125 per person (3-4 people per room), \$20 deposit per person due at registration.

NEXT BEST PRICE DEADLINE: MAY 11

Registration: alsbom.org/children-summit or 1-800-280-1105

A training event for children's choir leaders:

- Experience the fun of teaching music to any age preschooler or child.
- Discover new ways to make choir or music time a favorite for kids.
- Watch the love for worship come alive.
- Mingle with others in similar situations.
- Learn to use games and toys to add more excitement in your music time.
- Hands-on learning and fun in children's choirs.
- Great conference for day care workers.
- Can be used for CEU credits!

Cost includes interactive sessions from top-notch clinicians, breakout times to interact with other choir workers, lodging, three meals, "munch & mingle" fellowship, Pine Lake music vendor to purchase whatever needs you might have in your choir, and much more.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland at

1-800-264-1225, ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279, scleveland@alsbom.org.

children's
choir
summit

2017 REGIONAL AND STATE BIBLE DRILLS MAY THE WORD BE WITH YOU

**REQUIRED ONLINE REGISTRATION:
ALSBOM.ORG/BIBLEDRILL**

2017 REGIONAL BIBLE DRILLS

• **North:**

East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, April 20
Sign-in begins at 3:30 p.m.; drills begin at 4 p.m.

• **South East:**

Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan, April 20
Sign-in begins at 3:30 p.m.; drills begin at 4 p.m.

• **North Central:**

Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, April 23
Sign-in begins at 1:30 p.m.; drills begin at 2 p.m.

• **South Central:**

Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, April 23
Sign-in begins at 1:30 p.m.; drills begin at 2 p.m.

• **South West:**

College Park Baptist Church, Mobile, April 24
Sign-in begins at 3:30 p.m.; drills begin at 4 p.m.

• **West Central:**

First Baptist Church, Livingston, April 24
Sign-in begins at 3:30 p.m.; drills begin at 4 p.m.

• **North East:**

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, April 25
Sign-in begins at 3:30 p.m.; drills begin at 4 p.m.

**2017 STATE BIBLE DRILL AND SPEAKERS
TOURNAMENT**

First Baptist Church, Montgomery, April 29
Sign-in begins at 12:30 p.m.; drills begin at 1 p.m.

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



A CHURCH REVITALIZATION Event with Johnny Hunt

Tuesday, May 9, 2017, Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Speaker: Johnny Hunt // **Cost:** \$20

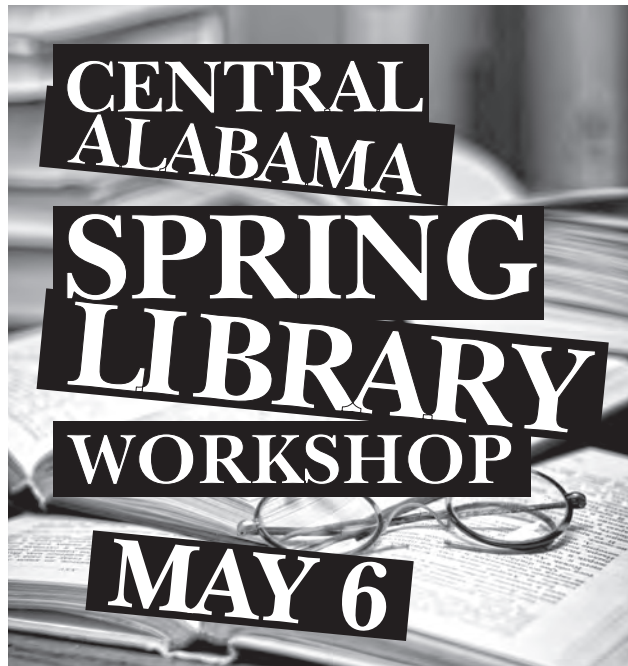
Registration: alsbom.org/revitalizationevent

A one-day event on church revitalization under the leadership of Johnny Hunt. The objective is to see each church striving toward becoming the best and most it can be. THERE WILL BE TWO BREAKOUT SESSIONS: "Moving Beyond the Walls" and "Leadership That Lasts."

For more information, please call 1-800-264-1225: State Missionary Mike Jackson, ext. 210, or (334) 613-2210, or Ministry Assistant Debbie Dickey, ext. 218, or (334) 613-2218, ddickey@alsbom.org.



ONEMISSION: TheGreatCommission ONEPROGRAM: TheCooperativeProgram MANYMINISTRIES: GreatCommissionMinistries



EASTMONT BAPTIST CHURCH, 4505 ATLANTA HWY., MONTGOMERY

Theme: Building Blocks for Ministry

Classes will be offered in all areas of library work. Anyone who is involved in any type of library work is invited. This includes church, Christian school, public school or private school and even public library. The information provided will help your library grow.

The cost will be \$5 per person to help with the cost of the noon meal. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. and the workshop ends at 3:30 p.m. Swap table will be available.

To register or for other information, please contact Marty Woodall at (334) 569-3854 or martybooks1@juno.com.

ONEMISSION: TheGreatCommission ONEPROGRAM: TheCooperativeProgram MANYMINISTRIES: GreatCommissionMinistries



OneVoice is a group of auditioned singers and instrumentalists in grades 7-12 who actively participate in their local church youth music ministry. This year's tour will include a concert at First Baptist Church, Ashland. Lodging will be at Shocco Springs Conference Center, Talladega.

The cost of the tour is \$225 and includes lodging, meals, local transportation, music and shirt. Students must provide their own transportation to Shocco Springs (Friday) and home from First Baptist Church, Ashland (Sunday) after the 10:30 a.m. worship service.

Audition Requirements:
alsbom.org/onevoice



DEADLINE FOR RETURNING THE APPLICATION INFORMATION AND AUDITION CD IS FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 279, or (334) 613-2279, scleveland@alsbom.org.

SPEAK: VOICE OF INFLUENCE

SPEAK (formerly the Youth Evangelism Conference) is an annual event for youth ministries across Alabama. The church has a voice. Will you use it?

MESSAGES: Acton Bowen, Rick Burgess, Josh Holland

WORSHIP: Rush of Fools

SPOKEN WORD: Shantrice Coleman

COST: \$30 per person (includes a t-shirt if you register by 4/30)

ONLINE INFO: speak.ymlink.org

For more information, please contact State Missionary Scooter Kellum at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 280, or (334) 613-2280, skellum@alsbom.org.



Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

First Baptist Church, Birmingham
Monday • May 1, 2017 • 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
No registration or admission charge (lunch is on your own).

Speakers



Dan Garland

Junior Hill



Junior Hill

Mike Shaw



Mike Shaw

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

Worship



Squire Parsons

Alabama Baptist State Convention
 STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS
 This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Missions Adventure Camp at WorldSong

WorldSong Missions Place, Cook Springs

Open to girls completing grades K-12 and boys completing grades 2-6.

DON'T MISS OUT ON MISSIONS ADVENTURE CAMP (MAC) THIS SUMMER AT WORLDSONG! IT'S A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE ROLLED IN WITH A WHOLE LOT OF FUN!

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

MAC FOR GIRLS
 (girls completing grades 2-6)
 Early Bird Rate: \$220/person
 After **May 1:** \$240/person
June 19-23, June 26-30, July 17-21

MAC FOR TEEN GIRLS
 (girls completing grades 7-12)
 Early Bird Rate: \$220/person
 After **May 1:** \$240/person
June 19-23, July 17-21

EXTREME MAC FOR TEEN GIRLS
 (girls completing grades 7-12)
 Early Bird Rate: \$120/person
 After **May 1:** \$140/person
June 12-14

MAC FOR CITs*
 (girls completing grades 9-12)
 Early Bird Rate: \$220/person
 After **May 1:** \$240/person
June 26-30

MINI MAC FOR GIRLS
 (girls completing grades 2-6)
 Early Bird Rate: \$120/person
 After **May 1:** \$140/person
June 12-14

MAC FOR GIRLS & BOYS
 (coeds completing grades 2-6)
 Early Bird Rate: \$220/person
 After **May 1:** \$240/person
June 5-9, July 10-14

MOM & ME
 (girls completing grades 2-6)
 Early Bird Rate: \$120/person
 After **May 1:** \$140/person
June 15-17

MOM & ME LITTLE
 (girls completing grades K-3)
 Early Bird Rate: \$65/person
 After **May 1:** \$75/person
June 23-24

*CITs are Cabin leaders In Training. Space is limited in this program.



IS YOUR MINISTRY SAFE?

MINISTRYSAFE WORKSHOP
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017
10 A.M. - 3 P.M. • CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH,
BESSEMER

Visit alsbom.org/ministrysafe for updated information and to register.

The MinistrySafe Workshop will equip you with an awareness, understanding, tools and strategies needed to help protect children from sexual abuse in churches and protect churches through policy and procedure development.



MIX musicCamp @ Shooco

JULY 10-14
SHOOCO

COST (next best rate!): \$305 per person with \$80 per person deposit at time of registration.

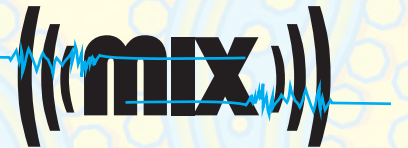
NEXT BEST PRICE DEADLINE IS MAY 11.

IN ADDITION TO MUSIC CAMP:

- Hiking Trails • Putt-Putt Golf • Basketball
- Volleyball • Pedal Boats • Horseshoes • Octaball
- Disc Golf • Poly Pong • Fishing • Ropes Course
- Paintball • Pedal Cars • Swimming

REGISTRATION/OTHER INFO: mixmusiccamp.org

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



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



Saturday
May 20, 2017

First Baptist Church,
Montgomery

CELEBRATION

SpringRing is a handbell gathering workshop. We meet, greet and ring together with handbell favorites of the groups participating. Each leader of the group (can appoint a leader) will conduct the piece that you choose for the whole group. We will learn new music, perfect it together and then end our day with a Worship Ring Celebration.

REGISTER ONLINE AT [ALSBOM.ORG/SPRINGRING](http://alsbom.org/springring)

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Sharon Cleveland, 1.800.264.1225, ext. 279, or (334) 613.2279, scleveland@alsbom.org.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Anthropology

Why Is Man?

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

Like Job, the Psalmist asked, “What is man?” This week Theology 101 modifies the question by exchanging “what” for “why.” God created us as beings in His own image and likeness. Why? Of course the ultimate answer lies within God’s own heart, but we can begin to discern aspects of the answer from what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture.

A starting point takes us to God’s own nature. He has revealed Himself to be a person of love. What depth of meaning is compressed into the simple statement of 1 John 4:16, “God is love.” Love, such as God demonstrates, is not grasping but giving. His love is far more than mere sentiment of the heart. God’s love is a love that seeks objects upon which to bestow itself. Divine love is ever outgoing. By creating us after His own image and likeness, God made us capable of recognizing and receiving His love and, ideally, loving Him back in return. We might say perfect love motivated our creation so that God would have objects upon whom to bestow that love and to be loved in return.

‘Praise of His glory’

Another reason why God made us is for the “the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:12). In short, God created human beings for His own glory.

As God said in Isaiah 43:6-7: “Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth — everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory.”

God’s perfection and independence join to remind us that He does not need anything or anyone; He is self-sufficient. We read in Acts 17:24-25 that “God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made with hand nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything,

since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

So why are we here?

We exist as God’s own creation because He loves us and desires that we bring Him glory. Herein lies the essence of human dignity and value. We are the objects of divine love and are important to God. Humans, every one of us, matter to God both here and now as well as in all eternity. His admonition to us here and now is: “Do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). His expectation about us in eternity is, in the words of Romans 11:36, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be glory forever.” For those created in God’s image and likeness to bring Him glory forever defines a human being’s importance and significance.

Purpose for being

Hardly a day goes by that we do not hear or read about multiple acts of violence in which human lives are taken. When these sad occurrences come to our attention, do we have the thought, “There goes another person whom God made for the purpose of being loved by Him and bringing Him glory?” The devaluing of human life runs counter to God’s desire as expressed in Zephaniah 3:17: “The Lord your God ... will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by His love. He will exult over you with loud singing.” God made us that we might bring Him joy and live to His glory. To do less is to come short of our purpose for being.✠

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



in Loving Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders

Horace Sellers Merrill

Public servant, Alabama pastor Merrill dies at 80

Horace Sellers Merrill, a former public servant and Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 17. He was 80.

Merrill, born in Micaville, graduated from Cleburne County High School in Heflin in 1954 and later attended Southern Union Junior College in Wadley. He began working at Dixie Mines Mica Mining Company before entering the political arena in 1964 as circuit clerk of Cleburne County, where he worked for 12 years.



MERRILL

Merrill was later elected probate judge and chairman of the Cleburne County Commission in 1976, a position he held for six years.

While serving the state, he also served several Alabama Baptist churches as pastor, including Happy Hill Baptist Church, Heflin; Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Heflin; Chulafinnee Baptist Church, Heflin; and Edwardsville Baptist Church. He also was a member of Heflin Baptist Church for more than 50 years, serving as deacon, Sunday School superintendent, Sunday School teacher, church training director and sanctuary choir member.

He is survived by his wife, Mary; two

children; and four grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

Moody Faulk

Former Alabama Baptist pastor Faulk dies at 82

Moody Faulk, a pastor who served across Alabama for 62 years, died Feb. 9. He was 82.

Faulk, a resident of Hartford, graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham in 1957 and earned a degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1961.

Faulk took on the role of pastor at the age of 20. He served at several churches across the state including: Waverly Baptist Church; Dauphin Island Baptist Church; Kushla Bethany Baptist Church, Eight Mile; the former Westgate Baptist Church, Mobile; Hartford Baptist Church; and Antioch Baptist Church, Hartford.

Faulk is survived by his wife, Betty; three children; and six grandchildren. (Neisha Roberts)

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

Remember to:

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

UM holds ribbon cutting for health care center



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

The University of Mobile (UM) holds a ribbon cutting ceremony for its new Center for Excellence in Healthcare Practice on Feb. 21. Pictured are (l to r): Dr. Kathy Sheppard, dean, School of Nursing; Deborah Nelson, chairman, board of trustees; Dr. Timothy L. Smith, UM president; Fred Wilson, past chairman, board of trustees; Dr. Nancy Huff, chair, department of kinesiology.

You can help give children in foster care **NEW LIVES!**

When Don Eades was 8-years-old, his step-dad abandoned his family, and his mom was hospitalized for medical issues. Times were tough, but a retired couple, George and Nell Norton, took him in and soon helped him find a more permanent home with us at our home for boys in Eastlake, and then to our Gardendale home, now our present-day Family Care. There he became one of the "Home Boys," something he and the other boys proudly called themselves.

"I KNOW GOD HAD A HAND ON MY LIFE THEN . . ."

"I know God had a hand on my life then," Don shared. "He placed me under the care of Godly house parents, Elton and Gail Griffin, who were amazing. They were like family to me then, and still are today."

The Griffins took the "Home Boys" to church every Sunday, and that's where Don accepted Christ. He also went on to attend and graduate from Samford University, got a job in sales, started a family of his own, and now has four daughters. "I look back today and see how generous people sacrificed for me, providing all those years of food, shelter, clothing, and even Christmas gifts. I know my life could have gone a different path. If the Griffins had not loved me like their own . . . if caring supporters like you had not given. I don't know where my life would be today."

Don's story shows just how much your support of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries means to the children we serve. **You help give them new lives!**

Visit alabamachild.org/Easter or call (888) 720-8805 to make a gift today and help other children like Don!






Don, in the top left corner, with other "Home Boys"

Don today, with his wife, Lynne



Alabama Baptist
CHILDREN'S HOMES
& Family Ministries

alabamachild.org //   

GRACE gifts

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

Andrews, Evelyn, Ozark: Rusty Andrews
Andrews, Lomax, Ozark: Rusty Andrews
Andrews, Mary Olive, Roswell, GA & Panama City, FL: Rusty Andrews
Bauer, Blake, Fairhope: Wayne & Faye Parker
Bice, Doris: Mary Ann Short
Blake, Thomas R., The Villages, FL: Larry & Linda Tims
Bloom, Rev. Chris, Hoover: Larry & Linda Tims
Brooks, Hannah, Goodway: Mr. & Mrs. J. E. Booker
Bryan, Mildred, Eufaula: Evelyn Gullatte
Calderwood, Gayle, Centreville: Centreville BC
Clark, Agnes, Brent: Centreville BC
Crawford, Gary Clark, Tuscaloosa: James & Juliette Wright
Dick, Kellar, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Dodd, William R., Jr.: Mr. & Mrs. James D. Evans
Duke, Betty, Linden: Providence BC of Gallion
Durant, Antoinette, Bay Minette: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette
Earley, Ronald, Bessemer: Concord BC of Bessemer
Farrior, Myrtha: Wilma F. Revel
Farrior, Mr. & Mrs. W. C.: Wilma F. Revel
Hicks, Larry, Grove Hill: Forest Avenue BC of Jackson
Knight, Terrell Bice: Mary Ann Short

McMickens, Jack, Vestavia: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Maddox, Doris, Centreville: Centreville BC
Morrison, Estlene, Hoover: Larry & Linda Tims
Morros, Dr. Demetrius "Jimmy": Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Neeley, Edna Ray, Bay Minette: Durant Chapel BC of Bay Minette
Odom, Donald Ray, Uriah: Eureka BC of Franklin
Price, Judi, Hoover: Larry & Linda Tims
Rowland, Carolyn, Flomaton: Ual & Ann Murph
Salter, John E. & Katherine, Bay Minette: Their Children
Short, Donald H.: Mary Ann Short
Skinner, Lucille, Butler: Larry & Linda Tims
Smith, Jim, Phenix City: Pleasant Grove BC of Salem
Smith, Rev. Waine, Millbrook: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Stanton, Jimmy, Gadsden: Larry & Linda Tims
Wilkinson, Wanda, Linden: Providence BC of Gallion
Willis, Bobby H., Selma: Ken & Betty Schroeder
Woodruff, Harold, Hartselle: Ricky & Brenda Cook
Wright, James, Centreville: Centreville BC

Honors are listed below (the name of the honoree is bolded).

Farrior, Myra: Wilma F. Revel
Gibson, J.D. & Family, Butler: Sarah A. Gibson
Gibson, Joe & Teresa, Butler: Sarah A. Gibson
Gibson, Samuel G., Jr., Berea, KY: Sarah A. Gibson
Rodgers, Mrs. Margaret, Butler: Sarah A. Gibson

THANK YOU!

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



(augmented reality)

Follow these instructions

- 1** Download the Aurasma app from your app store.
- 2** Choose the "ALBaptist" profile under channel and tap "Follow." You will only have to do this one time. (Any ALBaptist options will allow you to follow *The Alabama Baptist*.)
- 3** Tap the [] icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 4** You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.
- 5** Hold your device over a page or image in *The Alabama Baptist (TAB)* marked as augmented reality and watch the paper come to life.
- 6** If the image is slow to load at any point, then it may be your data speed or Wi-Fi strength. Change locations and try again.
- 7** Each week when *TAB* arrives, open the app and hold your device over the augmented reality articles.

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering funds assist immigrants' needs

(continued from page 1)
of western religion and slow to trust.

Through ILC, Carr and her volunteers focus on teaching English and citizenship skills, which the immigrants typically are eager to learn. As relationships develop she is able to refer students to planters from their language and culture. Those planters become advocates for the immigrants to help them navigate a new and confusing culture.

Many eventually join a house group and "they bring trusted family and friends into their group," Carr said. "They don't casually bring somebody who just decided to become a believer. They are careful to vet those they bring in."

The ILC model of partnering a compassion-based program with indigenous planters is the most natural outcome one could hope for, Carr said.

"When you meet people's needs with excellence, establishing an authentic relationship with them, you are so different than anything they have seen," Carr said. "And they will listen to why you are different."

Jacksonville's indigenous planters help immigrants understand that following the Lord isn't just a western religion.

When NAMB leaders discovered Carr and ILC, they realized the 32 Send North America cities

Consider adopting church planter

(continued from page 1)
Southern Baptist churches have collected the offering in the weeks leading up to Easter to support NAMB's work to take the gospel to the more than 269 million lost people living in North America.

In 2017, Alabama Baptists aim to help reach the national goal of \$70 million with a state goal of \$6.1 million.

The offering, which was named in 1934 in honor of missions advocate and WMU leader Annie Armstrong, supports more than 5,600 NAMB missionaries.

Building that kind of missions framework was the life goal of Armstrong, who served 18 years as national WMU secretary.

Southern Baptists set aside a Week of Prayer for North

American Missions and AAEO every year on the first week of March as a kickoff to the offering season. A Bible study is available for adults, youth and children to learn more about the NAMB missionaries their gifts go to support.

McIntosh said another great way to get involved as a church or missions group is to adopt a church planter through the office of associational missions and church planting at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM).

"This experience will help make missions personal as well as open their heart and mind to God moving among our state and across our nation," she said.

For more information, contact SBOM's Lamar Duke at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 332.✉

need the Jacksonville model. So NAMB's Send Relief focus has developed an ILC initiative and made Carr the national director and mobilizer. Now she's working to establish new ILCs across the United States and Canada.

She continues to work out of Jacksonville but travels frequently to other cities to implement the ILC template with its proven teaching curriculum.

She receives funds from NAMB's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) for her work.

A key component of the template replication will be a partnership with local indigenous planters who start house groups in each Send City.

"At ILC, 25 to 50 may make a profession," Carr said. "However, the UUPG planters are reaching an additional 200 per year. They take the living water to them."

And when they do, she said that's "a beautiful thing."

For more information, visit www.AnnieArmstrong.com. (NAMB)

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'Walk Worthy'

Trail Life USA offers alternative to Boy Scouts in Alabama

Since Boy Scouts of America (BSA) decided to accept transgender youngsters, there appears to be a growing market for a different kind of scouting group.

BSA does not require troops chartered by houses of worship to accept children who do not identify with their birth gender. Nevertheless, the Trail Life USA website has had an influx of clicks on its online locator map for troops across the country since BSA's announcement related to transgender members in late January. Trail Life bills itself as a Christian alternative to BSA.

"We've seen tremendous response," said Trail Life CEO Mark Hancock in reference to the surge of membership inquiries. "Where many people would say that they're leaving Boys Scouts, we have many others that are saying that the Boy Scouts left them."

Trail Life currently has about 26,000 nationwide members, with 23 troops active in Alabama.

Since Trail Life began in January 2014, its staff has doubled to 12, its mostly evangelical church-based troops have increased from 500 to 700 and it has moved from a virtual office to the 127-acre campus of a former boys home in Belton, South Carolina. Participating boys, called "Navigators" and "Adventurers," have outdoor adventures, earn badges and can seek the Horizon Award that Trail Life considers a parallel to the Eagle Scout rank.

Many of their troop numbers correspond to Bible verses. Troop 110 is particularly popular, after Colossians 1:10 —

"So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way" — on which the organization's "Walk Worthy" motto is based.

Meanwhile BSA, which has nearly 2.3 million youth members, said it has received letters of support since its recent transgender decision from a range of religious organizations — which charter the majority of Scouting units — including Reform Jews, United Methodists, Catholics and Mormons.

Different religious beliefs

BSA spokeswoman Effie Delimarkos said, "If a religious organization declines to accept a youth or adult application based on their religious beliefs, we ask that they please notify their local council so that a unit open to accepting the individual can be offered as an option."

Leah Harlow, program coordinator for Trail Life USA Troop 0316 chartered by Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Ozark, said BSA will "continue to move away from Christian values ... in large part because they are pushed to accept money from anybody and everybody and have become politically based."

Prior to her role with Trail Life, Harlow was involved with BSA for 10 years while her son was in the program. That BSA troop, Troop 316, was chartered by a church when BSA made its first decision to allow homosexual men to mentor youth several

years ago. The church then refused to continue to charter the troop.

"The boys were 12 years old," Harlow said. "It wasn't their fault (that BSA made those decisions). I didn't want to take (the outdoor and community experience) away from them. So we jumped right on to the Trail Life USA program."

According to Harlow, moving to Trail Life was a great decision for her son and daughter (who participates in American Heritage Girls — an alternative to Girl Scouts).

Morals and values

"As a Christian and as a Christian mother we want to instill those morals and values into our children and that's one way we can do that — through a faith-based youth outdoor adventure program. ... We have Bible studies. We don't differentiate between denominations and we teach basic Christian principles. ... In our troop we have Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists."

The Trail Life troop chartered at Ridgecrest Baptist is led by troopmaster Casey Peterson, who oversees the program and operations of the troop. Harlow works closely with him to ensure the success of the program.

Ted Spangenberg, president of the Association of Baptists for Scouting, said he hopes groups like Trail Life, as well as missions-oriented programs like the Southern Baptist Royal Ambassadors, will continue to thrive.

"These can be effective in helping churches and their families disciple the youth in their congregations," he said.

For churches or religious groups still chartering BSA troops, former chairman of BSA's Religious Relationships Committee, R. Chip Turner, said congregations are still responsible for membership guidelines.

"Faith groups chartering Boy Scout units need to realize that the latest change only impacts them as they choose for it to do so," Turner said.

Trail Life's Hancock said his organization generally does not focus on the Boy Scouts but he thought it needed to be vocal about the latest decision, which he called "harmful to boys."

"We don't want boys psychologically, spiritually and possibly physically scarred by the confusing message being presented by BSA," he said in a statement posted on Trail Life's website. "We don't want boys or girls subjected to compromising situations on outings in an environment where reasonable precautions are no longer enforceable."

Trail Life's website includes a "purity" section in its values statement: "We are to reserve sexual activity for the sanctity of marriage, a lifelong commitment before God between a man and a woman." It describes membership as "designed for biologically male children under the age of 18."

Harlow said she'd encourage anyone "uncomfortable with BSA's new policies to check out Trail Life USA." (Neisha Roberts, RNS)

"We don't want boys psychologically, spiritually and possibly physically scarred by the confusing message being presented by the BSA."

**Mark Hancock
CEO, Trail Life USA**

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School transgender bathroom order reversed, 'good for parents, families'

The Trump administration has reversed an Obama-era directive that advised schools to open bathrooms and locker rooms to students based on their perceived gender identity or risk losing federal funding.

The new ruling leaves bathroom use policies to the discretion of state governments and local school districts, but the issue is already set to be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. The court is scheduled to hear a case March 28 from the Gloucester County School Board in Virginia challenging a lower court ruling allowing transgender teen Gavin Grimm to use the boys' bathroom at school. Grimm, a biological female, identifies as male.

Directive sent to schools

Obama's directive, nonbinding legally but strengthened by the possibility of federal funding being rescinded under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, had already been blocked in August 2016 by a Texas federal district court.

Trump's reversal was announced in a Feb. 22 directive sent to pub-



lic schools jointly from the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education.

"There must be due regard for the primary role of the states and local districts in establishing educational policy," the new directive reads. "The Department of Education and Department of Justice have decided to withdraw and rescind the [Obama] guidance documents in order to further and more completely consider the legal issues involved. The departments thus will not rely on the view expressed within them."

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore welcomed the new directive.

"I'm very glad to see the Trump administration revoke these guidelines. This move is good for parents and good for families," said

Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, at erlc.com. "Children are not pawns of the State to be used to advance the latest fashionable 'right side of history' cause. Christians must continue to insist that the worldview of the sexual revolution harms men and women and advocate for the inherent dignity of all."

Discrimination based on sex is still prohibited in public schools, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said as the new directive was issued.

'Protect every student'

"We have a responsibility to protect every student in America and ensure that they have the freedom to learn and thrive in a safe and trusted environment," she said. "This is not merely a federal mandate but a moral obligation no individual, school, district or state can abdicate. At my direction the department's office for civil rights remains committed to investigating all claims of discrimination, bullying and harassment against those who are most vulnerable in our schools." (BP)

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

WHO IS JESUS? Matthew 16:13-28

Misunderstood Identity (13-14)

When Jesus came on the scene in Israel many did not see Him as the long-awaited Messiah. The Jews knew their coming Messiah would be a conquering hero; however, Jesus didn't seem to fit this model. As such, many people saw Jesus as some sort of prophet in the line of Elijah or John the Baptist.

True Identity (15-16)

When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter answered correctly and recognized Him as the Messiah. This question Jesus asks is the most important question we will ever face. When we are confronted by this question of who Jesus is, our answer determines our eternal destiny. If we reject Jesus then there is no salvation for us.

Since we need to be reconciled to God, the lack of someone or something to do this leaves us separated from God eternally. If, however, Jesus is the means by which God has reconciled us to Himself — which is what the entire Bible presents — then we must bow down and worship this God-man as our Lord and Savior. This requires our full obedience to His commands.

New Identity (17-20)

Jesus affirms Simon's declaration and calls him by his nickname, "Peter," which means "rock." Jesus declares He will build His Church upon this rock but to what is

this rock referring? This saying is what the Roman Catholic Church uses to support its belief that the pope, who stands in the line of Peter, is God's representative on earth. However, this view does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture. A better understanding is that the declaration made by Peter is the rock upon which the Church is built, or the rock is the disciples themselves as they testify to Jesus who is the foundation of the Church. Peter certainly was foundational in the early Church but even Peter was rebuked by Paul, suggesting he did not have some sort of supreme role.

Cross Identity (21-28)

The disciples recognized Jesus was the Messiah but they did not believe this would lead to Jesus' death. Jesus rebuked Peter because Peter's statement was a temptation for Jesus to not go through with His death. Instead He had to press on in service to the will of the Father. It had to be this way for God's salvation to come to men. The gospel is not complete without Christ's sacrificial atonement upon the cross and Christ knew this was the road He had to face. He also knew that for those who followed Him, persecution awaited. In fact everyone who follows Jesus must die to him/herself and put God's will above his/her own.

Many in our world today ignore Jesus' words of warning, choosing temporal things to seek to fulfill their lives only to find that the promises of the world are empty. Instead of trying to look to the world for satisfaction and meaning, the only place to find real meaning and real satisfaction is in Christ. Those who come to Christ must put aside their own desires and choose His. This often leads to ridicule and, in many countries, a loss of property and possibly life. But choosing God's path leads to eternal life, whereas the way of the world leads to destruction. †

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

JESUS, OUR VICTOR Revelation 1:12-20

Contrary to the way we read it, John's revelation is meant to encourage believers who are suffering persecution for their faith (Rev. 1:9; 13:9-10). It is a book of hope. It can be hard for American Christians to grasp the weight of this hope because we comprise the majority of citizens, and the vast majority of our elected officials say they share our faith. But we know of places in the world where our brothers and sisters suffer because of their faithfulness to God. For them the hope in God that John discovers is not an abstract idea. I suggest even if you discuss only the printed verses, you begin reading with Revelation 1:1.

The glory of Christ reflects His victory. (12-16)

Notice that starting in verse 10, John must use similes, for language cannot fully describe the divine. John's first readers would have understood "seven golden lampstands" as a vision connected with the temple in Jerusalem, where the menorah — a gold, seven-branched lampstand — stood until the year 70. Perhaps John's vision shows us that God's light — God's wisdom and righteousness — now abides with the Church. John's vision also links to Daniel 7, where we first see "one like a Son of Man" (v. 13). The colors and substances resemble Daniel's Ancient of Days and represent attributes of God: a gold sash for honor, white for age and purity, fire for refining, waters for subduing chaos (Gen. 1:2, 9-10), a two-edged sword for prophecy (Isa. 49:2) and so on.

The seven churches named in verse 11 all lie in the Roman province of Asia, in the western part of modern Turkey. John indicates that Christians there are undergoing persecution (Rev. 1:9), probably for refusing to worship images of the emperor (13:11-15; 20:4), and John anticipates the

persecution will get much worse before God's redemption comes.

The resurrection of Christ guarantees His victory. (17-18)

John's terror puts him in the company of Isaiah (6:5), Daniel (7:15) and others in the Bible who encounter the divine. John is not to fear, however, because the alarming "one like the Son of Man" is none other than Jesus. And even though it appears the wicked — in this case, the Roman Empire — control everything, it is Jesus Himself who is in control. That God is a God of justice no matter how things appear. God's justice will triumph in the new heaven and earth.

John calls the abode of the dead "Hades" (Rev. 20:13). But death and Hades also are powers that will meet the same fate as the devil and the wicked (20:10-15). Jesus' death and resurrection show that death, Hades and the devil only have temporary power.

The Church is victorious because Christ is victorious. (19-20)

The lampstands represent the seven churches of verse 11 and the stars represent angels of these churches. They are not brick buildings; rather each city probably has several small congregations that meet in houses. Each "church" has an "angel." The word simply means "messenger," in this case someone who communicates God's message to a church.

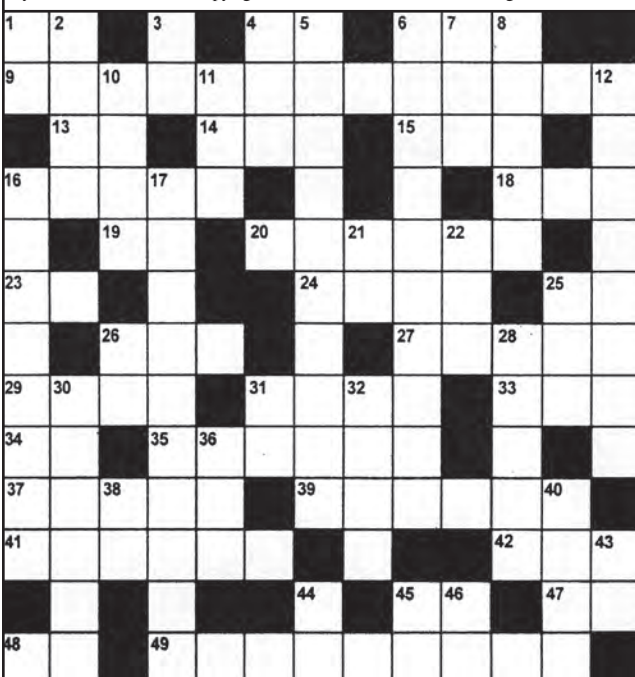
Note the risen Jesus stands in the midst of the lampstands, the churches. This is both a warning and one of the first words of hope for the churches as they face oppression.

Despite its bizarre and frightening images, Revelation expresses a sober realism. Things are bad for the churches of Asia and they are likely to get worse, so much so that some of their members will die in persecutions. Nevertheless they must remain faithful even if they must wait for the coming new creation to experience God's justice. †

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Christian Crossword

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Across

1. I _____. (name of God)
4. Father.
6. A deity or idol.
9. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
13. Satan went ____ and fro. (Job 1:7)
14. Small, humanlike mythical being.
15. Prefix of negation.
16. ____ from God the Father. (Gal. 1:3)
18. Moses' second book. (abbr.)
19. ____, every one that thisteth. (Isa. 55:1)
20. ____ fell from Saul's eyes. (Acts 9:18)
23. Peter wrote ____ the scattered Jews. (1 Pet. 1:1)
24. I will ... have mercy on _____. (Jer. 33:26)
25. Indefinite singular article.
26. Hiram's navy brought this animal to Solomon. (1 Kings 10:22)
27. Traveled with Rebekah.

(Gen. 24:59)

29. Ancient city.
31. The Spirit descended in this form. (Matt. 3:16)
33. This animal spoke to Balaam. (Num. 22:28)
34. In him is ____ darkness. (1 John 1:5)
35. Used to kill Stephen. (Acts 7:58)
37. Pilate found no ____ of death in Jesus. (Luke 23:22)
39. Relationship of Martha and Mary to Lazarus. (John 11:1)
41. ____ his money. (Gen. 42:27)
42. Built the ark. (Luke 17:27)
45. Eleth's son. (Num. 16:1)
47. Year of the Lord. (Latin abbr.)
48. Ye shall be ____ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
49. Love thy _____. (Matt. 5:43)

Down

1. Albert. (short form)

2. Something small in the eye.
3. King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
4. King of Assyria. (2 Kings 15:19)
5. Set your ____ on the things above. (Col. 3:2, plural)
6. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
7. Gold. (Spanish)
8. Eats.
10. A just and perfect man. (Gen. 6:9)
11. The pure in heart ... shall ____ God. (Matt. 5:8)
12. Fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
16. Sound in faith, charity, and _____. (Titus 2:2)
17. Jesus was moved with _____. (Matt. 9:36)
21. ____, Lord God! (Jer. 4:10)
22. Ostrichlike bird.
25. Donkey.
26. Alabama. (abbr.)
28. Brought food to Elijah.

- (1 Kings 17:6)
30. My soul ____ in the Lord. (Ps. 34:2)
31. It is lawful to ____ well. (Matt. 12:12)
32. Rebekah's face covering. (Gen. 24:65, modern spelling)
36. Golf ball supporter.
38. Opposite of down.
40. Lion's call. (1 Pet. 5:8)
43. Name of an altar. (Josh. 22:34)
44. See 3 down.
45. 21-verse prophet. (abbr.)
46. If we say we have ____ sin. (1 John 1:8)



Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram

Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

I am a passionate person by nature but my passions do not generally run toward physical activity. The main reason for this is because I am disabled and not able to move around very much.

However, I am finding myself wanting to do things so badly that I can literally visualize myself doing them. I am well aware of my limitations, so this is a very unusual circumstance for me.

For example before I began to write this I was sitting here on my sofa eating popcorn, picturing myself going and getting a box and packing up my bookshelf. Why? Who knows.

Maybe I am tired of looking at it, maybe I want to replace the wonderful tomes of literature with knick-knacks.

Here is what I think — I think this desire is actually God speaking to me. I think He is telling me, “I am about to move you into a new phase of your life, one where you won’t need all of these things you have surrounded yourself with. One of simplicity where you only need Me to be the focus of your life.”

These things are not what is going to make me happy. As a matter of fact, looking at the clutter is actually bringing me dissatisfaction with life. I think He is telling me I need to change my attitude, step out of my comfort zone and live.

How can I do that? I know my first step. I am going to get off the computer and read my Bible. It’s His love letter to you and me. It’s past time for me to fall in love with life all over again.

What’s holding you back? Where do you need to de-clutter? †



Family Christian Stores, after filing for bankruptcy protection two years ago, will close its doors after 85 years. The store pictured here is located in Fultondale.

Photo by Linda Harrison

‘Our only recourse’

Family Christian Stores to close doors after 85 years of retail

LifeWay Christian Stores’ closest competitor — Family Christian Stores — has announced it is closing after 85 years. This move comes after the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based company filed for bankruptcy protection two years ago.

Family Christian Stores employed more than 3,000 people in 240 retail sites across 36 states. It was considered the world’s largest retailer of Christian-themed merchandise. LifeWay comes in second with more than 170 stores.

“We had two very difficult years post-bankruptcy,” Family Christian Stores President Chuck Bengochea said in a statement. “Despite improvements in product assortment and the store experience, sales continued to decline.”

‘Trusting God’s plan’

He said the nonprofit company was not able to work out terms and pricing with its vendors that allowed it to compete in the market successfully. “We have prayerfully looked at all possible options, trusting God’s plan for our organi-

zation, and the difficult decision to liquidate is our only recourse.”

The company also was known for providing humanitarian aid. In a statement, the company said it had served more than 14 million widows, orphans and other oppressed people across the world.

At the time of the bankruptcy protection filing, Bengochea said the company “took on too much debt” because of declining sales and was hit by the 2008–2009 recession and the digital revolution that has changed the sales of books, movies and music.

In 2015, MLive Media Group

reported the chain had \$230 million in sales in 2014, down from \$305 million in 2008. *Publishers Weekly* reported the chain had “assets of between \$50 million and \$100 million and liabilities in the same range.”

The magazine said creditors included prominent publishers such as HarperCollins Christian Publishing, which was owed \$7.5 million.

Family Christian Stores was founded in the 1930s. In 2012 it was purchased by three businessmen and donated to Family Christian Ministries. (RNS)

Scholarships for journalism, communications students up for grabs

The Evangelical Press Association (EPA) will award two scholarships this spring for students majoring or minoring in journalism or communications. The deadline for applications is March 10.

EPA believes Christian students should be prepared to be outstanding journalists and communications professionals by being equipped with a biblically based philosophy of journalism and the skills, knowledge and experience they will need to effectively communicate a Christ-centered worldview to their audience.

Along those lines, EPA will award the

\$2,000 Jerry Jenkins Scholarship and the \$1,000–\$2,000 Mel Larson Memorial Scholarship. The Jerry Jenkins Scholarship is named for a former EPA president who served as editor of *Moody Magazine* and was the founding editor of *Today’s Christian Woman*. The Mel Larson Memorial Scholarship also is named for a former EPA president who served as editor of *The Evangelical Beacon*.

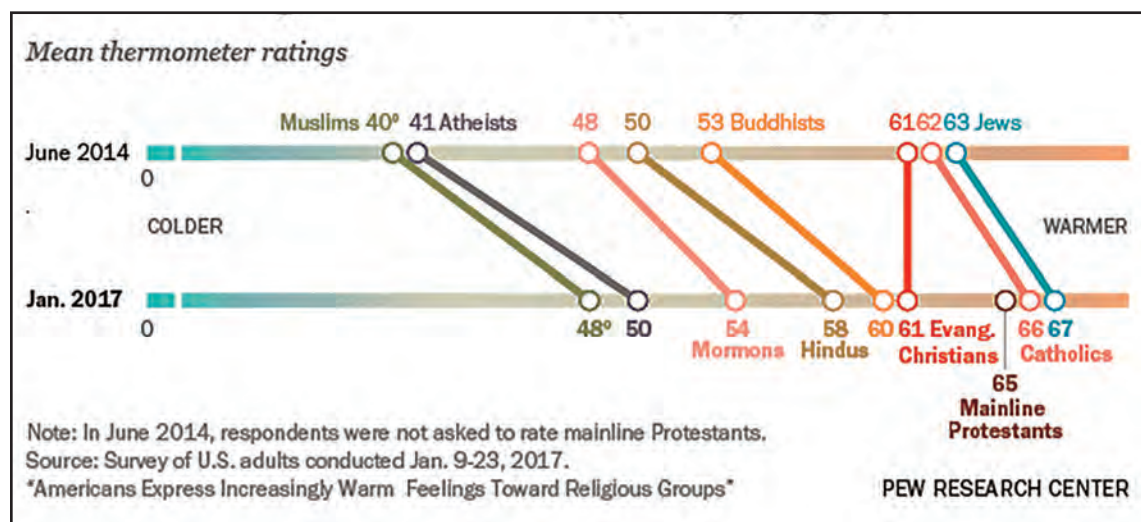
Recipients must be third- or fourth-year undergraduate students or graduate students with

at least one year of full-time study remaining when they receive the awards. Students must be enrolled at an accredited Christian or secular college or university in the United States or Canada. Candidates must have maintained a B-average or better.

Preference will be given to, but not restricted to, students with an interest in Christian journalism. Winners will be announced at the annual EPA membership meeting April 9–11.

For more information, visit evangelicalpress.com/scholarship/. (TAB)





Changing opinions

Americans warming up to various religious groups

Maybe Mitt Romney should have waited one election cycle to run for president.

Romney was dogged by negative perceptions about his Mormon faith during his unsuccessful 2012 bid for the presidency. But new research shows attitudes about Mormons are warming, just as they are for most other faith groups in the United States.

Using a “thermometer” to gauge opinions about various religions, the Pew Research Center said American feelings about Mormons improved from 48 to 54 degrees since 2014.

“The increase in mean ratings is broad based,” Pew said in the February report titled “Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups.”

“Warmer feelings are expressed by people in all the major religious groups analyzed as well as by both Democrats and Republicans, men and women, and younger and older adults.”

Nearly every faith tradition enjoyed greater acceptance than it did nearly three years earlier.

Jews saw an increase from 63 to 67 degrees, the highest temperature Pew reported. Catholics jumped from 62 to 66 degrees and Mainline Protestants rose from 62 to 65 degrees. Hindus spiked from 50 to 58 degrees and Buddhists from 53 to 60 degrees.

Evangelicals remain steady

Those experiencing some of the greatest thawing were atheists and Muslims, who saw increases in temperature from 41 to 50 degrees and 40 to 48 degrees, respectively.

Evangelical Christians alone saw no improvement since 2014. They remained steady at 61 degrees, Pew said.

The research organization said it surveyed 4,248 adults Jan. 9–23. Attitudes toward different religions varied widely by generation, Pew said.

“For example young adults — those ages 18 to

29 — express warmer feelings toward Muslims than older Americans do,” according to a summary posted online.

In fact young adults rated all of the faiths in a warm range from 54 degrees for Mormons and 66 degrees for Buddhists.

“By contrast older Americans (ages 65 and older) rate some religious groups, such as Mainline Protestants (75) and Jews (74), very warmly, and others, such as Muslims and atheists (44 degrees each), much more coolly,” Pew found.

Great variety also was uncovered in the attitudes religious groups have about one another.

“While for the most part Jews and Christians tend to rate each other warmly, atheists and evangelicals continue to view each other in a negative light,” Pew reported.

The study reaffirmed the tendency faith groups have to rate themselves more highly.

“Jewish respondents give Jews an average rating of 91 degrees on the 0-to-100 scale,” Pew said. “Catholics rate their own group at a warm 83. And self-described atheists rate atheists at 82.”

Four in 10 respondents, or 44 percent, reported having warm feelings about evangelicals, compared to 38 percent who were mid-thermometer about them and 18 percent who were very cool toward them.

But when self-described evangelicals are removed from the statistics, only 32 percent of Americans rated the group in the warmer sections of the thermometer, Pew said.

Republicans rated evangelicals warmest — at 71 degrees. Catholics, Jews and Mainline Christians were close behind. Republicans also rated Muslims cooler than atheists.

Democratic leaning Americans had the warmest feelings toward Jews, at 66 percent, followed by Catholics, Buddhists, Mainline Christians and Hindus. Their coolest feelings were for evangelicals and Mormons at 53 and 52 degrees, respectively. (BNG)

“While for the most part Jews and Christians tend to rate each other warmly, atheists and evangelicals continue to view each other in a negative light.”

Pew Research Center



Church buildings to be demolished in Sudan

KHARTOUM, Sudan — State officials in Sudan plan to demolish at least 25 church buildings in the Khartoum area, according to Christian leaders.

An official letter dated June 2016 listed the names and locations of the churches, which the government claims are built on land zoned for other uses. Christian leaders said it is part of a wider crackdown on Christianity.

The Sudan Council of Churches denounced the order at a Feb. 11 press conference, calling on the government to reconsider the decision or provide alternative sites for the churches. Mubarak Hamad, chairman of the Sudan Council of Churches, said at the conference that mosques located in the same area were spared from the demolition order.

Since 2012, Sudan has bulldozed church buildings and harassed and expelled Christians, usually on the claim that the buildings belonged to South Sudanese. In 2013 the government announced its decision to issue no new church building licenses, a move that came after South Sudan seceded from Sudan in July 2011. At the same time Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of Sharia, or Islamic law, and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language.

Because of its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a country of particular concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999. It ranked fifth on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2017 World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most persecution. (MS)

Teenage boy in jail on blasphemy charge

LAHORE, Pakistan — A 16-year-old Christian in Pakistan is languishing in jail under a baseless blasphemy charge after a judge declined to grant him bail, his attorney said.

On Feb. 7 a judge denied bail to Nabeel Masih, who has been jailed since Sept. 18, 2016, after a Muslim friend accused him of “sharing” and “liking” on Facebook an allegedly blasphemous photo of the Kaaba, the holiest Islamic site in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Police are suspected of beating Masih until he confessed. He maintains his innocence, according to news sources.

“The case against Nabeel is clearly fabricated, as he is illiterate and does not know how to use social media,” said Riaz Anjum, the teen’s defense attorney. “The Facebook account in his name was made by his Muslim friends and they used (it) to post pictures on the timeline without his consent.”

Police registered the case against Masih when a Muslim friend claimed his religious sentiments had been hurt by an image posted to the Facebook page. The case attracted the attention of local Islamist groups and large mobs have gathered at court hearings.

Pakistan ranked fourth on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2017 World Watch List, which lists the 50 countries where Christians suffer the most persecution. (MS)

Pastor in India beaten for praying for healing

HYDERABAD, India — A week after a pastor fell into a coma following harassment by hardline Hindus in southern India, a gang of Hindu extremists in the same state beat another pastor after he prayed for healing at the home of an elderly church member, family members said.

Gandham Padma Rao, 49, reported that 10 young men who were members of a Hindu nationalist group assaulted him Jan. 27 as he walked to his car, punching and kicking him and pushing him into a pit. The attack led to blood pressure so high that doctors said he could have soon suffered a hemorrhage. However, police altered his statement to indicate the young men were simply drunken youths, Rao’s son said.

Six days before the assault on Rao, 47-year-old K.A. Swamy fell into a coma from suffering a brain hemorrhage after Hindu extremists threatened him with highly offensive language and took him to police for distributing Bibles. (MS)