



April 20, 2017
Vol. 182, No. 16

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INSIDE



Two Cullman-area churches combine for 'greater purpose of gospel'

◆ Page 3



Forced out: 'Let us pray for Robert Bentley to pursue God's purpose for his future'

◆ Page 5



Prayer, faith, hope important tools to reach incarcerated, help prevent crime

◆ Page 8



'UNIFYING TIME'

Church atrium baptisms fan flame of revival at Cottage Hill Baptist

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Shane Hale says in hindsight he can see God's fingerprints all over it. Hale's a realtor, and four and a half years ago when Alan Floyd was moving to Mobile to become pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, he bought a house that Hale was selling.

"I wasn't in church then," Hale said. "But fast forward a few years and I recently found myself in a rough spot in life and decided it was time to get myself back on track."

He remembered Floyd and he searched and found his sermons online.

"Alan was doing a sermon on Jonah and taking the next step in your

faith and I knew God was talking to me," Hale said.

It was a Saturday and Hale was listening to the previous Sunday's message — a message in which Floyd was inviting anyone in the church who wanted to be baptized the following Sunday.

'Baptized the next day'

Hale knew he wanted to. So he messaged Floyd, told him what was going on in his life and asked if he could be baptized too.

Floyd said, "Yes."

"I called him, talked through his relationship with Christ and he was baptized the next day," Floyd said.

And along with him, 40 others were baptized the morning of March 12. (See 'Spiritual,' page 9)



Photos courtesy of Cottage Hill Baptist Church

Top photo: People pack the atrium of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile, to witness 41 people being baptized the morning of March 12. The previous Sunday, Pastor Alan Floyd had invited anyone in the church who wanted to be baptized. **Bottom photo:** Pastor Alan Floyd baptizes Meredith Nations in a portable baptismal tank in the church atrium.

See Alabama's new governor
Kay Ivey
through her pastor's eyes



PAGE 5

COMMENT

Starting Strong, Ending Strong

It is only a footnote in history now but given what has happened to former Gov. Robert Bentley, perhaps it should be remembered that most Alabama Baptists were proud of him the first time he got in trouble for what he said as governor.

It was the day of his first inauguration, Jan. 17, 2011. Bentley, who had been governor only a few hours, made an evangelistic appeal while speaking at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, Montgomery.

He said, "There may be some people here today who do not have living within them the Holy Spirit. But if you have been adopted in God's family like I have and like you have if you're a Christian and if you're saved and the Holy Spirit lives within you just like the Holy Spirit lives within me, then you know what that makes? It makes you and me brothers. And it makes you and me brother and sister."

Brothers and sisters in Christ

"Now I will have to say that if we don't have the same Daddy we're not brothers and sisters. So anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, I'm telling you you're not my brother and you're not my sister and I want to be your brother."

The national news media went wild accusing Bentley of alienating minorities and using his official governmental position to advance religion.

Most Alabama Baptists wondered why anyone who knows Baptists would find the statement shocking. Baptists believe and preach that faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord makes one a child of God and brother and sister to all others who believe in Jesus.

High hopes

The statement was made from a Baptist pulpit and was what should be expected from an active Baptist deacon and Bible teacher, most Baptists agreed. The incident was seen as evidence of who the new governor was as a Christian believer.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Baptists had high hopes Bentley, a relative unknown in the state, would provide principled leadership based on biblical teachings as leader of the state of Alabama and be a public witness for Jesus Christ at the same time.

The problem with a prominent figure being a public witness is that it increases the pressure for that person to act like a Christian in every aspect of life. If a public witness for the Lord falls, it is generally interpreted as an indictment against the Christian faith as well as against the individual.

Unfortunately Bentley appears to be one who allowed himself to get caught up in the power and prestige that goes with the State's top office. As he left office April 10 he was described by various people as selfish, manipulative, vindictive, a bully, a liar and dishonest as well as one who indulged his sexual appetites.

His early success in economic development for the state gave way to charges that he spent little time on the people's business and most of his time on private affairs.

Bentley had to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges and resign from office in order to avoid more serious felony charges that could have landed him in prison.

At the announcement of his resignation as governor, Bentley was still playing the religious card. He called his election "a calling from God placed on my life," adding that "I pray every morning for wisdom and guidance" as governor.

Sad ending

But, as many observed, Bentley never apologized for his actions nor asked forgiveness from the people of Alabama. All in all it was a sad ending for one who started amid such high hopes.

Bentley had become a liability to the state and an embarrassment to the Christian faith.

But Alabama Baptists have not given up on

the former governor. Several reached out to him offering to companion him through a time of repentance and restoration. Time will tell if those offers are accepted. Certainly our God is able to forgive and restore every repentant soul.

In the meantime Bentley is another example that it is harder for a Christian leader to end well than it is for that person to start well.

When Bentley walked out the door of Alabama's governorship, another long-time Alabama Baptist walked in. Kay Ivey, a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, was inaugurated the state's 54th governor within an hour of Bentley's resignation.

Holding the Bible on which her hand rested as she took the oath of office was her pastor, Jay Wolf, who also led a prayer for the new governor as part of the ceremony. There can be little doubt that Wolf's prominence in the swearing in was symbolic of the type leadership Ivey hopes to provide.

The new governor promised an open, honest and transparent administration and asked for patience as Alabama turned a "dark day" into a "positive opportunity." We certainly hope she succeeds.

Ivey has served for 14 years as an elected state officer — two terms as state treasurer and was in her second term as lieutenant governor at the time of Bentley's resignation. Before that she worked in various state departments. She is

thoroughly acquainted with all aspects of state government and has no hesitancy about providing leadership.

Ivey also is an active Baptist, one whom all Alabama Baptists will want to uphold in prayer as she attempts to restore credibility to the governor's office and move government toward addressing the pressing issues of our state.

The religious card

In Alabama a lot of political candidates play the religious card in their campaigns. Being a Christian is important. Having a worldview and a value system built on the teachings of the Bible are important.

But the Christian faith of elected officials cannot be a mile wide and an inch deep. Starting strong is not enough. Alabama needs elected officials in every area of government who are as committed to finishing strong as they are in starting strong.

May God give us elected officials of whom the people join our God in saying "well done good and faithful servant" when their time in office is completed. ✠

***"Alabama needs
elected officials
in every area of
government who are as
committed to finishing
strong as they are in
starting strong."***

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TAB
THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

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

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Church Budget — \$13.75
Individual — \$22.25

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Church Budget — \$8.50
Individual — \$14.95

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'God was in it'

Two Cullman-area churches combine for 'greater purpose of gospel'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Harrison has been in ministry for 21 years. He's helped start churches in Alabama and Asia and a lot of places in between.

But even so, he says he's never experienced anything like what God is doing in Cullman through a church merger that's breathed new life into two congregations.

"I've never seen anything remotely like what has happened at our church," he said. "It's really like a revival in my view."

At the start of the year, Church 212, the congregation Harrison planted, didn't really have money and didn't really have a building.

But it had people — lots of them, he said.

"We kind of considered ourselves an independent evangelical church and we were running between 60 and 70 people or so," Harrison said.

And amazingly his congregation was largely unchurched beforehand, he said. "Once we had a show of hands of how many people had been saved at Church 212 and about 70 percent raised their hands."

That was great for the gospel going out but initially it wasn't great for the budget, he said.

"We're a young congregation and renting a space to meet in just on Sundays was costing us 65 percent of our budget," Harrison said. "We were doing a lot on a little but we got to a place where we were really struggling."

Their rented space was only secure until May and as they set up and tore down chairs each Sunday morning, they were getting closer to having to find a place they could afford or close the church, Harrison said.

"Then one Sunday morning in February while we were setting up chairs, a deacon and pastor from Shady Grove Baptist Church walked in the door and asked to talk to me," he said.

In recent months, Shady Grove Baptist had dwindled to between six and 10 regular attenders but they owned a building sitting on 9.5 acres of land and had savings in the bank.

"They said they'd like our help, that their church was at the point of dying and they knew our church had been bringing in young people," Harrison said.

At first he said he could send some church members over to help build Shady Grove back up.

But Roger Pierce, Shady Grove's pastor, had a different idea.

"Chris had a good vision, a dream and the people," Pierce said. "He needed space and I needed people. That's basically it — and we knew God was in it."

Harrison said he was totally floored at the idea and how much the people of Shady Grove were open to it.

"They are such loving people who care



Photo by Debbie Campbell

Roger Pierce (left) and Chris Harrison (right) joined efforts and resources to form Church 212, Cullman. They are located where Shady Grove Baptist Church was before the merger.

more about the vision and mission than I'd ever seen," he said.

So they got right to it.

Harrison became pastor of the new combined church, which kept the name Church 212 and met for the first time in Shady Grove's building at the end of February. Pierce became the associate pastor.

"We've done things as a team and there has been nothing but unity and peace and excitement," Harrison said. "The two churches have joined together for the greater purpose of the gospel."

'A God thing'

The newly merged Church 212 expected around 70 or 80 on the first Sunday based on their combined congregations but 90 showed up. Now they are running 140.

"We have more people than we could've imagined and we've had more people saved than we could've thought," Harrison said. "We're so packed in this building, we are already planning to go to two services. It's absolutely incredible."

Pierce agreed.

"It's just a God thing," he said.

The new congregation joined West Cullman Baptist Association — something Harrison said he had been interested in pursuing even before the church merge.

Dennis Trimble, director of missions for West Cullman Association, said the situation is "a win-win-win for Shady Grove, Church 212 and the association."

One church got a fresh wind, another a building and the association gained a congregation committed to missions, Trimble said.

"Church 212 has a specific vision for

reaching those who have never been involved in a local church and those who may have been involved in the past but have quit the church for whatever reason," he said. "Their goal is to not grow at the expense of other churches."

And its name reflects its vision, Trimble said. "As the pastor explains it, 212 degrees is the boiling point. At 211 degrees, all you have is hot water but it's not boiling. The church's desire is not just to be hot but to be boiling, on fire for the Lord and committed to reaching the lost and discipling the saved."

Harrison agreed, noting that he's blown away by what God has done.

"That's my story and it's insane," he said. "It fell out of heaven. It was all Jesus." ❖

Alabama Baptist GIVING

Year to date through March 31, 2017

MARCH

CP Challenge Budget Goal \$3,333,333
CP Challenge Budget Gifts..... \$3,631,782
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YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal \$9,999,999
CP Challenge Budget Gifts..... \$10,466,622
Over Goal for Year..... \$466,623

The monthly and year-to-date totals
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PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Coptic Christians persevere after Palm Sunday bombings

CAIRO — As Coptic Christians buried more than 40 killed in terrorist bombings during Palm Sunday services in Egypt, the head of the Coptic Church urged believers to stand strong and be unified.

The first bomb exploded in the Nile Delta city of Tanta on April 9 at St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church about 60 miles north of Cairo, killing at least 27 people and wounding 78 others. Hours later, a suicide bomber was stopped at the door of St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in the coastal city of Alexandria, where he detonated explosives that reportedly killed at least 17 people and injured 48 others. The Islamic State group (IS) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The head of the Coptic Church, Pope Tawadros II, was at the service in Alexandria and had finished addressing the congregation before the blast, according to reports. He was unhurt.

"These acts will not harm the unity and cohesion of the people," Tawadros said later through state media.

The bombings were the latest in a series of assaults on Christians in Egypt, who make up about 10 percent of the population.

The Birmingham (Ala.) Islamic Society (BIS) released a statement April 9 condemning the "cowardly and heinous attack ... on one of the most holy holidays in the Christian calendar."

"Muslims of the greater Birmingham area demand justice for the victims of this terrorist attack and swift action by the Egyptian

authority to investigate and punish those responsible to the maximum extent allowed by law," the statement said.

Ashfaq Taufique, BIS president, said, "Our hearts are saddened by the death of innocent worshippers, not to mention our anger on such blatant violations of Islamic principles in attacking people just because of their faith." (MS, TAB)

Church elder dies after being stabbed during raid

OMDURMAN, Sudan — A church elder died April 3 from injuries sustained in a raid on an embattled Christian school in Omdurman, Sudan, sources said.

Younan Abdullah, an elder with Bahri Evangelical Church, reportedly died in a hospital after being stabbed while he and others were defending women at the Evangelical School of Sudan.

Christians had staged a protest against the attempted seizure of the school by a Muslim businessman. Police from the Omdurman Central Division along with a group supported by Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment arrived first at the school and arrested the protesters in an attempt to hand the school over to the businessman, sources said.

After the arrests about 20 men arrived at the school with knives and other weapons and began to beat the women. Several men from Abdullah's church rushed in to help, and the attackers stabbed him and another man, who survived.

Sudan ranks fifth on Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of countries. (MS)

Odenville votes 'wet' for Sunday alcohol

In their second round of voting held April 11, residents of Odenville voted 196 to 105 in favor of Sunday alcohol sales. The first attempt in March 2016 defeated the effort but only 132 voters turned out of the more than 3,600 residents.

This second vote means Odenville joins four other municipalities in St. Clair County who have gone wet — Moody, Pell City, Riverside and Springville.

The "wet" vote will now allow licensed retailers to sell alcohol every day of the week, something Mayor Rodney "Buck" Christian has been quoted as saying would be "good economic development."

States and cities that vote to allow alcohol sales "may experience a short-term cash windfall but loss of reliable income, coupled with increases in alcohol-related harm, will damage economic stability and public health in the long term," according to Alabama Citizen's Action Program's "Wet/Dry Issues" information on www.alcap.com. (TAB)



In March of 1986, Parham Williams Jr. was named dean of Samford University's Cumberland Law School, according to *The Alabama Baptist*. Both of his parents were 1925 graduates from Cumberland Law School.

Also reported in the paper was Tommy Karn being named Man of the Year at the Chilton County Chamber of Commerce annual banquet. He earned this honor by serving 16 years as director of missions in Chilton-Unity Association. (TAB)



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Soteriology

Salvation as Justification

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

We have discussed in prior weeks that salvation may be understood under the analogies of redemption and conversion. This week we think about salvation in terms of justification. This helps explain how God responds when sinners repent and trust Christ as Savior.

Romans 3:26 tells us God is "the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Two verses later the same passage sets forth the conclusion "that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (v. 28). Two chapters later Romans adds as a summary truth: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

What are we to draw from these and other passages about the meaning of justification? We might put it like this: Justification is God's immediate response to a repentant sinner who trusts Christ. God then chooses to view our sins as forgiven and to view Christ's perfect righteousness as accredited to us, thereby declaring for time and eternity that He counts us righteous in His sight.

Justification is an analogy that draws its meaning from a court of law. When all the evidence has been presented, a verdict is rendered. The result of that verdict determines the accused person's legal standing in the eyes of the law — either innocent or guilty.

'Not guilty'

We speak of a verdict of innocence as acquittal, or a release from all charges against the accused person. As believers in Christ we stand before God as sinners who have been acquitted. God has declared us "not guilty." The potential penalty that belongs to a guilty person will not be imposed.

The amazing thing about this analogy is that we, as sinners, are in fact very guilty. All have sinned; none are innocent. The heart of the gospel is that Christ has taken our guilty verdict upon

Himself so that God the Righteous Judge might declare us "innocent." The Bible refers to this as being justified before God.

Not only does justification mean we are acquitted of all charges, along with their rightful penalty, but also that we are fully accepted into right standing before God. The dark cloud of divine condemnation has been lifted and God has credited Christ's perfect righteousness to our account.

'Accepted in the Beloved'

The Bible puts the matter simply, declaring that by God's grace we "are accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). When we think about being justified with God, we rightfully hold in mind the twin ideas of "acquitted" and "accepted." Henceforth God views us as fully pardoned, just as if we had never sinned at all. Not only does God pronounce the guilty to be innocent, He also reinstates us to His favor and privilege. He fully accepts those whom He fully acquits.

Bearing our sins

That God is just when He justifies the ungodly is explained by pointing us to His Son who became our Savior by bearing our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24).

God no longer counts us guilty because Christ has taken the legal consequences of our sin upon Himself on our behalf.

God remains perfectly just in upholding sin's penalty while at the same time not exacting that penalty upon those of us who trust Jesus. ✠

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.





Former Gov. Robert Bentley

TAB photo

Forced resignation

‘Storyline is always redemption, Romans 8:28’ when leaders, others mess up

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Media coverage, coffee shop talk and discussions at all levels moved quickly to negative — and many times ugly — remarks related to former Gov. Robert Bentley.

The dramatic play-by-play of events taking place April 10, the day Bentley resigned as governor following an exhausting two-year scandal, left no question he messed up and did it in royal fashion.

But even with the seemingly unrepentant state leader leaving an embarrassing black eye on the state, the storyline is always redemption and Romans 8:28, said Jay Wolf — pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, where Alabama’s new governor, Kay Ivey (see story, this page), is a member.

“Let’s stay anchored to Romans 8 that says ‘God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose,’” Wolf said.

‘Poorly managed opportunity’

“We are blessed to live in a land that allows for accountability of our elected officials. [Former governor] Bentley poorly managed his opportunity to be the Lord’s

strategic servant leader. The result of his mistakes was losing his place as governor,” Wolf said. “Let us pray for him to pursue God’s purpose for his future. We must refuse to descend into cynicism and skepticism but instead let us trust that God’s power is bigger than our problems.”

Travis Coleman — pastor of First Baptist Church, Prattville, where Bentley is a member — also urged Alabama Baptists to pray for Bentley.

“The fellowship at First, Prattville, has reached out to him and continues to pray for him,” Coleman said. “I would ask all Alabama Baptists to pray for our former governor, his spirit and to make himself accountable to the right men to help him through this very difficult crisis.”

Bentley moved his church membership to First, Prattville, after he and his wife of 50 years, Dianne, divorced in late summer 2015. He also currently attends Church of

the Highlands at both its Montgomery and Tuscaloosa campuses.

Previously Bentley had been a longtime member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, where he taught Sunday School and served as a deacon before entering the state’s political arena. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 2002 and served in that role until elected governor in 2010. He was re-elected governor in 2014.

Bentley’s forced resignation came once a yearlong investigation by the Alabama Ethics Commission determined Bentley had misused state resources to cover up an alleged inappropriate relationship with a former staff adviser,

Rebekah Mason, who has been part of Bentley’s inner circle for more than a decade.

While he denied a physical affair with Mason and consistently defended himself against any wrongdoing, Bentley worked out a plea agreement with the Alabama

attorney general’s office April 10 once possible impeachment and criminal charges seemed imminent.

He pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor charges — knowingly converting campaign contributions for personal use and failing to file a major contribution report. While he will not serve any jail time, Bentley will be required to serve 100 hours of community service in his field of dermatology.

Resignation speech

“There have been times that I have let you and our people down and I’m sorry for that,” Bentley said in his resignation speech. “The consequences of my mistakes have been grievously unfair to you, my loyal and dedicated staff and my cabinet and all of our agencies who have continued your exemplary service to our people ... in the face of difficult circumstances. I can no longer allow my family, my dear friends, my dedicated staff and cabinet to be subjected to the consequences that my past actions have brought upon them.

“I pray every morning for wisdom, guidance and forgiveness of the sins that I commit,” Bentley said. “I am thankful for a loving and merciful Savior who will always love me and you unconditionally.” ✠

“We must refuse to descend into cynicism and skepticism but instead let us trust that God’s power is bigger than our problems.”

**Pastor Jay Wolf
FBC Montgomery**

New Alabama Governor Kay Ivey — her pastor’s perspective

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Gov. Kay Ivey has a favorite pew at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. She tends to sit in the same spot and attends church faithfully, said her pastor, Jay Wolf.

Whether she will be seen as frequently now that she is governor is yet to be determined. But either way the First, Montgomery, family “will continue to be her encouraging church family,” Wolf said. “We will pray for her and help her recharge her spiritual batteries as her worship community.

“Kay is a dear friend that I admire and respect,” he said. “I am very grateful that her love for the Lord and His people have motivated her public service. It is a blessing to be her pastor, friend and brother in Christ.”

A prayer partner and occasional counselor for Ivey, Wolf described her as a faithful public servant with a “bright mind, loving spirit, deep loyalties and a genuine faith in Jesus Christ that guides her val-

ue system and decision making.”

“Kay’s walk with the Lord is real, deep and daily,” he said.

Ivey grew up in a strong Christian home in Camden and came to Christ early, Wolf explained. “At Auburn (University) her faith in God and leadership abilities propelled her to be elected as the first female president of the student government senate.

“Kay has served the people of Alabama for many years in the strategic positions of state treasurer and lieutenant governor,” he said. “She understands our state’s needs and the processes of government. Kay has excellent relationships with people at our church and in our state.”

Friendly and approachable, Ivey is known for her listening skills and ability to build consensus among people, he noted.

In her first words to Alabamians as governor April 10, Ivey said, “I will serve for the glory of God and the good of mankind. I ask for prayers and support.” ✠



TAB photo

Jay Wolf (center) — pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, where Alabama’s new governor, Kay Ivey (left), has been a member for more than 20 years — participates in Ivey’s April 10 swearing in ceremony led by acting chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court Lyn Stuart (right).



amazonhope.org

Reaching remote people in Amazon jungle takes giving up control, safety, time

By Roy McCormick
Special to Baptist Press

Although we sometimes lament the digital age, truth be told it's nice to be so connected. Most of us can't remember the last time we were out of contact without a phone, a computer or even a GPS-enabled car to get us out of trouble. It seems that everyone, everywhere on the planet is accessible, but that's not the case.

There are still remote, uncontacted places in the world where the gospel has not yet been declared.

Some of those places are in the Amazon Basin, a massive area larger than the continental United States that includes portions of six countries: Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela. This dense jungle expanse hosts many of the remaining people groups on the planet who live without any contact from the outside world. Estimates vary, but there may be as many as 50 remote groups scattered across the Amazon.

Broke away from outsiders

These hunter-gatherers fled war and disease decades ago to the relative safety of the river headwaters, out of reach from people such as rubber barons, lumber workers, drug runners and gold miners who sought to exploit them. These uncontacted groups may have once been part of a larger, now-contacted tribe, but the groups likely broke away before encountering outsiders.

Because of language drift and cultural differences, they now exist as separate peoples. They may venture out only to steal machetes and other indispensable tools. And when they do, they can be violent and

murderous. If they are seen, frightened villagers usually greet them with shotgun blasts.

Based on what we've learned from recently emerged groups, the general Amazonian tribal culture and photos shot with telephoto lenses, we believe the remaining uncontacted groups are rife with disease and spiritual warfare.

As animists they believe everything in the physical world has a more powerful spiritual counterpart. The wind has a spirit, as do certain trees, animals and people. The spirits are often seen as malicious and cause

sickness, confusion and death. These tribes perform rituals with animal sacrifices, libations and chants to appease or control the spirits. The color red is thought to shield them from evil, so they paint themselves with red dye or wear red-beaded bracelets. They are completely unaware of the power of the gospel. If you or I had been born in one of these groups, we could live and die without hearing the name of our Savior even once, apart from the intervention of Christ's Church on mission.

How do we even begin to bring the gospel to these peoples?

I've had the privilege of working with an indigenous missionary named Wilson who has been called to reach his uncontacted "cousins," the Iropi. The Iropi tribe speaks a similar dialect to Wilson's native tongue, so it's likely they broke off from his tribe more than 100 years ago.

Watching Wilson live out his Great Commission calling to the Iropi has shown that in order to reach these isolated groups

Christians must give up three things that Western culture highly values: control, safety and time.

Many of us have jobs, take vacations and plan our schedules well in advance. Work with the uncontacted can't be scheduled. For years Wilson simply waited. As he and his team waited they worked hard to prepare for contact with the Iropi.

They built dwellings for themselves so they could stay nearby. They planted fields, cut trails and left gifts the Iropi might find useful, such as machetes or cooking pots in order to initiate peaceful contact. But

they did all this back-breaking work while acknowledging that if God did not extend His hand to bring the tribe out, then there was nothing more they could do except "wait for the Lord, be strong and courageous" (Ps. 27:14), and trust that God's plan was better than theirs.

Years later, when Wilson finally saw the Iropi, he nearly lost his life.

The band that greeted him from the deep jungle was divided. Some treated him as a long-lost brother while others snuck around to his blind side to shoot him with six-foot-long arrows.

'I was prepared to die'

Wilson described to me how he dodged their lethal missiles while he sang the first songs to our Savior the Iropi had ever heard.

"I was prepared to die, and if it was my day for God to call me, then so be it," he said. "But instead He gave this old man the strength to dodge arrows!" As King David wrote when the Philistines attacked him, "In

God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Ps. 56:4)

For Wilson the danger was incidental to the work and nothing compared to the blessing of working for his Lord.

Wilson waited 17 years for first contact with the Iropi, and only then did his mission finally progress to "hello." He's still waiting to learn the language and culture, share the gospel, make disciples and plant churches.

Life of sacrifice

In many Western cultures, a "career" may now last only six to eight years before a person moves on to something else. Wilson lived a life of sacrifice for nearly two decades before completing the first steps of his ministry. It may be another 17 years before the work is complete. But at the end of his work, Wilson — and hopefully all of us — will be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Most people will never find themselves in the Amazon jungle, dodging arrows while singing praises to God. That particular blessing may be limited to Wilson and others on his team. However, whatever your ministry context, my prayer is that you "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us" and "run with endurance the race that lies before us" (Heb. 12:1). Wait on the Lord, do not let fear drive you and stay the course to completion.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons. Roy McCormick has worked in the Amazon Basin for the past 13 years as a discipler and trainer where he serves with his wife and three children. Although he has lived in Bolivia and Brazil, he now lives in Peru. ✠

**For more information,
visit [imb.org/2017/02/24/
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amazonhope.org

Nonprofit organization Amazon Hope works through volunteers from the United States to share the gospel with the more than 33,000 villages along the Amazon River.

Amazon HOPE

Churches, individuals can partner to bring hope of Christ to millions in Amazon River Basin

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Alabama Baptist Ty Harris went on a missions trip to the Amazon River Basin several years ago, one thing quickly became clear to him. People there were hungry for Jesus.

And the more people who could go share with them, the more people who could hear.

“When I went the first time to the Amazon River, I just fell in love with the people of Brazil,” said Harris, a member of Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz. “I just wanted to keep going back.”

But the cost of a trip like Harris’ was high and he knew he wouldn’t be able to go as often as he wanted with a price tag like that. He figured there might be others in the same boat.

“So God put it on my heart to start an organization,” Harris said.

His solution? To get everybody in a different boat.

“We bought our own boat so that way we wouldn’t have to rent one every time,” he said. “That’s really kept our costs down.”

And as a nonprofit organization — Amazon Hope — Harris and others have employed a group of Brazilian men to serve as boat captains, river guides, cooks and missionaries.

Follow up

“During the year they travel and scout out the people along the river and then in the summer we go back and follow up with those people and take teams to evangelize them,” Harris said. “We don’t just go in and leave — it’s a long-term effort and we partner with Brazilian pastors who go back in and do discipleship after we’re gone.”



amazonhope.org

Four million people live in as many as 33,000 unreached villages along the Amazon River and its tributaries.

Four million people live in as many as 33,000 unreached villages along the Amazon River and its tributaries. A number of those villages are indigenous people totally isolated from human contact, nestled deep in the jungle (see story, page 6).

But others are reachable by several days on the boat and open their arms to welcome teams from Amazon Hope.

The boat can sleep 30 people in cabins and an additional 20 people in hammocks.

Groups sail down the Amazon on six- to nine-day trips, stopping along the way and

investing in villages, doing door-to-door evangelism and showing the “JESUS” film.

“So many times when people come on trips, they want to come back and bring more people with them,” Harris said. “It’s so contagious on the river.”

That’s what happened to Harris — and what happened to Zac Goforth, who led Harris on that first trip several years ago.

‘People of my heart’

“It just kind of caught my heart,” said Goforth, associate pastor of students and family life at Sardis Baptist. “I’d been on trips before but this one was just different.”

Harris agreed. “They became the people of my heart.”

The villages are right along the river and they live “very poor subsistence lifestyles,” Goforth said.

But, he said, they’re wealthy by their standards — they have food and they have a roof over their heads.

Harris agreed. “They think they are the richest people in the world,” he said. “The only thing they hunger for is the gospel.”

Churches interested in bringing teams on a trip with Amazon

Hope can book the entire boat with 15 or more people or they can combine smaller groups with other churches.

“Individuals are welcome too,” Harris said. “You don’t have to have a church group to come on a trip.”

In addition to door-to-door evangelism, opportunities for ministry on the trips range from peacock bass fishing to medical work to construction.

“It’s a huge blessing every time,” Harris said. “God pours into us so much on each and every trip.”

For more information, call Harris at 256-458-4427 or visit www.amazonhope.org.

“So many times when people come on trips, they want to come back and bring more people with them. It’s so contagious on the river.”

Ty Harris
founder, Amazon Hope



amazonhope.org

Amazon Hope groups sail down the Amazon River on six- to nine-day trips, stopping and investing in villages through door-to-door evangelism, among other strategies.

Falling crime rate

Prayer, faith, hope important tools to reach incarcerated, help prevent crime

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Contrary to political rhetoric and common public opinion, serious crime in the United States has been declining for years, a trend mirrored in Alabama's own experience.

A recent Pew Research Center report notes that violent crimes and property crimes have fallen significantly over the past couple of decades. Annual data collected by the FBI, which compiles law enforcement agency data, and the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which surveys 90,000 households nationwide, indicated these long-term trends:

▶ Violent crime has fallen sharply from 1993 to 2015 (the latest year available) — by 50 percent according to the FBI's law enforcement data, and 77 percent according to BJS's survey data, which includes unreported crimes. FBI did report a 3 percent increase in violent crime between 2014 and 2015.

▶ Property crime has likewise declined during that period — 48 percent according to the FBI and 69 percent according to BJS.

Alabama's total serious crimes (including violent and property crimes) during the last couple of decades also have declined, according to the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center (ACJIC). There were 162,476 serious crimes reported in 2015, compared to 198,356 in 1993.

ACJIC data indicates that much of the progress in reducing the crime rate has been made during the last few years.

"In a Pew Research Center survey in late 2016," researchers reported, "57

percent of registered voters said crime had gotten worse since 2008, even though BJS and FBI data show that violent and property crime rates declined by double-digit percentages during that span."

Undeserved reputation

Likewise some cities get an undeserved reputation for high crime during the heat of a campaign. Chicago made headlines in 2016 for its murder rate, despite the fact that its murder rate was less than one-third of the murder rates in St. Louis and Baltimore, according to crime data collected by the FBI.

However, crime rates do vary widely from one geographic region to another and

Crime trends in Alabama				
Year	Total number of offenses	Percent change	Crime rate per 100,000 population	Percent change
2011	191,318	7%	3983.5	7%
2012	181,752	-5%	3769.2	-5%
2013	173,916	-4%	3598.0	-5%
2014	164,516	-5%	3392.5	-6%
2015	162,476	-1%	3343.8	-1%

(Source: Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center)

can be attributable to factors such as population density and economic conditions. "In 2015 for instance there were more than 600 violent crimes per 100,000 residents in Alaska, Nevada, New Mexico and Tennessee. By contrast, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Virginia had rates below 200 violent crimes per 100,000 residents," Pew reported.

Alabama's crime rates also vary widely from county to county. For instance the 2015 index crime rate (expressed in serious crimes per 100,000 population) in Jefferson County, the state's most populous, was more than twice that of comparatively rural and affluent Baldwin County, according to ACJIC.

While it's encouraging to see crime rates decline overall, it's important to remember that many crimes are never reported in the first place.

"In 2015, the most recent year available, only about half of the violent crime tracked by BJS (47 percent) was reported to police. And in the much more common category of property crime, only about one-third (35 percent) was reported. The proportion was substantially higher for offenses classified as serious violent crime (55 percent), a category that includes serious domestic violence (61 percent of which was reported), serious violent crime involving injury (59 percent) and serious violent crime involving weapons (56 percent)," Pew researchers wrote.

Pew survey respondents attributed the lack of crime reporting to a variety of fac-

tors, including doubts police would help, the feeling it was too trivial a matter to report to police or it was a personal matter they preferred to handle themselves.

Lack of crime reporting

Baldwin County's two top law enforcement officials weighed in on the issue.

Sheriff Huey "Hoss" Mack said, "Submission to the FBI UCR (Unified Crime Report) is voluntary for most agencies. With that in mind I view the UCR as a true but not complete picture into the criminal activity in a particular area. Most unreported crime falls into the misdemeanor and violation categories. Felony crimes are more reported due to their nature and court actions."

Baldwin County District Attorney Robert Wilters, who spent more than two decades as a judge and before that was an FBI special agent, said lack of crime reporting can be highly localized and crimes can affect people disproportionately.

"In some neighborhoods, it's sort of a way of life that at some point in your life, your car will be broken into or stolen. If they don't have the means to fix the broken window or replace that car, what are they going to do? Some people live on the razor's edge financially and a small crime that some people might overlook can be a major crime to other people.

"And in some neighborhoods a crime of violence will not be reported to police because it's sort of an eye for an eye and

a tooth for a tooth, that 'if you hurt one of my people, I'll hurt one of your people,'" he said.

Both the sheriff and the district attorney believe faith matters when it comes to preventing crime and rehabilitating offenders.

"God wants us to look out after our friends and family and that's what we should do — pay attention," Wilters said. "Don't just go home, close the door and not go outside. Be active in your community. We've got to pay attention to what's going on. That's a godsend when people are watching out for you."

Power of prayer

Wilters believes in the power of prayer too. "Pray for our victims of crime, for the offenders, for law enforcement, judges, juries."

An important part of the drug court he presided over as a judge and remains involved in as a district attorney is connecting offenders with people of faith. Volunteer chaplains are available at drug court to pray with offenders and have private conversations with them. "There's someone in the courtroom that they can talk to about anything and everything and it's not going to go any further than the offender, the chaplain and God. That can be a big turning point in someone's life.

"Too many people in drug court are unchurched or haven't been in such a long time, they've forgotten and they have no hope," Wilters said. "As a Christian, if I'm going through bad times, I know God's going to be there with me, He'll never

abandon me. If I'm going through some bad times, I have hope that there will be a better day.

"But if you've got no hope for a better life, you continue on that path of destruction. It's a slow way of committing suicide."

Prayer and faith and hope are powerful tools, Mack said. "As people of faith, I ask for prayers for our deputies and employees. I also ask for prayers for our inmates. We average a daily count of 525

inmates and we need prayerful support for them while they are incarcerated and physical support when they are released. I personally believe that a person who has faith also has hope. Hope is key to any rehabilitation or change in a person's life," Mack said.

"Faith first, which leads to hope, which leads to the promise of something better."

"Pray for our victims of crime, for the offenders, for law enforcement, judges, juries."

**Robert Wilters
Baldwin County
District Attorney**

"Faith first, which leads to hope, which leads to the promise of something better."

**Sheriff Huey "Hoss" Mack
Baldwin County**

'SPIRITUAL MARKER'

Church members witness friends making commitment to God

(continued from page 1)

12 in two portable baptistries in the church atrium.

"It was indeed a great day for Cottage Hill," Floyd said. "I believe it to be a spiritual marker in the life of the church."

Greg Golden, pastor of media ministries/prayer, said it was an encouraging time for all.

"The excitement level was so high getting to watch obedient people committing their lives fully to what Jesus is doing in them and in our city," he said.

When the main service ended and moved out to the atrium for the baptisms, nearly everyone stayed, Golden said. "People packed in and lined the staircases and the balcony to watch."

One of those people was Cindy Hubbart, who watched both of her teenage daughters get baptized that morning.

"We had been going to church more and I've been really trying to get them into their Sunday School and youth group," Hub-

bart said of Victoria, 16, and Faith, 13. "They told me I wasn't allowed to cry, but I'll tell you, mama teared up. It was amazing — that's the best word I can use to describe it."

'Big church pep rally'

Meredith Nations, who also was baptized that morning, said it was like "a big church pep rally."

"I had been floundering about whether or not my salvation experience was the 'real deal,'" she said. "I was ready to make a firm commitment to the Lord and I knew that baptism was a statement letting everyone know whose team I am on."

The Sunday of the Jonah sermon, she prayed God would give her peace in her salvation and help her to take that first step of obedience in baptism.

"I feel peace and joy knowing that my salvation is secure," Nations said. "It was a blessing to have many of my family members and life group sisters there to witness it."

Golden said it was "a very unifying time" as church members got to see their friends make that commitment.

Floyd agreed. "For several months, we have seen the sparks of revival in the church but this helped fan the flame." ✠

"We have seen the sparks of revival in the church but this helped fan the flame."

Pastor Alan Floyd
Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile



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ALABAMA-CRENSHAW

► **South Luverne Church, Luverne**, will celebrate homecoming and its 32nd anniversary April 30, 10:55 a.m. Boyd Evans, pastor of First Church, Port St. Joe, Florida, will be guest speaker. Lunch will follow the service. Sam Tate is pastor.

COFFEE

► **Bethany Church, New Brockton**, will celebrate homecoming April 23, 9 a.m. Ben Amlong will be guest speaker. Joyce Croft will perform special music. For more information call the church office at 334-894-2344. Tony Dye is pastor.

ELMORE

► **Mount Hebron East Church, Eclectic**, will hold revival services April 24-26, 7 nightly. Gerald Hallmark will speak each night. Chris Smith will perform special music. The church also

will celebrate homecoming April 30, 10:30 a.m. The Jordan River Band will perform special music. Lunch will follow the service. And **Jeff Finklea** is the new pastor of Mount Hebron East. He previously served as pastor of Olive Branch Church, Wetumpka. He holds a bachelor's degree from Troy University and a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary. He has two children. His first Sunday was April 9.



FINKLEA

LIMESTONE

► **Lindsay Lane Church, Athens**, will hold "Blended and Blessed: Keys to Stepfamily Success" on April 29, 9

a.m.-4:30 p.m. Dusty McLemore is pastor. ► **Clements Church, Athens**, will hold a special service April 30, 9:30 a.m. Evangelist Junior Hill will speak. Tim Anderson is pastor. ► **Limestone Association** will hold its ministers meeting May 1, 10 a.m. at Camp Helen's fellowship hall in Harvest. Kevin Ward is DOM.

ST. CLAIR

► **First Church, Pell City**, will host the associational Sunday School leader training April 30, 4 p.m.-5:45 p.m. Jay Gordon will speak. This event is sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, St. Clair Association and First, Pell City. For more information call Tim Gold at 205-338-9444. John Thweatt is pastor. Chris Crain is director of missions.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Daviston Church** will celebrate homecoming and its 175th

anniversary April 23, 10 a.m. The Dyes will perform special music. Larry Cummings will speak. Lunch will follow. Shane Dye is pastor.

DALE

► **Jim Hill** is the new director of missions for **Dale Association**, effective May 1. He previously served as pastor of Ridgecrest Church, Ozark, for more than 18 years and as interim at Newton Church before that. Hill holds a bachelor's degree from the Baptist College of Florida in Graceville. He and his wife, Robin, have two children and six grandchildren. †



HILL



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Southside Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Pastor Search Committee, 1101 Cherry St., Talladega, AL 35160 (www.southsidedalladega.org).

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Chapel Hill Baptist Church, Northport, Alabama. Accepting resúmes for full-time student pastor. Send to: jnichols@chapelhillbc.org or to: Student Pastor Search Committee, 8790 Highway 43 N., Northport, AL 35473.

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Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2017 marks 150th anniversary of Dallas pastor George W. Truett's birth

George W. Truett was one of the most famous Southern Baptist pastors of the 20th century. He served First Baptist Church, Dallas, for 47 years.

This year is the 150th anniversary of his birth.

The seventh child of Charles and Mary Kimsey Truett, George Truett was born May 6, 1867, on a farm in Hayesville, North Carolina. As a child he read great literature such as John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "Fox's Book of Martyrs." His love of books led him to eventually acquire a library of 10,000 books.

He attended Hayesville Academy from 1875 until he graduated in 1885.

At the age of 19 he was converted in a church service after hearing Hebrews 10:38: "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." He joined

Hayesville Baptist Church and soon shared the gospel with friends and neighbors.

In 1887 he moved to Towns County, Georgia, where he founded Hiwassee Academy and became the first principal.

He left Georgia to follow his parents to Whitewright, Texas, and joined Whitewright Baptist Church and was ordained there in 1890. He preached his first sermon at First Baptist Church, Sherman. George Truett soon became known as a great orator.

The president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, hired him to serve as the school's financial secretary. George Truett raised \$92,000 in 23 months, which erased the university's debt. He studied there from 1893 to 1897, graduating with a bachelor's degree.

He married fellow Baylor student Josephine Jenkins in 1894.

He became pastor of First, Dallas, in September 1897, a position he held until his death. Membership increased from 715 to 7,804. The church was rebuilt three times to accommodate crowds.

George Truett was a humble man whose preaching was profound yet simple and filled with illustrations. He used short, concise sentences. Speaking in a conversational voice, his pathos and feeling often made parishioners weep.

He traveled the world preaching and making addresses.

During World War I, then-President Woodrow Wilson appointed him as 1 of 20 ministers to preach for six months to Allied forces.

On May 16, 1920, George Truett delivered one of his famous sermons, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," on the steps of the Capitol in Washington. He stressed

religious freedom and separation of Church and State.

He was president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1927 to 1929. From 1934 to 1939 he was president of the Baptist World Alliance. He toured missions sites in the Far East.

An admirer of Charles Spurgeon, he was the only American to speak at the Spurgeon Centenary in London in 1934.

For 37 summers George Truett made annual trips through the Davis Mountains in west Texas, traveling with cattle drives and preaching at cowboy camp meetings.

He received many honorary degrees, including a law degree from the University of Alabama.

He died July 7, 1944, of bone disease and respiratory arrest. He was buried at Sparkman-Hillcrest Memorial Park Cemetery in Dallas. On his gravestone is etched: "My greatest desire is to help the people and to magnify the matchless name of Christ." †

By Joanne Sloan

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



TRUETT

Prosecution drops case against former minister Shahan because of insufficient evidence

By Neisha Roberts
The Alabama Baptist

More than three years after Richard Shahan's arrest for the alleged murder of his wife, Attorney General Steve Marshall filed a motion April 10 in Jefferson County Circuit Court to drop the prosecution of the former Birmingham minister.

A team of attorneys from the attorney general's office began preparations in December 2016 for a May 2017 trial date but upon review of the case they concluded there was insufficient evidence in the State's possession at this time to move forward with prosecution, according to a news release.

The motion to "nolle prosequi without prejudice" preserves the State's opportunity to prosecute in the future.

Having been under house arrest and living with his mother since 2014, Shahan's electronic ankle monitor was removed April 11 and he is now "free with no restrictions," his mother told *The Alabama Baptist*.

Shahan's wife, Karen Louise Shahan, was found stabbed to death in her home located just across the parking lot from First Baptist Church, Birmingham, on July 23, 2013. At the time Richard Sha-

han was serving as children and families pastor and facilities director at First, Birmingham. When her body was found, Richard Shahan was out of town reportedly visiting family in Franklin, Tennessee, and Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Since that time there have been several chapters to the case:

► **December 2013** — Richard Shahan resigned from his role at First, Birmingham mid-December. He had taken administrative leave in August and sent out newsletters and prayer cards in December about a new three-year role with Bible Mission International in Frankfurt, Germany.

► **Jan. 1, 2014** — He attempted to board a flight to Germany but the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office saw enough developments in the case to obtain a murder warrant. He was arrested in the Nashville airport. Emails confiscated from his computer indicated that once out of the country he planned to move to the United Kingdom and marry his boyfriend. He was held without bond at Davidson County Sheriff's Office in Tennessee.

► **Jan. 7, 2014** — He waived his right to extradition in a hearing and was returned to Jefferson County on Jan. 8. He

was held in protective custody until his release on a \$100,000 bond later that month and was put under house arrest.

► **August 2014** — He was indicted for murder by a grand jury.

► **February 2015** — He pleaded not guilty in a hearing before Jefferson County Circuit Judge Laura Petro. Petro ruled on two pre-trial motions in the hearing, one allowing prosecutors 90 days to begin providing defense attorneys with more of the "voluminous" collected evidence for the case.

► **August 2015** — Petro ruled on other motions in an Aug. 19, 2015, hearing and set Nov. 6 as the deadline for prosecution to provide a list of experts they plan to call on trial. The defense argued that Richard Shahan did not kill his wife but that someone broke into their home and killed her.

► **October 2016** — Jefferson County District Attorney Patrick Lamb disclosed evidence to the defense that investigators had found, according to al.com.

► **December 2016** — Jefferson County District Attorney's Office recused itself from the case and requested the attorney general's office assume the prosecution. A trial date was set for May 2017. (Debbie Campbell contributed) †

PASTORS: A quick tip

Growing your church

Is your church plateaued or declining? If so, your church is part of a growing segment of churches. It is sad and this ought not to be. I am convinced God wants every church to grow, no matter the size or location (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 2:4). While this can be a complex matter, here are a few simple tips that may get your church back on track.

Tip #1: Don't try to disguise the lack of growth by re-shifting the focus. Someone in the car business told me years ago that "if cars are not moving, move them around (the lot)." Churches have been known to use this tactic as well.

Tip #2: Be honest and admit there is a problem. Avoid talking about what a great church you have and how everything is going great if it isn't.

Tip #3: Meet with appropriate groups in the church and analyze your current plan for growth. If you do not have a plan for growth, develop a plan. I suspect the churches that are not growing either have no plan or are not working the plan they have.

— Chip Warren, ministry leader †

Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

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Alabama Baptist State Convention
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

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



Church groups rebuild homes destroyed by IS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — As a number of Iraqi Christians are returning to the homes they left behind when the Islamic State group attacked, three major church groups have joined forces to rebuild more than 12,000 houses that were destroyed or damaged, according to The Christian Post.

The Syriac Catholic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church and Chaldean Catholic Church have come together to form the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee and will rebuild the houses using funds raised by the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need. The project has a price tag of at least \$213 million, according to the Post.

Canon Andrew White, an Anglican priest known as the “vicar of Baghdad,” said that for Christians, living in Iraq “has become very difficult.”

“If there is anything I can tell Americans it is that your fellow brothers and sisters are suffering, they are desperate for help,” White said. “And it is not just a matter of praying for peace. They need a lot — food, resources, clothes, everything.” (TAB)

Pope considers married men for priesthood

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is open to the possibility of ordaining married men to the priesthood in remote areas that lack spiritual leadership, according to a March 9 article in a German publication.

The Pope said in the article that while making exceptions to the celibacy rule is not the solution to the shortage of priests, he was open to considering the idea, he said. “We must consider if ‘virī probati,’ or ‘married men of proven faith,’ is a possibility. Then we must determine what tasks they can perform, for example, in remote communities,” he said.

The shortage worldwide is an “enormous problem” that weakens the Church, the Pope said. He added that he prefers an unmarried, celibate priesthood but that the value is a discipline of the Catholic Church, not a dogma, The Christian Post reported. (TAB)

Chilton Assoc. among state groups preparing for National Day of Prayer

At press time, it’s just 20 days away from the 65th annual National Day of Prayer on May 4.

Established in 1952 by a United States Congress joint resolution, the National Day of Prayer was signed into law by then-President Harry S. Truman. This year’s theme is “For Your Great Name’s Sake” and is based off Daniel 9:19.

Many churches and associations across the United States, including Alabama, are encouraging Christians to pray on that Thursday “as it enables us to recall and to teach the way in which our founding fathers sought the wisdom of God when faced with critical decisions,” according to national-dayofprayer.org.

Chilton Baptist Association is just one of many associations encouraging its churches to “pray for our nation on this appointed day.” The association will provide 10 yard placards to each church to help promote the day and the purpose of the prayer emphasis.

Positive response

“The response from our churches has been extremely positive,” Director of Missions Larry Felkins said. “Many communities are promoting this day with an event. Churches are open for prayer that day and our desire



Photo courtesy of Chilton Baptist Association

A banner promotes the National Day of Prayer as part of Chilton Baptist Association’s involvement in the event.

is to have more people praying every day and especially on May 4.”

In conjunction with the National Day of Prayer, Alabamians will gather again at civic locations around the state to read the entire Bible over their cities.

To get involved, check out the details for the various Bible Reading Marathons:

► Birmingham — Starting Thursday, May 4, 9 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 5 p.m. Held at Kelly Ingram Park Pavilion at the corner of 5th Avenue North and 16th Street downtown. For

more information, visit libertypark.org/biblemarathon.

► Oneonta — Starting Thursday, May 4, 8 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 8:30 a.m. Held at the Blount County Courthouse. For more information, visit the Facebook page: Oneonta Blount County Bible Reading Marathon.

► Tuscaloosa — Starting Sunday, April 30, 3 p.m. and ending Thursday, May 4, 9 a.m. Held in front of the chapel of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, at 721 Greensboro Avenue. For more information, visit hope4mycity.com.

► Montgomery — Starting Thursday, May 4, 8:30 a.m. and ending Sunday, May 7, 8:30 a.m. Held at the State Capitol building. For more information, visit hisvessel.org/bible-reading.

► Ozark — Starting Sunday, April 30, 3 p.m. and ending Thursday, May 4, noon, with a prayer service. Held in front of the Dale County Courthouse in Ozark. For more information, call Dale Association at 334-774-2713.

► Troy — Starting Sunday, April 30, with music and prayer at 6 p.m. and Bible reading at 7 p.m. ending May 4, noon. Held in downtown Troy in the gazebo on the square. For more information, call Salem-Troy Association at 334-566-1538. (TAB)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 23

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

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE? Matthew 24:36-51

Be Reminded (36-41)

Every few years it seems there is someone who predicts the date of Christ's return and yet they are always wrong. Should we be surprised at this? No. The Bible is clear that no one knows the date of Christ's return except for the Father Himself.

The key for Christians is not to focus on the date of Christ's return but to be prepared for when He does return.

If we knew the exact date of Christ's return we may become tempted to be lazy in our pursuit of sanctification. We may decide to live a life of selfishness and then get prepared when Christ was set to return.

I have heard many young people say they are not willing to follow Jesus yet, but they will get serious about "religion" later. They want to live a life of selfish indulgence, putting themselves and their wishes above those of God and they expect they will live long enough to change later in life, after they get married and have kids.

There are two problems with this attitude. First if you are not willing to follow Jesus now, what makes you think you will follow Him later in life? Second you may not live long enough to make a decision later.

Be Alert (42-44)

Not knowing the day and hour of Christ's return helps us to focus on the important thing — striving to live a godly life through the help of the Holy Spirit and telling other people about Christ. The key is being prepared for Christ's return, not knowing the time of it.

Many people throughout history have focused on Jesus' day of return and foolishly made preparations for it by getting

rid of their property and belongings. Since Christ did not return, they were left having to go back and trying to acquire their things.

Furthermore people banking on the return of Christ at a specific time often are disillusioned when they realize they were led astray.

Instead we need to focus on Christ and the gospel with the confidence that He will return rather than waiting for the return and becoming idle.

Be Faithful (45-47)

What should Christians do in preparation for the Lord's return? Christians need to follow the great commandment — "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Since God loves people, we show love to God when we love people. Christians cannot be picky about whom they love — we are to love all types of people from every ethnic background and every nation.

Be Warned (48-51)

The consequences for rejecting Christ are disastrous — an eternal separation from God.

God loves us and sent His only Son to die for us but God also is a God of justice. Anyone who dies apart from Christ still has to answer for his sin. Without the perfect sacrifice of Christ which atones for our sins, one is left with his own works of righteousness, which amount to no more than filthy rags.

The Book of Romans makes it clear that the wages of sin is death but God offers a remedy for sin in Christ.

This demonstrates the importance for Christians to tell others about Jesus, but also it shows the need for people to accept Christ as their Savior so they do not face eternal separation from God. †

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

LIFE IN CHRIST Luke 9:18-26

Today's passage comes at a turning point in Luke. Read all of Chapter 9 to get the context. Very soon Jesus will head to Jerusalem to fulfill the exact events He talks about in the passage we'll read.

Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. (18-20)

The phrase "the disciples" probably refers to a group larger than "the twelve" (compare 9:1, 9:12 and Acts 1:21-26). Some people probably thought Jesus was John the Baptist (raised from the dead, see 9:7-9) because the two preached similar messages (see 3:7-17).

The people who think Jesus was Elijah have in mind Malachi 4:5-6, and those who say that "one of the ancient prophets has risen" might be thinking of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 (see Acts 3:22).

Peter, however, has figured out that Jesus indeed resembles all of these people, but He is something more: "the anointed one of God." Your translation might say "the Christ of God" or "God's Messiah."

In Matthew, Mark and Luke those who make this confession signify that they recognize not only who Jesus is, but also that through Him, God is accomplishing His plan of redemption.

Jesus took up His cross for us. (21-22)

It is not just that Jesus took up His cross for us but that He took His long trip to Jerusalem (almost one-third of the Gospel of Luke) knowing full well what awaited Him at the end.

"Son of Man" is one of Jesus' typical ways of referring to Himself. In Aramaic, Jesus' native tongue, the phrase simply means "human being," but Jesus is calling attention to His divine authority and king-

ship, for in Daniel 7:14 the "one like a Son of Man" receives "dominion and glory and kingship" from the Ancient of Days (i.e. God).

Jesus is saying, "I, the one to whom God has given the authority to rule as Messiah, will suffer and die so that God may form 'the new covenant in My blood'" (Luke 22:20).

Following Jesus means taking up our cross daily. (23-26)

In Acts the apostles are in danger of being killed if they continue to proclaim Jesus boldly, as might all of the new leaders including Paul. Most famously Stephen is lynched for his bold proclamation.

Jesus makes that possibility clear in this passage in Luke. To "take up one's cross daily and follow Me" means to be prepared to face death because of one's faithfulness to Jesus. After all, the cross was an ancient torture and execution device. Such a possibility seems distant to us in Alabama, but we know some of our brothers and sisters face this reality.

Following Christ means following Him to the cross and dying to self. Paul takes up and reworks these ideas in Romans 6:1-11.

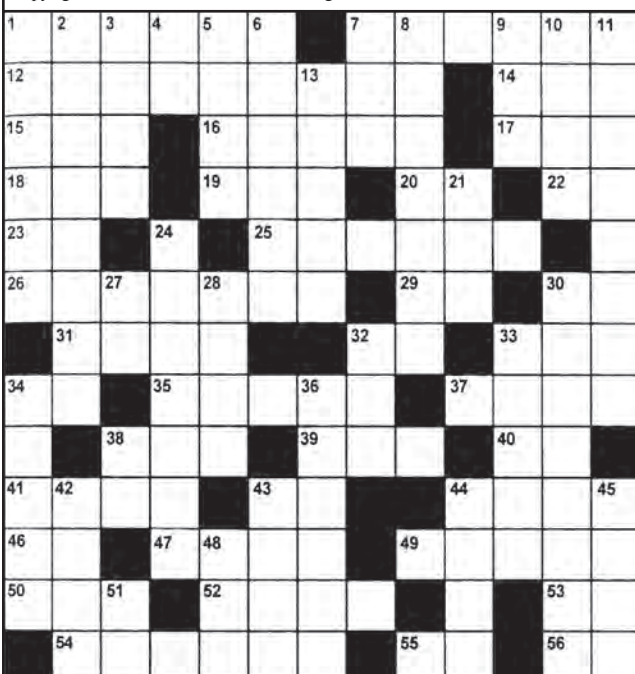
Whereas Jesus talked about the possibility of being killed for one's faith, Paul, who faced that possibility himself, talks about a different kind of death.

If what we have after coming to Christ is called "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) or being "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11), then abandoning our previous existence when we thought we were living well must be called "death" — death to our own passions, our own motivations, our own will.

If we study Paul and Jesus' words together, we see that the sort of death Paul teaches is what enables us to take up our crosses the way Jesus demands. †

Christian Crossword

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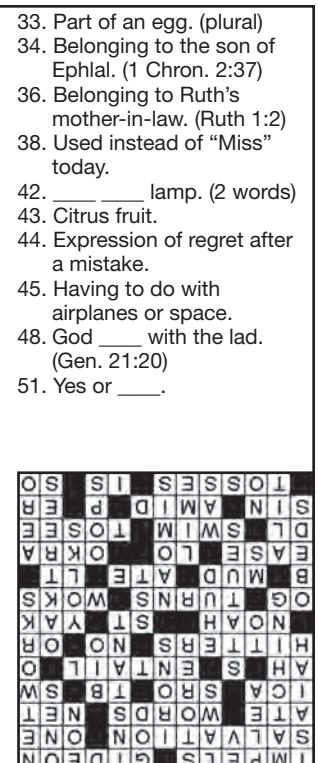
Across

- Principles.
- The sword of _____. (Judg. 7:14)
- A horn of _____ for us. (Luke 1:69)
- But _____ mightier than I cometh. (Luke 3:16)
- Consumed.
- Nor hear your _____. (Matt. 10:14)
- He is cast into a _____. (Job 18:8)
- International Cooperative Alliance. (abbr.)
- Standing Room Only. (abbr.)
- A disease of the lungs. (abbr.)
- Wind direction.
- Exclamation of satisfaction.
- To impose a necessary accompaniment or result.
- Batters.
- Negative.
- Either/_____.
- Lamech ... begat _____. (Gen. 5:30)
- Saint. (abbr.)

- A large long-haired Asian animal.
- The kingdom of _____ in Bashan. (Josh. 13:31)
- To take _____.
- Oriental cooking pans.
- Very wet dirt.
- I _____ no pleasant bread. (Dan. 10:3)
- Left Tackle. (abbr.)
- Shalt thou find no _____. (Deut. 28:65)
- _____, I come to do thy will. (Heb. 10:7)
- Hairy Southern vegetable.
- Roman numeral for 550.
- Lest any of them should _____ out. (Acts 27:42)
- For I trust _____ you. (Rom. 15:24; 2 words)
- Lay not this _____ to their charge. (Acts 7:60)
- In the middle of.
- Emergency Room. (abbr.)
- Throws.
- Made ... the sea, and all that in them _____. (Acts 4:24)
- _____ Abram departed. (Gen. 12:4)

Down

- A prophet.
- Identical.
- Request.
- Audiovisual. (abbr.)
- Abraham ... kept ... my statutes and my _____. (Gen. 26:5)
- A person who saves things.
- They were both righteous before _____. (Luke 1:6)
- Continuing _____ in prayer. (Rom. 12:12)
- Long period of time.
- I have commanded my sanctified _____. (Isa. 13:3)
- NBC, CBS, ABC.
- Fill his skin with barbed _____. (Job 41:7)
- Having to do with a natural science. (prefix)
- Idols.
- Christ went up _____ Jerusalem.
- The son of Gera. (Judg. 3:15)
- A strong wood comes from these.
- Supersonic Transport. (abbr.)



Want to know GOD?

By Jenni Ingram
Member, First Baptist Church, Gantt

My husband is a sweet man and although he tries not to show it, he is really very funny. We were talking with some friends the other day and one of them made a very silly statement.

My husband, Billy, looked at our confused friend and said, "The light is on, but no one is home."

I know the context is vastly different but for some reason that got me thinking about the resurrection of Jesus.

He had told His followers, "You will look for Me, but you will not find Me; and where I am, You cannot come" (John 7:34).

The lights were on, the sun had risen on that glorious day, but no one was "home" in the tomb.

Thanks to Jesus, His sacrifice and His amazing grace, the tomb will never be home for anyone who accepts His free gift of salvation. Thanks to the love of Christ that held Him on that old rugged cross, we will never experience an eternity in hell. We will never have to know what pain and suffering some will experience.

Our reward will be complete because Scripture also promises, "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6-8).

I have total faith in my salvation, I have total faith in Jesus' love and I have total faith in my eternal destination. Do you? If you don't have your reservation for heaven, I urge you to call a pastor right now or a Christian friend to discuss salvation. †



Media reviews

Hollyn

"One-Way Conversations"
Gotee Records, 2017

In 2013, Hollyn was cut from the Hollywood rounds of American Idol. She shouldn't have been.

Four years later the 20-year-old has cultivated the looks and sound for pop stardom, in Christian music and beyond. "Love With Your Life" is a radio-ready, pop-funk masterpiece that's already stuck in your head barely a minute in. You could say the same about "All My Love," "Can't Live Without" and probably half of the 11 songs on "One-Way Conversations," the



full-length follow-up to Hollyn's breakout self-titled 2015 EP. Nothing sounds like filler, not even "Party in the Hills," a slight stylistic departure featuring Andy Mineo and Steven Malcolm that contains echoes of monster Miley Cyrus' monster hit "Party in the USA."

Lyrically the album focuses on applying faith to real-world situations. Yet "In Awe," a beautiful, piano-driven track highlighting Hollyn's impressive vocal chops, might as well be a praise song.

"Can't speak
So close I can feel You breathe

*You're so holy and worthy
You know what I've been
Can't move
So close to You I'm see-through
No, not innocent like you
Oh God, I'm sorry*
"One-Way Conversations" is worth checking out.

Darlene Zschech

"Here I Am Send Me"
Integrity Music, 2017

Hillsong veteran Darlene Zschech wrote modern praise masterpiece "Shout to the Lord" in 1993 while fighting to keep her family afloat financially. The 11 songs on "Here I Am Send Me," only the second live solo album of Zschech's illustrious career, were born of even greater struggles.



The album kicks off with "You Are Great," a response to Zschech's recent battle with breast cancer. The song was actually co-written with former Delirious? vocalist

and guitarist Martin Smith during Zschech's first week of chemotherapy. It's followed immediately by "You Will Be Praised," which Zschech wrote with Paul Baloche and Bethel Music's Jenn Johnson, dur-

ing her first trip to the United States after radiation treatment.

It's a fantastic song, especially lyrically:
*"Though I walk through darkest valleys
There's no fear for You are with me
You have held me through the fire
Jesus You are here with me ...
Through every storm You will remain
In death and in life I'll not be afraid
In joy or in pain You will be praised"*
There are plenty of reasons Zschech has been called a "praise and worship pioneer." "Here I Am Send Me" is merely the latest and one of the greatest. †

Meet the reviewer

Jeremy Henderson reviews music for The Alabama Baptist. He is co-host of Rich and Jeremy in the Mornings on Wings 94.3 FM, editor of The War Eagle Reader and attends Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn.



news@thealabamabaptist.org

REFLECTIONS



Correctional ministries summit to train, equip volunteers

There can be "tremendous challenges" for Christian volunteers working in correctional ministries. That's why Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association (CMCA) is hosting its fifth annual Correctional Ministries Summit to help volunteers develop skills, network with others and be encouraged in ministry.

The summit will be held May 5-6 at the Philadelphia Airport Marriott Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and will feature key speakers W. Wilson Goode, former mayor of Philadelphia; Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College in Illinois; James Ackerman, president of Prison Fellowship; and Yasmine Arrington, poet, blogger and motivational speaker.

Workshop tracks will be

offered in the areas of jail ministry, re-entry specialists, chaplains, church leaders and juvenile ministry.

CMCA — in partnership with the Philadelphia Leadership Foundation, Alpha Community Development Corporation and Amachi — also will host a pre-summit panel May 5, 10 a.m.-noon. Discussion topics will include juvenile sentencing, drug sentencing and sentencing disparities.

Meeting challenges

Joseph Williams, CMCA executive director, said, "Our role is to prepare our brothers and sisters in Christ to be ready to meet these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities."

For more information or to register for the summit, visit cmcainternational.org. (TAB)

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'He has blessed me'

Faith keeps Sacramento Kings guard grounded

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Collis Temple Jr.'s legacy has made its way to the NBA.

From 1971 to 1974, Temple was the first African-American to play varsity basketball at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge, be named All-Southeastern Conference as a senior and be drafted by the Phoenix Suns in the 1974 NBA draft.

While Temple did not play in the NBA, he played for the San Antonio Spurs when they were members of the American Basketball Association before the league merger in 1976.

"My dad being the first African-American to play at LSU is an amazing legacy," said Garrett Temple, a guard for the Sacramento Kings. "It means a great deal. It shows some progress and I appreciate him for blazing that trail for us — for me and those other players that played at LSU."

One of those other players at LSU was Collis Temple III, who also followed in his father's footsteps, playing there from 1999 to 2003.

Both his father and his brother gave Garrett Temple advice: "Good things will happen if you put in the work. Eventually you will get the results you want."

And Garrett Temple's hard work has paid off.

Following in the footsteps of his father and brother, Garrett Temple played at LSU. From his freshman season in 2005 through his senior year in 2009, his point total increased as well as his minutes. During his senior season he became the all-time leader in minutes played — 4,432. He was All-SEC Defensive Team and All-SEC Second Team.

NBA contract

Undrafted out of college he signed his first guaranteed NBA contract in 2013 with the Washington Wizards.

Since then he has reaped the benefits of tithing. "I didn't know all the ins and outs of tithing. I started tithing my third year. It's just crazy. Not crazy — amazing — how God rewards you after being obedient. When I started tithing and doing what I was supposed to be doing, that is when the contracts started getting bigger. I have been tithing

every year since then. It's not all about the money. You can do so much good with the money. He has blessed me. It shows His faithfulness," he said.

Garrett Temple's faith kept him grounded and focused on his goals during eight 10-day contracts with five NBA teams; Development League stints with three teams; an overseas season in Italy; being on the roster of four NBA Summer League teams; and being waived by the Miami Heat in 2012.

He played with the Wizards from 2012 to 2016 before being traded to Sacramento.

"I never feared the next thing because I had faith in God. If I have fear that means that I don't trust

what God is doing. I never feared anything at all. I have always been a guy that lets things roll off my back and I understand that something is bigger. If a door closes, God closes it for a reason. I understand that concept. He has allowed me not to be a worrier, but a guy who trusts His timing and trusts whatever He has for me. I have a peace of mind to not worry about things I cannot control."

Garrett Temple credits his father for helping him be where he is.

As well as basketball, Garrett Temple learned from his father to prioritize and "do the right things. God first and foremost and family. You are on this earth to do good things for other people and be grateful for what you are," Garrett Temple said.

A member of Mount Zion First Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Garrett Temple grew up in church, being baptized at a young age.

However, he began to better understand his faith while a junior at LSU and got "serious" about it his first year in Washington.

"The third year in the NBA was big for me," he said. "That was a turning point."

A daily Bible reader, Romans 12 is his favorite Scripture passage.

"It shows you how to be a good Christian and how to live it. It has not been difficult. I was always raised to be an independent thinker. My mom did a good deal of that as well as my father. I was a guy who always shunned peer pressure. I am not letting the NBA life affect it really that much more.

"I want to continue getting better as a Christian man," he said. "Every day I will try to continue to walk that line and stay true to my faith." ✠



Garrett Temple

Photo by Rocky Widner/NBA

RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

'Peeping Tom' caught in Target dressing room

WEST KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — A woman in a Target store in Tennessee recently caught a "peeping Tom" taking photos of her while she was changing clothes in a dressing room, according to The Christian Post.

Leigh Hamby was in the women's dressing room around 7:45 p.m. March 29 when she looked in the mirror, saw something under the door and quickly realized what was happening, local news channel WBIR 10 reported.

"I feel so violated. It's dehumanizing in a sense that someone feels they can come into my dressing room and take something that doesn't belong to them," Hamby said. "It's a violating and a humiliating feeling."

She said she didn't remember seeing a store employee present when she entered the dressing room, she soon heard an employee shout at the man.

"She asked him in that mama bear voice, which I appreciated, 'What are you doing?' and I heard a man's voice say something like 'nothing' or a defensive comment back," Hamby said, according to the Post. "At that point he took off."

The incident comes on the heels of Target's controversial gender-neutral bathroom and dressing room policies, which conservative advocacy groups call a prime opportunity for sexual predators. (TAB)

Mothers file lawsuit over 'subtle propaganda'

CHATHAM, N.J. — Two mothers are filing a lawsuit against a middle school in New Jersey after their seventh graders were shown pro-Islamic video curriculum, which The Christian Post called "subtle propaganda" in cartoon form.

The video, called "5 Pillars," opens with a Muslim boy teaching his non-Muslim friend about the five pillars of Islam. A subtitle declares the Islamic creed, "There is no god except Allah and prophet Muhammad is his messenger."

The cartoon ends with the Muslim boy cheering up a sad non-Muslim boy by inviting him to prayers at the mosque — something the teacher is not allowed to do in that setting, the Post reported.

Libby Hilsenrath and Nancy Gayer, the two mothers filing the lawsuit, first voiced their concerns to the local board of education, but the superintendent suggested that altering the curriculum was unlikely. In the days since the two mothers filed their objection, they have been criticized as "hateful," "Islamophobes" and "racist," among a host of other things.

Richard Thompson, president and chief counsel of the Thomas More Law Center, said, "Clueless school administrators across our nation are allowing this type of indoctrination to take place and it's up to vigilant parents to stop it. Libby and Nancy should have been praised, not pilloried." (TAB)

Trump signs order reversing LGBT policy

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has reversed an executive order made by former President Barack Obama in 2014 that prevented companies without LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) anti-discrimination policies from being eligible for federal contracts. Conservatives are praising the March 27 decision, which is a departure from Trump's original decision to uphold the Obama-era order, The Christian Post reported.

Abraham Hamilton III, public policy analyst for the American Family Association, referred to Trump's order as "heartening."

"American citizens should not be forced to abandon their faith in order to contract with the federal government," he said. "We hope this is an early indication that religious freedom protection will be a defining feature of President Trump's legacy."

But LGBT groups say they are concerned the decision will increase discrimination.

Kate Kendell, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said Trump's order was a "quiet takedown ... of federal safeguards against employment discrimination for millions of LGBT," according to the Post. (TAB)