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**If every person who has dropped out of church in the past 10 years came back, most churches would triple in size.**

**Thom S. Rainer  
president and CEO  
LifeWay Christian Resources**

123rf.com

# Reclamation ministry

## Churches should make intentional effort to reclaim inactive members

**By Grace Thornton**  
The Alabama Baptist

**I**f every person who has dropped out of church in the past 10 years came back, most churches would triple in size, according to Thom S. Rainer.

“The most challenging problem is church dropouts rarely return,” said Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. “Reclamation ministry is exceedingly difficult.”

Daniel Edmonds, state missionary and director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, agreed.

### Reaching the inactive

“Reclaiming inactive members is usually one of the more difficult things a church attempts,” Edmonds said.

People can go missing from church for a variety of reasons from

illness to a life situation to a change in job, he said. Sometimes they don’t even really mean to fade out.

But then if weeks go by and no one from the church contacts them, they often become another name unchecked on the roll, he said.

“If you missed a week, you wouldn’t think anything of it if no one called,” Edmonds said. “If a second Sunday came and went and nobody called, nobody sent a card, text or whatever, at that point you

might begin to think, ‘Well, that’s kind of odd.’”

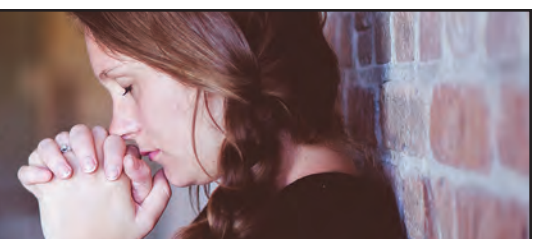
If a third week passes, you begin to think no one cares, he said.

### Taking note

“Even the most faithful members would even be somewhat irritated that they are missing and no one is taking note,” Edmonds said. “You can imagine how others might feel who are not always the most faithful (See ‘Members,’ page 13)

**National Day of Prayer  
is Thursday, May 4.**

Information and schedules for the state’s Bible Reading Marathons can be found at [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org).



# COMMENT

## ‘Never More than a Shell of What It Could Have Been’

That was the evaluation for an upcoming Franklin Graham “Revival Festival” in Norway. The opinion was offered by Norwegian evangelical leader Stefan Fisher-Hoyrem, professor of history, philosophy and Christian apologetics.

Fisher-Hoyrem pointed out that several Norwegian evangelical leaders, Christian members of Parliament and even the head of Norway’s largest Christian think tank who share Graham’s core theological convictions no longer want to be associated with the Christian evangelist. Only five people participated in the first informational session for churches interested in attending the upcoming Nov. 11–12 festival, according to a report in *The Christian Post*.

This is the third time in recent months some evangelical leaders, including some Baptist leaders, have distanced themselves from Graham and his ministry. Baptists in Puerto Rico and in Vancouver, Canada, took similar actions.

### Political identity

The reason for this reversal in Graham’s popularity is politics. Specifically Graham’s close association with the election of President Donald Trump.

While Graham did not endorse President Trump, he did post on Facebook that it was “the hand of God” on election day that intervened to elect Trump as president of the United States. That close political identity with President Trump evidently is costing Graham ministry opportunities.

Whether one agrees with Graham or not, his situation is a real-life example of a potential threat to the ministries of churches and houses of worship across the United States.

That threat is the possible repeal of the Johnson Amendment which President Trump has promised to “totally destroy.”

The Johnson Amendment, named for then Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, does two things. It recognizes the right of faith leaders to speak prophetically about social, economic and justice issues without fearing reprisals from government or politicians. Churches and other nonprofit organi-



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

zations can critique government policy, campaign for ballot issues, sponsor voter registration drives and engage in other type activity as long as they continue their primary purpose for which they are tax exempt.

What the Johnson Amendment prohibits is “directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office.” In other words, tax-deductible money donated to churches or other nonprofits cannot be used for partisan purposes such as electioneering or the endorsement or opposition of a political candidate.

As individuals, pastors and other nonprofit leaders can endorse or oppose anyone they choose but the tax-exempt organization (the Church) cannot endorse or oppose a political candidate nor can the pastor or nonprofit leader in their role as leader of the nonprofit.

### Growing opposition

In recent years a growing number of pastors, mostly evangelical pastors, have charged the Johnson Amendment is a violation of their freedom of speech, an attempt to control what is said from the pulpit. An increasing number of pastors have openly violated the prohibition against tax-exempt groups endorsing political candidates and dared the Internal Revenue Service to come after them.

A leader of this movement recently said, “Pastors must be free to say what they believe in and why, including politics. Censoring the pulpit is not in the country’s best interest.”

Growing opposition to the Johnson Amendment convinced President Trump that white evangelical Christians — a group that overwhelmingly supported him for president — wanted the Johnson Amendment repealed.

But do they?

A 2015 study by LifeWay Christian Resources found that 79 percent of Americans believe clergy should not endorse candidates during worship services.

In March the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) released a study showing evangelical leaders do not want to mix religion and partisan

politics. When asked “should pastors endorse politicians from the pulpit” 89 percent answered “no.”

NAE President Leith Anderson summarized, “Evangelicals emphasize evangelism and pastors often avoid controversies that might take priority over the gospel message.” He continued, “Most pastors I know don’t want to endorse politicians. They want to focus on teaching the Bible.”

Teaching the Bible is about salvation, Christian discipleship and prayer. It also is about caring for the hungry, the displaced and the poor. It is about ethics in the public square as well as about individual ethics. Teaching the Bible is about justice, compassion and accountability.

There is no way of teaching the Bible without touching on political topics. Teaching what God’s Word says about public issues is part of what the Bible means by the admonition for the Church to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13). Hopefully Alabama Baptists will be bold in helping believers understand the implications of biblical teaching concerning moral and ethical issues.

### Biblical guidance

There is nothing in the Johnson Amendment that restricts pastors from offering biblical guidance on contemporary issues.

When one moves from what the Bible says about an issue to the personal preferences of endorsing a particular candidate, one has entered a completely new field. God does not belong to any particular political party or to any particular candidate within a party.

As a denomination Southern Baptists are still wrestling with the fallout when some in the denomination concluded a Southern Baptist Convention entity leader was fighting against the presidential candidate they preferred. Imagine the division that scenario would cause in a local church if the pastor endorsed a candidate from the pulpit that some in the church opposed?

### Magnified in the church

The problems Graham is experiencing because of his close association with President Trump would be magnified in a church, and the ministry of that church or its pastor may “never be more than a shell of what it could have been.”

With or without the Johnson Amendment one must ask about the wisdom of introducing unnecessary division into a congregation and about politicizing the church by officially endorsing political candidates.

From a governmental standpoint it seems common sense to ensure that tax-exempt groups such as churches and other nonprofits not be transformed into partisan political organizations.

The Johnson Amendment seems to promote good policy for government and good practice for the Church. We see no reason for its repeal. ✠

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# TAB

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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# 'God's work has not ended'

## India's crackdown on foreign relief causes concern, forces Compassion out

About seven years ago David Platt — then pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham — challenged his congregation to do something big. He challenged them to "take India" — to pay for the child survival programs run by Compassion International in India for a whole year, a \$525,000 price tag.

They did — in 2010 the congregation funded 21 child survival programs. In the years that followed, they funded 12.

But now, not only will Brook Hills not be able to provide for these programs in India — Compassion won't be able to have them at all.

At the beginning of March, Compassion announced it was pulling out of India after 48 years, closing up shop on 589 church partner centers that were taking care of nearly 147,000 babies, children and young adults living in extreme poverty.

The reason? India's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had begun blocking the Christian organization from sending money to its partners in India in May 2016, and Compassion had found no way to resolve the issue, according to the organization's website.

U.S. leaders stepped in on Compassion's behalf, including former Secretary of State John Kerry, who spoke with officials in India in summer 2016. More than 35,000 Compassion child sponsors wrote to Congress about the issue.

Stephen Oakley, Compassion's senior vice president and general counsel, told the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee in December 2016, "We've simply run out of funds (in India)."

The Indian government didn't budge on blocking more from being sent in, and on March 15, Compassion pulled out of the South Asian nation.

Compassion president and CEO Santiago "Jimmy" Melado said in a press release, "Though we are saying farewell to Compassion's current program in India, we know that God's work has not ended. The local church in India remains committed to serving children living in poverty in their country. And the investment made by sponsors in their children's lives has made a significant difference and will not be forgotten. We continue to lift up in prayer the children, families and staff who are affected by this difficult decision."

### India's changing direction

The move is tragic but it's a sign of greater growing concerns — for starters, that India is cracking down on foreign relief organizations in fear they are using humanitarian work to cover up evangelism, according to *WORLD Magazine*.



IMB photo by Don Rutledge

A group of people make a home living in the slum area of the city of Patna, India. Many of them show smiles on their faces in spite of the environment in which they live.

The nation uses its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act to decide on what funds can be sent there, and the act — revised by MHA in 2011 — is now up to broad interpretation, *WORLD* reported. It includes a line that says the government can deny funds "for any activities detrimental to the national interest."

That revision was seen by many as yet another step the government has taken toward Hindu nationalism since 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected, according to *Christianity Today* (CT).

About 11,500 nongovernmental organizations — both secular and Christian — in addition to Compassion have lost their licenses to operate in India in that window of time, *WORLD* reported.

Hinduism — which is claimed by 80 percent of the population — forms the "philosophical bedrock" of his ruling party, according to Stratfor, a geopolitical analysis site.

And attacks on Christians and Muslims have increased, according to CT. In 2013, India was No. 31 on Open Doors' World Watch List of countries where Christians are persecuted; now it's No. 15.

India has long been an officially secular nation with a variety of minority populations, but a "surging wave" of Hindu nationalism has started a "raging national debate" over India's foundational principles.

In recent months controversies began to pop up and rally protesters — controversies such as

the February 2016 arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar, a doctoral student and political activist, over charges of sedition. Protesters claimed Modi's party was using heavy-handed Hindu nationalism to stifle democracy, according to Stratfor.

If what they accused Modi of progressed to the extreme, it would "entail the political and cultural subordination of the country's Christian and Muslim populations," Stratfor reported.

Such an intense case is unlikely in the short term but even a partial implementation is cause for concern, Stratfor wrote. Open Doors agrees there is cause for concern.

As a result of Modi's election, "radical Hinduism, which was already present under the previous government, has increased steadily," Open Doors wrote on its website.

### Growing persecution

Intolerance continues to rise and attacks on Christians have increased steadily, it said. An average of 40 incidents are being reported per month, "including pastors beaten, churches burned and Christians harassed. Of the 64 million Christians in India, approximately 39 million experience direct persecution."

Communities of Hindus converting to Christianity have born the brunt of that persecution, Open Doors reported. "They are constantly under pressure to return to their old beliefs and are often physically assaulted, sometimes killed." Protestant Christian communities who attempt to reach others are the second target, according to Open Doors.

David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, wrote that India is now "a country where Hindu extremists are vowing to erase the Christian faith by 2021." (TAB)

### How to help Christians in India

► *Pray* for those who are suffering, for believers under intense social pressure and in physical danger.

► *Advocate* on their behalf by sending the World Watch List to the President Trump.

Source: opendoors.org

# Second Chance Month to help alleviate 'second prison' in US

Nearly 1 in 4 American adults have a criminal record — that's 65 million people trying to restart their lives after living behind bars.

And Jack Hausen, executive director of Shepherd's Fold transitional program in Birmingham, said that when they leave prison and re-enter society, they're "basically lost."

"We had a gentleman arrive recently who had spent 41 years in prison," Hausen said. "He didn't know how to catch a bus, work the technology of a car or use a computer."

Not everyone stays that long but whether its six months or six decades, vast numbers of obstacles await those being released from prison, Hausen said. "They need help getting ID cards, birth certificates, social security cards and so many other things. And getting gainful employment is the biggest issue that hangs over their head."

Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship ministry has documented more than 48,000 social stigmas and legal restrictions that can impact a person's life after incarceration. So to help alleviate what they call the "second prison" people enter upon re-entry to society, Prison Fellowship has gathered a coalition to help instate a Second Chance Month in April.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, introduced the observance at the end of March.

"We applaud Sen. Portman for his resolution declaring April as Second Chance Month," said Craig DeRoche, Prison Fellowship's senior vice president of advocacy and public policy, in a statement. "As America's largest outreach to prisoners and their families, Prison Fellowship was founded on the conviction that every person has God-given dignity and potential."

The first-ever Second Chance Month goes hand in hand with a greater awareness of the needs surrounding the nation's prison system and prisoners, DeRoche said.

"A second chance is what we're all offered in Christ," he said, according to *Christianity Today*. "It's the core of our faith and religion. It's what saved us from our afflictions or addictions. That should be available to others."

That's what Hausen said Shepherd's Fold is hoping to do — extend a hand of help and rescue to those who need it. And April provides a chance for the ministry to celebrate a new facility that can accommodate

100 people in its six-month re-entry program.

It also celebrates the arrival of 38 new participants.

"We want them to be able to get jobs when they leave here and

take care of themselves," Hausen said, noting that one of his hopes is that Alabama lawmakers will decide to "ban the box," or remove the box from job applications that requires an applicant to check whether or not they are a convicted felon.

"Employers can find those things out in a background check during the employment process, but often having that box checked gets an application thrown immediately into the trash," he said.

That's one way he said he hopes second chances will be expanded, but in the meantime, churches can continue to be a support to former inmates.

Many local churches provide meals for program participants at Shepherd's Fold. Others provide job training through ministries like WorkFaith Birmingham.

"We want to constantly motivate and move them forward until there is a transformation," Hausen said. (TAB)

For more information, visit [sflabama.org](http://sflabama.org) and [workfaithbhm.org](http://workfaithbhm.org).

## Church finance workshop set

Have questions related to managing finances for a church? Then be sure to check out an upcoming three-hour workshop set for June 3 in Birmingham.

The "Small Church, Big Responsibility: How to be Financially Savvy No Matter Your Size" workshop presented by Samford University's Ministry Training Institute is co-sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper.

It will be held on the third floor of the Cooney-Sullivan Fieldhouse from 9 a.m. to noon.

Samford's Gary Fenton and SBOM's Jim Swedenburg will share information on stewardship, budgeting, increasing tithing and basic financial management.

For more information, contact call 205-726-4055, email [mti@samford.edu](mailto:mti@samford.edu) or visit <https://www2.samford.edu/eve/index.php?formid=1643>. (TAB)



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

### Soteriology

## Salvation as Reconciliation

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

The idea of reconciliation is familiar to us from ordinary relationships. People become at odds with one another but then something happens to bring them together again. We say they have reconciled. Married couples may separate, only to get back together later. When that happens we commonly say they are reconciled. Differences are put away or bridged. Whatever it was that separated people is buried or overlooked and counted of no importance any longer. If the differences come back to mind, people are able to say, "It doesn't matter anymore."

Ruptures in personal relationships were a concern to Jesus. He put it like this: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

Reconciliation is not only a need that occurs in human relationships; it is an absolute necessity in a person's relationship with God. In this instance reconciliation speaks of a permanent change in a believer's relation with God, a change in which separation because of sin is replaced by a new relationship in which we have full fellowship with Him.

Prior to experiencing salvation, we are at enmity with God. Reconciliation defines enemies as becoming friends. It speaks of estrangement becoming fellowship. The need for reconciliation with God is as wide as the human race, for all have sinned.

One result of sin is separation from God. For our separation from God to be bridged we need someone to bring about reconciliation. God alone is that Someone. He sent His Son to be the cause that had the effect of reconciliation.

As Christians we are recipients of this truth as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry

of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

The Bible is quite clear to tell us we do not reconcile ourselves to God. Nothing we can do or that we can become on our own will suffice to reconcile us to God. He is the author of reconciliation and His Son is the agent of that reconciliation. Colossians 1:19-22 tells us clearly that it pleased God to send His Son in human flesh "that in Him all fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself ... and you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight."

### 'Reconciled to God'

Romans 5:10 declares it simply: "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son."

Something in human nature might cause some to object, saying that to their knowledge they have never felt themselves to be an enemy of God. Of course the need for reconciliation is not based on how we might feel; it is based on how God counts us to be. God in His absolute purity and perfection counts sinners to be estranged from Him. Reconciliation is a necessity from God's point of view. If God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13), how much more is He of a purer nature than to gather uncleaned and unforgiven humans into fellowship with Himself? Reconciliation is a universal human need and God's gracious provision. ✠

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 March 1995, *The Alabama Baptist* reported that Jane Ferguson was named Humanitarian of the Year by *The Montgomery Advertiser*. She was honored for her years of work as director of community ministries at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. Jay Wolf, pastor of First, Montgomery, said, "She is one of God's choice people and one of Montgomery's greatest assets." Ferguson continues to work with the needy and disadvantaged in Montgomery. (TAB)

# Multigenerational

# TRAVEL



## Family vacations build relationships, memories while enjoying experiences together

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

**R**oad trips have been a favorite part of many of our summers. Driving the highways of the United States with our travel trailer in tow, we have enjoyed great adventures, including viewing the carvings at Mount Rushmore from the trail below, walking Boston's Freedom Trail and riding to the top of St. Louis' Gateway Arch.

Since my mom often joins us for vacation, we are multigenerational travelers, a growing group in the tourist industry. At least one-third of Americans take a multigenerational vacation each year, according to AAA. The majority of these trips include three generations, while a smaller percentage are grandparents taking their grandchildren on vacation.

"Today's grandparents are active and enjoy exploring the world," said William Sutherland, AAA senior vice president of travel and publishing. "They value spending time with their children and grandchildren. In today's fast-paced world, travel affords families an opportunity to spend quality time reconnecting and sharing experiences."

Sandra Hudson, owner of Best Day Ever Vacations travel agency in Northport, said parents also benefit from having other adults along.

"It means we have another set of hands to help with our kids," she said.

That doesn't mean everyone has to stay together all the time. Plans should include opportunities for grandparents to spend

one-on-one time with grandchildren as well as time alone doing what they enjoy. That might mean older adults and younger kids take an afternoon break while parents go out for an early dinner. Or it might mean grandparents enjoy time at the hotel while younger family members hit the amusement park. The keys to a successful intergenerational trip are planning and flexibility, Hudson said.

### Working with a travel agent

"Every family is different," she said. "You might ask your friends for advice, but your friends probably have kids that are different ages and personality types than your own. Also, not everybody travels

the same so what makes for a great trip for your neighbor is not necessarily the right trip for your family."

Working with a travel agent can help families review options when traveling with family members of different ages and ability levels, Hudson said.

"My main goal when helping clients is to make it as worry-free and stress-free as possible. I want them to have the best vacation possible and to concentrate on making happy memories instead of worrying about all the details," she said.

Recognizing the increasing desire for

multigenerational trips, Road Scholar, a nonprofit educational travel company that promotes lifelong learning, began offering trips for grandparents and grandchildren several years ago. The itinerary for each trip is planned with both generations in mind, and staff members try to engage kids and grandparents in a way that is fun and motivating, said a Road Scholar spokes-

*"In today's fast-paced world, travel affords families an opportunity to spend quality time re-connecting and sharing experiences."*

**William Sutherland,**  
senior vice president of  
travel and publishing, AAA



unsplash.com

person. The result is a unique opportunity for relationship building.

"A lot of travelers say that it is an amazing experience to be able to spend one-on-one time with their grandkids without their parents there. Many grandparents don't live near their grandchildren, so traveling together is an opportunity to spend some special time together."

### Orlando vacation

Grandparents also delight in watching their grandchildren enjoy experiences, which is probably why one of the most popular destinations for Alabama families is Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. Though the park caters to young children, the rides, dining options and shows appeal to visitors of all ages. Convenient transportation also allows large groups to work out activity and rest schedules that meet individual needs, which makes everyone's experience more enjoyable. Cruises and beach trips also

are popular with multigenerational groups because both activity and rest can easily be accomplished.

When there's so much to see and do travelers may find it hard to slow down. But when a group includes members of all ages from newborns to octogenarians, a slower pace can be beneficial.

Valerie M. Grubb, author of "Planes, Canes and Automobiles: Connecting with Your Aging Parents through Travel," said, "On my own I can power through three Italian cities in a week — but that pace becomes more challenging to maintain if I'm pushing mom in a wheelchair. After years of traveling with her I've realized that I see more when I slow down. Remember though that slowing down can benefit you as well. How many times have you come home even more exhausted after going full-tilt throughout a jam-packed vacation? Being more relaxed about time will help you enjoy your travels more — and experience less stress." ✝

## MULTIGENERATIONAL TRAVEL

# IMPACTING generations

## Family missions trips offer opportunities for relational, spiritual growth

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

**S**hooting hoops, painting faces and listening to music are common missions outreach activities. They also are activities kids and their parents can do together. So why don't more families go on missions trips together?

Perhaps the No. 1 reason is that missions trips that engage the unique gifts of multiple generations are hard to plan, said David Armstrong, co-founder and executive director of ShortTermMissions.com, an organization that helps people connect with short-term missions trips that fit their gifts and calling.

"There are lots of trips where kids can come along, but they won't have much to do," Armstrong said. "Coming up with a trip with a strong family focus is harder to do."

### Summer trips

ShortTermMissions.com averages 30,000 visitors per month, and data shows there is a big interest in missions trips that involve parents or grandparents and their kids. Armstrong has observed that summer trips

planned with families in mind often fill up by early spring because there are less of them.

National Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) meets the need for family-focused missions trips with Familyfest, an annual multigenerational summer missions trip that allows parents and their children and grandparents and their grandchildren, as well as aunts, uncles, cousins and friends to serve alongside each other. Lena Plunk, ministry consultant for mobilization at WMU and Familyfest coordinator, calls the week "an opportunity for generations to impact generations."

"It is a great opportunity for families to live out God's call of sharing His love together," Plunk said. "Our hope is that Familyfest provides opportunity for families to do missions together and then will encourage them to do this regularly as a family."

During Familyfest 2016 in Aurora, Colorado, a 6-year-old boy who was serving with his grandfather witnessed him share the gospel with the homeowner whose yard they were cleaning. A grandmother and her grandson helped with Vacation Bible School (VBS). One Familyfest participant has brought her nephews to Familyfest for the past eight years.

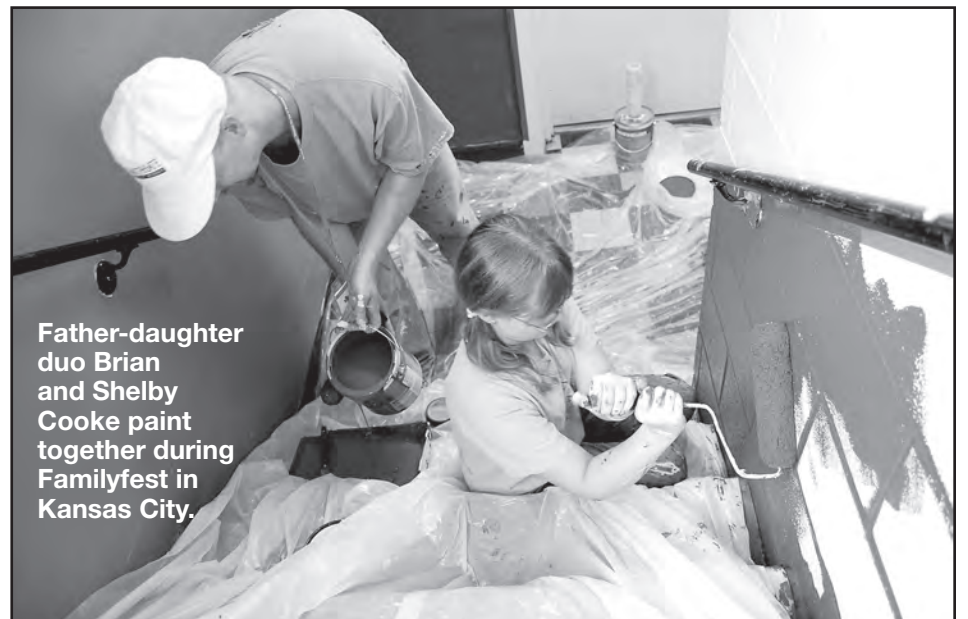
"The joy that comes from being at Familyfest and seeing an 80-year-old, 50-year-old, 30-year-old, 15-year-old and 6-year-old serving together at the same ministry site gives a beautiful picture of what it means to serve Christ together as believers and make His name known," Plunk said.

Intergenerational missions trips also are "very dynamic," Armstrong said. They bring together the energy of youth and the wisdom and knowledge of adults. Serving together strengthens the bonds within the family as well.

### Sharing experiences

"You have an experience together that stretches you out of your comfort zone. Together you've done it and you will share that experience forever," Armstrong said.

Even if the benefits of taking a family missions trip are clear, choosing the right trip can be a daunting decision, writes Jill Richardson, author of "Don't Forget to Pack the Kids: Short Term Missions for Families." She advises families consider-



Father-daughter duo Brian and Shelby Cooke paint together during Familyfest in Kansas City.

Photo by Sue Sprenkle

ing a family missions trip to consider three questions as they make plans:

#### 1. Does the mission accept families?

Search for a group that specifically encourages families. Reluctance on the part of trip organizers to accept children may signal a poor fit.

**2. Can all family members participate in ministry?** Trips that involve children ministering to children around their age are ideal. Planned events also should match the abilities and temperaments of children. Possibilities include orphanage work, VBS, drama, going to schools and working with missionary kids.

**3. Is it safe?** Risk is part of travel but it's also part of everyday life, says Jess Jennings, a Southern Baptist representative in Southeast Asia. Issues like terrorism and political unrest pose particular concerns, but Jennings encourages parents to turn their "fears and worries into prayers" in obedience to the Great Commission.

Richardson also suggests reading any in-

ternational travel-related warnings posted at [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) before settling on a location and accepting that a missions trip is "a leap of faith." Perfection is not required, she says. God uses families who are willing to grow and learn. She also believes that providing opportunities for children to be involved at younger ages is increasingly important to their long-term spiritual development.

### Making church relevant

Richardson cites research suggesting that more than half of youth in church today will leave after high school because they believe church is "irrelevant to their daily lives and out of touch with the culture."

"What would happen if, instead, our churches taught kids from the time they could walk that they were ministers? That the ends of the earth weren't as far away or impossible to impact as they thought? I truly believe we could turn those statistics upside down." ¶

**"[Familyfest] is a great opportunity for families to live out God's call of sharing His love together."**

Lena Plunk, ministry consultant  
for mobilization at national WMU and Familyfest coordinator

### Tips for preparing kids for short-term missions projects

- 1. Research the city.** Use online tools to find maps and check out local shops and restaurants. Get a feel for housing options available to residents. Talk to your kids about how life in the city you will serve may be similar or different from their own.
- 2. Find local recipes.** Prepare popular dishes together and talk about why the ingredients would be commonly used in the region.
- 3. Get to know a missionary family serving in the area.** Read the family's blog, pray for them and talk about how God is working among the people you will soon meet.

(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)



## Be there in FIVE

### Alabama's location great for road trips

**A**labama's location in the heart of the Southeast means endless possibilities for road trips. Check out these five destinations that are great for the whole family and located within a five-hour drive (give or take an hour) from most of Alabama.

#### Atlanta

Whether your interests are sports, history, museums or entertainment, Atlanta has more than enough to fill a weekend or a weeklong stay. Sports fans can visit the recently opened Braves SunTrust Park, as well as events at Atlanta Motor Speedway and Philips Arena. Football fans are in for a treat because later in 2017 the new Falcon's stadium will open. History buffs can explore the city's role in American history from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement at museums like the Atlanta History Center and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. At the High Museum of Art, view paintings by American and European masters among the collection of paintings, sculptures, photographs and other works. Round out your trip with a visit to one of the many downtown attractions, perfectly suited for kids of all ages including the Georgia Aquarium, the World of Coca-Cola, Fernbank Museum of Natural History and the Atlanta Zoo.  
— [www.atlanta.net](http://www.atlanta.net)

#### Memphis

Memphis is another spot often connected to adult interests like food and music but the city has a kid-friendly side as well. Mud Island River Park is one of those spots. Museum exhibits show the impact of the Mississippi River on the region throughout history but kids will enjoy the Riverwalk, an exact scale model of the Lower Mississippi River where it's OK to wade in and get wet. At the end of the journey along the river visitors can take a pedal boat ride around the one-acre enclosure representing the Gulf of Mexico. The Children's Museum of Memphis and the Memphis Zoo also will be a hit. If your plans are flexible, then check out the family theatre series at The Orpheum and enjoy a play in the historic theatre. Finally don't forget to stop by the Peabody Hotel to watch the ducks in the lobby. Their ceremonial walk along the red carpet happens daily at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.  
— [www.memphistravel.com](http://www.memphistravel.com)

#### Nashville

Filled with music, shopping and dining experiences, Nashville is another southern city with something for everyone. Climb aboard the Music City Trolley and hop off at 15 different stops throughout the city including The Ryman, the Coun-

try Music Hall of Fame and other music-related spots. The Adventure Science Center offers hands-on exhibits and a full-dome planetarium to enthrall young visitors. Nashville Children's Theatre features a full schedule of shows each year to entertain kids and their families. For animal lovers, the extensive petting zoo at Lucky Ladd Farms, the wildlife on display at the Nashville Zoo and the underwater dining at the Aquarium Restaurant at Opry Mills are all fun places to visit.  
— [www.visitmusiccity.com](http://www.visitmusiccity.com)

#### New Orleans

Though most people first think of Mardi Gras when they think of New Orleans, the city has a lot of family-friendly attractions that family members of all ages will enjoy. To get a behind-the-scenes look at Mardi Gras without the raucous atmosphere of the celebration, Mardi Gras World is open year round. See parade floats, try on costumes and enjoy a free slice of King Cake on-site. Continue your visit at Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, Audubon Insectarium, Audubon Zoo or the Entergy Giant Screen Theater and see wildlife from around the world and close to home, from freshwater to ocean habitats and everything in between. Experience an older way of life with a float aboard the Steamboat Natchez where you can enjoy New Orleans jazz music and a New Orleans favorite — beignets.  
— <http://www.neworleanscvb.com>

#### Columbus, Georgia

Once known primarily as a military town, Columbus has become a destination for families who enjoy the outdoors. The RiverWalk is a 15-mile park along the banks of the Chattahoochee River where visitors can take in views of the river as they stroll or bike. The real excitement on the river is at Whitewater Express, the longest urban whitewater-rafting run in the world. Depending on the season and time of day, rafters can experience the thrills of class 4 rapids or a calmer ride through smaller rapids. Cyclists will enjoy biking along the RiverWalk or along the Columbus Fall Line Trace, a Rails-to-Trails project that meanders through the city. The Coca Cola Space Science Center, the National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus and the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center offer educational opportunities. Add a cultural experience by taking in a show at the Springer Opera House or the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts.  
— [visitcolumbusga.com](http://visitcolumbusga.com) ☛

(Compiled by Carrie Brown McWhorter)



unsplash.com

## Collecting SOUVENIRS

### Having collectibles will bring back memories

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

**T**ravel souvenirs come in all shapes and sizes but the memories they bring back are what matter most. Ideally souvenirs should be closely linked to a place or experience, writes Carolina Ayerbe, editor of the travel website CulturalTravelGuide.com. "Maybe something in that place moved you or made you wonder," she said. "Or maybe something related to the history of this particular place."

*The Alabama Baptist* asked Facebook followers to share stories and photos of their favorite travel-related collectibles and all who responded talked about the special recollections the items bring to mind.

"I collect little bottles of sand or gravel or pebbles," Renee Raney said. "We have them from all of our journeys and we bring them off the shelf occasionally to remember where we have been and pray blessings on the people that live in those places."

Magnets were another common collectible. Beverly McElroy said she has magnets from restaurants and shows that she keeps on her refrigerator.

"It's always a good, happy memory every day," she wrote.

Ayerbe advises travelers to avoid purchasing tokens that are too generic or that won't be easy to display or store back home. Items like coasters, mugs and baseball caps can be bought anywhere, she writes. Instead look for pieces that are unique and unavailable anywhere else, she suggests.

Everette Studdard has traveled many places since her retirement and not only does she look for unique items, sometimes she repurposes souvenirs to display them.

"I always buy handmade jewelry from local craftsmen on every trip," she wrote. "I

also collect nativity scenes and I make ornaments for my Christmas travel tree out of key chains and small pendants."

Christmas ornaments are popular among travelers for many reasons, according to blogger Amy Alberts at TravelingMoms.com.

"A Christmas ornament is a souvenir with purpose. There is no discussion of 'where are we going to put this?' because it is guaranteed a home with all our other ornaments," Alberts writes. "It's fun when we pull those ornaments out of the box. My kids start blurting out 'remember when' and we relive the memories of that trip as a family."

Patsy Swafford has collected Christmas ornaments from her travels for many years.

"They are boxed for 11 months of the year but in December they adorn my Christmas tree," she wrote. "As I place each one on my tree I remember my travel adventures and I enjoy them again."

Small souvenirs are most popular since they can be transported home more easily than larger items. They also are less expensive which makes them more attractive too.

Cindy Beam wrote, "I used to collect cookbooks but that got expensive. Magnets are usually reasonably priced and what else can you do with the side of a refrigerator?"

#### Traditional souvenirs

Traditional souvenirs like magnets, spoons and thimbles may seem cliché but if you have a collection, keep it going, Ayerbe said.

"Does it make your heart smile? Indulge your passions," she said. "Maybe you have hundreds of them but in the end if another ancient coin or one more postcard makes you happy and your experience memorable, go for it." ☛



123rf.com

# 10 TIPS

## for successful multigenerational trips



### Budget, destination, itinerary vital aspects to consider when planning family trip

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

**P**lanning a trip for a multigenerational group brings its own challenges but the benefits are worth the extra effort. Here's our best advice for making your trip memorable in a good way.

#### Choose a destination that offers something for everyone.

Kids are always going to love amusement parks and playgrounds but adults have many different interests from fine dining to shopping. As we get older our interests also change. Don't assume that just because you, your parents or your kids have enjoyed something in the past they are interested in doing it again. Ask family members (including children and grandparents) to write down what they want to do on vacation. Then research budget-friendly locations that offer at least one activity that appeals to each family member. Large cities are often a good choice because they have a variety of museums, parks, restaurants and shopping as well as excursions out of town for additional adventures.

#### Pick a place to stay.

Hotels, condos, cabins or campsites? Your destination and budget will largely determine your options when it comes to accommodations. Narrow your fo-

cus to places that are convenient to the attractions you plan to visit but also offer space, privacy and security.

#### Plan an itinerary everyone can enjoy.

Thoughtful scheduling can make or break a trip. Use the lists you made earlier and plan no more than two major activities each day. Keep in mind that you must travel to and from your accommodations and between attractions. Tell yourself from the beginning that there's no way you can do everything. Pace yourself and take time to really enjoy the activities you choose.

#### Discuss finances.

Money talks are hard anyway so don't ruin your vacation by arguing about who is paying for what. Before the trip figure out any shared expenses and clearly communicate those to the adults in the group. One of the reasons cruises and all-inclusive resorts are good for family groups is that they take away the surprise element of spur-of-the-moment side trips and expensive dining experiences.

#### Take advantage of discounts, deals and free stuff.

Most cities have coupon books or multiattraction deals that offer deep discounts. Check out the website of the local tourism bureau to see options and weigh the cost with your schedule and interests. A deal is only a deal if

you can take full advantage of it. If you are a member of your local museum, zoo or aquarium, you can probably go to a similar facility in another city for free or reduced rates through the Association of Science-Technology Centers Passport Program or the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Reciprocal Admissions Program. If you are visiting state or national parks with children, ask for a Junior Ranger program book. Complete the activities, which usually include attendance at a free ranger talk, and receive a badge as a souvenir of your visit.

#### Take a break (or two or three).

Everyone, regardless of age, gets tired. The first day or two of a fast-paced trip may go fine but by day three, watch out — tired people are not usually fun people. Toddlers may be expected to take naps — take advantage of that time to allow everyone to rest. Go back to the hotel and read a book, color, play quietly or just watch TV. Short on time? Find a park with a playground and benches in the shade. A physical activity break after a visit to a museum, for example, can be a nice change of pace for kids and the rest will help the adults recharge too.

#### Take another break — from each other.

One way to make more people in your group happy is to let them pursue what they most enjoy. This

may mean splitting up but that's OK. Give grandparents time with grandkids. Let the guys do guy things and the girls do girl things. Take all the under-10 kids to one place and the older kids to another. Going your separate ways will give you all something to talk about when you get back together.

#### Don't put off meals.

Sure you can save some money if you eat free breakfast at the hotel and wait until mid-afternoon to eat again, but most people in your group are probably used to three meals a day plus snacks. Hungry people can quickly turn into "hangry" people, or people who are so hungry that they become angry. If your budget is tight, then bring along a water bottle and some emergency granola bars so you are prepared when the munchies strike.

#### Record your memories.

Encourage everyone to take

lots of photos. Share your photos on a family share site such as Shutterfly or to a Facebook album (check your privacy settings if you prefer not to share your experiences with everyone on your friends list). Also remind everyone to write down funny stories and memories to go along with the photos. If a notebook or journal is too much to carry around, have everyone text one member of the group who is willing to compile all the texts after the trip.

#### Make a memory book.

Long after the trip is over your memories will stay with you. Even things that seem terrible at the time will be stories you tell over and over again. At the very least compile all your photos and memories in an online share site. Better yet use your snapshots and memories to design a photo book that everyone can purchase and enjoy for years to come. 📷



### Decatur's Central Baptist marks 125 years

In 1926, 321 people signed cards, wrapped them in brown paper and placed them in a hollowed-out portion of a limestone cornerstone to commemorate the building of a new sanctuary for Central Baptist Church, Decatur.

Ninety-one years later those cards became a special part of Central Baptist's 125th anniversary celebration March 19.



Photo courtesy of ABHC

"It was an inspiring day of celebrating how the Lord has brought us through so far and how He will take us into the future," said church historian Dorothy Hubbard.

To celebrate the past, the choir led the congregation in each of the two

morning services in singing old hymns and a special display was set up with old photos, scrapbooks and the earlier mentioned time capsule from 1926.

Special guests included former pastor Mike Dawson, who shared memories of his time at Central Baptist, and Joe Teal, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission representative, who presented a commemorative plaque to the church. Former pastor Mike Tolbert also sent a video message sharing about his memories of the Morgan Baptist Association church.

Rob Jackson is pastor.

### FBC Springville celebrates 200-year milestone

The Bible is filled with stories of God using those who are reluctant to accomplish His will — much like Sion Blythe. Blythe was reportedly a reluctant pastor who resisted his calling at times, but his eventual obedience resulted in the founding of a church in 1817. That church is First Baptist Church, Springville, which celebrated its 200th anniversary March 19.

Originally founded as Mount Zion Baptist Church, the church commemorated the two-century milestone during its 10:30 a.m. service with guest speaker Todd Friel, host of Wretched TV and radio. Church member Joe Whitten shared the written history of the church before adjourning to the family life center where special presentations were made.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a framed certificate and Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, presented a plaque.

Special items displayed for participants to view included a 1913 typewriter used at First, Springville, and old photos.

Chip Thornton is pastor of the St. Clair Baptist Association church.

Compiled by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and TAB

# Shades Mountain BC senior athlete draws crowd when he pitches

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

When Susan Stevens' son Joshua was young, she wanted him to learn how to swim, but she got a little nervous about letting someone else teach him.

Joshua had been born without a full left arm.

"Finally I decided to take him to a lesson and just be nearby in case he needed me," she said.

And when the young lady who was teaching the lessons walked up and introduced herself, Susan Stevens was speechless.

## God orchestrated

"She only had one hand — her arm was identical to Joshua's," she said. "I was amazed. It was so obvious God had orchestrated it. And it was one of the many times we saw the faithfulness of God taking care of the details and taking care of our family."

Fast forward a little more than a decade and Joshua Stevens is in his last year as a pitcher for Vestavia Hills High School.

He's committed to play ball next year at Huntingdon College in Montgomery.

"God has given him the determination to do whatever he has set his mind to — we've seen that since early on," Susan Stevens said.

"He's learned to face anything he's up against."

His love of baseball started around age 5 when his family moved from Huntsville to the Birmingham area.



Photo by Dennis Victory/AL.com

Vestavia Hills High School's Joshua Stevens pitches against Tuscaloosa County High School during a baseball game at Vestavia Hills High School's Sammy Dunn Field on April 6.

Joshua Stevens said, "I saw other people playing, so I started trying it — it was a lot of trial and error to find what worked."

He modeled his technique after major league pitcher Jim Abbott, who was born without a right hand.

"I tried different things and modified it, and eventually it started to become second nature. Ev-

erything kind of came natural once I started getting it down," Joshua Stevens said. "I started to really like it and I was able to keep going."

When he pitches, he tucks his glove under his left arm and throws the ball with his right. At the end of his pitching motion,

he tucks his hand back into his glove.

He's a "great athlete" and he's "well respected among his peers," said Andrew Johnson, minister to students at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, where the Stevenses are members.

## 'Faith determines a lot'

"We are excited to see how he grows as a Christian athlete at Huntingdon College," Johnson said. "He has worked hard to get to this point and has overcome a lot but honestly from knowing him even as a middle schooler I'm not surprised to see him have this opportunity now."

Joshua Stevens said his faith has been important to him since he accepted Christ at age 9.

"Your faith determines a lot and holding onto it helps you pick the right friend group and make the right decisions," he said.

Susan Stevens said that when they go to tournaments, people from other teams will gather to watch her son pitch, and there have been moments where seeing him play has been an encouragement to kids facing obstacles.

Joshua Stevens said he doesn't even really think about his arm much anymore and he would tell any kid to "not give up if something gets difficult."

"Keep pursuing it and don't give up," he said.

## Among top 7 in state

Stevens was named the 7A class winner for the Bryant-Jordan Student-Athlete Achievement Award on April 10. He was among 52 high school honorees from around the state who were chosen for their ability to overcome adversity during their high school athletic careers.



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# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

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

## AUTAUGA

► **Autaugaville Church** will celebrate homecoming May 7 with the theme "Exalting Christ, Encouraging the Church and Engaging the Community to the Glory of God." Sunday School will be at 9:30 a.m., worship will be at 10:30 a.m. and lunch will follow. Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, will speak. Garner Clark is pastor.

## BALDWIN

► **First Church, Spanish Fort**, is among those featured in the radio Internet broadcast Arise Radio ([www.arise-radio.com](http://www.arise-radio.com)) which began March 14. First, Spanish Fort, Pastor Franklin Kirksey's messages will air Tuesdays at 6:25 p.m., Wednesdays at 9:25 a.m. and Saturdays at 8:25 a.m. Messages also will air every Sunday at 6:25 a.m. on WLPR EZ Radio ([www.ezwlpr.com](http://www.ezwlpr.com)).

## BETHEL

► **Linden Church** will hold a wild game supper April 28, 6 p.m. Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee and retired coach for the University of South Carolina in Columbia, will speak. For more information and to register

call 334-295-4278 or visit [www.lindenbaptist.net](http://www.lindenbaptist.net). Billy Harris is pastor.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **Pioneer Church, Birmingham**, will celebrate homecoming May 7. Sunday School will be at 9:15 a.m., worship will be at 10:30 a.m. and a covered dish lunch will follow. Bob Posey, the first pastor of Pioneer Church, will speak. Former choir director Charles Taul will lead music. Darryl Castleberry is pastor.

## COFFEE

► **Basin Church, Elba**, will host a Basin Community Gathering on May 6, 3 p.m.-7 p.m. There will be BBQ, storytelling and Jerome Jackson will perform special music. Sam Self is pastor. ► **Mount Gilead Church, Elba**, will hold revival services May 7-10. Larry Grimm will speak Sunday, 11 a.m. and Bob Hataway will speak at 6 p.m. James Hataway will speak Monday, 7 p.m. and Glen Farris will perform special music. Richard Collier will speak Tuesday, 7 p.m. Derek Snellgrove will speak and perform special music Wednesday, 7 p.m. Dewey Emfinger is pastor.

## COLUMBIA

► **Malvern Church** will host a night of worship May 6, 6 p.m. The Plath Family will perform special music. Refreshments will follow the concert. A love offering will be collected. Hosea Parker is pastor.

## GENEVA

► **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will hold the 39er's CLUB on May 9, 11 a.m. Alison Sanders of Forever Families Foundation will speak. Gary McGowan and Dana McCain will perform special music. If you have previously been involved contact your table hostess by May 2 to make or cancel your reservation. If you would like to attend for the first time call the church office at 334-684-9617. Steve Wegmann is pastor.

## MADISON

► **Hillwood Church, Huntsville**, will host Ivan Parker in concert May 19, 7 p.m. For more information and to purchase tickets call 256-883-0485 or 256-883-1950. Charles Freeman is pastor.

## MONTGOMERY

► **Catoma Church, Mont-**

**gomery**, will hold a fifth Sunday sing and fellowship April 30, 5:30 p.m. Southern gospel group Down East Boys will perform special music. A love offering will be collected. Donnie Dickens is pastor.

## ST. CLAIR

► **Mount Pisgah Church, Cropwell**, will celebrate homecoming and its 177th anniversary May 7, 10 a.m.-noon. Gordon Lee will speak. Paul's Journey will perform special music. Lunch will follow. Chris Aldridge is pastor.

## RANDOLPH

► **William "Billy" Allen** is the new bivocational pastor of **Pleasant Grove Church, Roanoke**. He previously served as pastor of Stovall Church, Greenville, Georgia. He is currently enrolled in Bethany Divinity College and Seminary in Dothan. Allen and his wife, Patsy, have one child and two grandchildren. †



ALLEN



(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.

# TAB CLASSIFIEDS

## CHURCH POSITIONS

### SENIOR PASTOR

Full time for FBC Chalkville, Birmingham, Alabama. Please send resumé to: 2100 Old Springville Rd., Birmingham, AL 35215, Attn: Burl McWaters or email [fbcchalkville@att.net](mailto:fbcchalkville@att.net).

### PASTOR

Saraland Baptist Church in Saraland, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: P.O. Box 749, Saraland, AL 36571 or contact Autrey Key at 251-675-6681.

### PASTOR

Immanuel Baptist Church in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, is accepting resúmes for a full-time pastor. The candidate selected will have five years senior pastor experience, seminary training, expository preaching style and be able to attract and appeal to all age groups. We currently have an elderly congregation and no other ministerial staff. We have underused, debt-free, excellent facilities and a good location. Candidates with the above qualifications can email

resúmes to: [immanuel38464@bellsouth.net](mailto:immanuel38464@bellsouth.net). Our website is [www.immanuel.net](http://www.immanuel.net). Please include current sermons on websites or send DVDs to the church office, Attn: search committee.

### PASTOR

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

### PART-TIME STUDENT MINISTER

Calera Baptist Church, Calera, Alabama, is seeking a part-time student minister to lead/grow our student ministry of 45+ students. Email resúmes to: [info@calerabaptist.org](mailto:info@calerabaptist.org).

### BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER

Silver Run Baptist Church, Seale, Alabama. Submit resúmes to: Cheryl Boutwell at [justshert@gmail.com](mailto:justshert@gmail.com).

### BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

County Line Baptist seeking bivo-

ational music minister for Sunday worship and adult choir. Send resumé to: 1000 Hwy 92, Enterprise, AL 36330. Contact [lodie@roadrunner.com](mailto:lodie@roadrunner.com). Call 334-389-0409.

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# Rashional THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash  
*The Alabama Baptist*

## SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

### Introverts living in extroverted world

She bounced into *The Alabama Baptist* student intern role with no hesitation, blending right in with the staff in such a way that we felt as if we had always known her.

We've been blessed with a great number of high quality interns passing through our ministry and she was certainly among the group.

It has been several years now since she served in that role but the positive contributions she made to the team and the work being done can still be seen.

Along with assisting us at the office, this particular student intern also taught me some helpful lessons about life and interacting with people.

While her personality was extremely outgoing and she was involved in just about everything she could be at school, she would periodically crash and end up hiding away from the world for a few days. She would call in sick and skip her classes but then in a day or two be back attacking everything at full throttle. And then a few weeks later, she was out again.

Once I noticed a pattern, I became concerned and talked to her about it. Surprisingly, she seemed to have more self-awareness than I expected from a 20 year old.

She shared with me how she enjoyed being active and participating in everything she could possibly squeeze into her schedule. She also loved being with and around people but somewhere along the way she always hit a wall, she said.

The pressure, the demands, the deadlines would finally overwhelm her and her escape was sleep. She could sleep for days when she got overwhelmed, she said.

As she talked I recalled my own insane level of activity in college and how Saturday mornings (except during football season of course) were spent sleeping in and catching my breath to gear up for the next week. I'm

sure I would have found myself collapsing periodically like she did if I had not scheduled that weekly downtime.

While I imagine all would agree I'm an extrovert, I'm not sure about her. Maybe she is and truly just pushes herself too hard all the time. But I also think she might be an introvert who figured out how to live and succeed in an extroverted world. Still she couldn't ignore her innate need for periodic isolation even though she tried.

I have several introverted friends who have maneuvered a similar path and are now careful to guard their much-needed alone time. It isn't something to hide or be embarrassed about. It is a real part of their world but we extroverts may not understand and end up stomping all over their sacred ground.

The time alone, processing, regrouping and gaining the energy to re-enter the sea of people and embrace them with the often-required extroverted style is vital.

One friend likes to call it "staring at the wall." She will avoid any human interaction for a day or so after an intense few days with people and then be ready to go again.

Another friend strategically isolates herself at the end of each workday, only interacting with her husband after that time so she can reset for the next day.

Both of these friends are successful at what they do and I believe they will be able to maintain that success because they know themselves well and what is needed for proper care. They have friends and family who support those needs as well.

How often do we try to force ourselves or someone else into a mold that isn't made for us or them? And how often do we refuse to even try to understand a different approach and different needs merely because we've convinced ourselves that the world inside our head is the only logical option? †

# RASHIONAL Extras ...

## Lessons of a failed governor

By Kevin Blackwell  
[drkevinblackwell.com](http://drkevinblackwell.com)

While it isn't surprising that an Alabama government official failed the public, the news about former governor Robert Bentley was heartbreaking. My heart broke not for a failed governor but for the failure of a 50-year Christian marriage and the undoing of a fellow brother in Christ.

This is so much bigger than politics and the state of Alabama; this is about a fellow believer, a redeemed man who made really bad decisions. ... It breaks the heart of God. Truthfully it should break every believer's heart. Not because Robert Bentley is a high-profile person but because he is a man for which God sent His Son to die.

Yet the biblical truth is that God still loves Robert Bentley and offers forgiveness and total cleansing. ... It is my honest prayer that my brother in Christ will run to the cross and find healing and restoration. Being the governor of Alabama is of little importance when compared to being in good standing with the Creator of the universe.

What lessons can Christians learn from the former governor's failure?

**1. Surround yourself with Christians who will hold you accountable — Galatians 6:1–2.**

It is critical that we create a circle of accountability around us and watch out for one another's spiritual well-being. ... Every Christian needs fellow soldiers who will stand with them in life's spiritual battles.

**2. Pride is perhaps the greatest sin and it comes into our lives gradually — Genesis 3:1–5.**

When pride creeps in we lose our common sense and spiritual sensitivity. When we exalt ourselves, we dethrone Christ from our hearts and our lives become a tailspin of mismanagement, mistakes and corruption. But as we lower ourselves in humility before the Lord, He then lifts us up and gives our lives the greatest of meaning and joy (James 4:10).

**3. Invest more time in your marriage than any other relationship — Ephesians 5:25.**

If you are spending more time with someone else of the opposite sex that doesn't share your last name, moral failure is surely around the corner. For both husband and wife there must be on display perpetual Christian devotion to one another that is rooted in the love of Christ. ... No other woman in the world should know my deepest secrets, biggest fears and grandest dreams except my wife. I should share no intimacy with another except the one to which the Lord has given me.

**4. The truth, regardless of how embarrassing and painful, will always be your best friend — Proverbs 12:22.**

Every falsehood will eventually be revealed and all lies will, in time, come back to haunt you. If you have failed, admit it. Don't cover up sin through lying and falsehoods. Sin covered up by sin is a double portion of poison to the soul.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — This is an excerpt from Kevin Blackwell's April 12 blog post. To read the full post, visit [drkevinblackwell.com/2017/04/12/lessons-of-a-failed-governor/](http://drkevinblackwell.com/2017/04/12/lessons-of-a-failed-governor/). †*

"God can use this situation for His glory and for Dr. Bentley's good, but not until Dr. Bentley has a broken and contrite heart because of his sin. As the old preachers used to say, 'Sin will take you further than you want to go; cost you more than you want to pay; and keep you longer than you want to stay.' This particular sin has already cost Dr. Bentley a lot."

Source quoted in a [yellowhammernews.com](http://yellowhammernews.com) March 30, 2016, article about Robert Bentley's church membership

"Jesus told His disciples to go into the world and to make disciples among all the nations. That means that we have a covenant of dialogue and listening with all persons everywhere, none of whom is beyond the reach of God's redeeming grace."

Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham

"I go by people every day and never see [their needs]. Why? Because I focus on me, that's why. ... I sit and focus on what's wrong, and I sit and complain and all I see are things to complain about. We need to redirect our minds to see the things we want to see. So when I walk about saying, 'Can I be a blessing?' I begin seeing a chance to be a blessing. ... Go be necessary for someone."

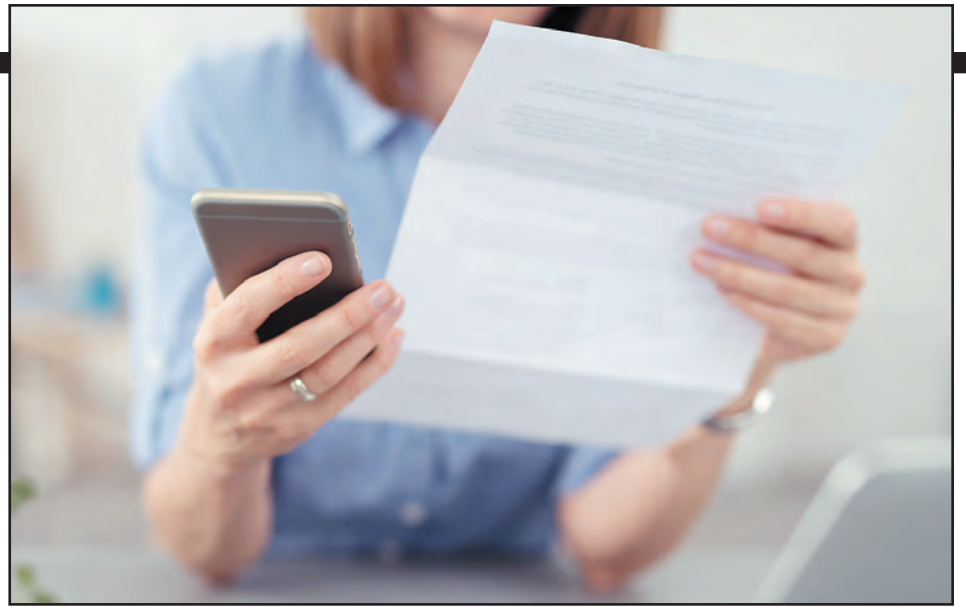
From "The Sender: A story about when right words make all the difference" by Kevin Elko and Bill Beausay

"For pride is a spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love or contentment, or even common sense."

C.S. Lewis

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# Keep ministering



123rf.com

## Things church members can do to help bring back, reach out to inactive members

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Every person who has walked away from the Church has a story. And almost every time, helping them starts with simply being willing to listen, said Lisa Keane, clinical director at Pathways Professional Counseling.

“Whether they feel that they were not reached out to when in despair or hurtful words were said or even felt alone within their church family, right or wrong, they may leave their church feeling hurt,” she said.

Their stories of hurt can look a thousand different ways, but there are a few things churches can keep in mind across the board when reaching out to those who have walked away, Keane said.

### 1. Listen well.

“First and foremost, the Church should approach these people with grace and with the goal of reconciliation,” Keane said.

### Attitude of humility

It’s not about who’s right and who’s wrong, she said — rather it’s an attitude of humility that asks, “What can we do to bring people back into the local fellowship in a way that honors God?”

Ask to hear the person’s story and then

really listen to him or her, Keane said.

And keep in mind that though a surface hurt may have driven them away, there is likely a deeper hurt going on that was brought up by the event that occurred.

“Listening without trying to fix or blame will help decipher what is really going on and will help determine what the church can do to help reconcile this person back to the faith family,” she said.

### 2. Meet needs.

If in the process of hearing a person out you discover a need, work as a church to meet that need, Keane said. That could be a spiritual need but it also could be a physical one.

In an article written by Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, he noted that one of the most underestimated reasons that someone came back to a church is because someone simply extended a hand and invited him or her back.

More than 40 percent said they would

return to the local church if a friend or acquaintance invited them, he said. That number jumped to about 60 percent for young adults.

Couple that invitation with meeting their needs without strings attached and see what that commitment to love may do in their life, Keane said.

### 3. Don’t give up on loving them.

If the person is still resistant to reconciliation, keep pursuing them and keep trying to meet their needs, Keane said. Sometimes people feel the Church is an extension of their representation of God and so the hurt they feel affects their faith, she said.

“They might shut down, quit attending regular services or even question their own faith in the Lord,” she said. “The hurt they experience becomes a foothold to keep them from connecting to a local congregation and can even push them away from a denomination all together.”

Russ Robbins, education minister at

First Baptist Church, Eufaula, said he felt that rub recently when his church did a month-long “Take Two” campaign to invite people back to church.

“I met with our Sunday School outreach leaders and asked them to look at their rolls and identify the people that have not been to Sunday School in the past three months,” Robbins said. “They were asked to pray specifically for these people and develop a strategy to attempt to love them back into the church.”

The results numerically, he said, were not great.

### Personal connections


But a few classes worked hard and made meaningful contacts through personal connections, he said.

“The ones who saw progress were really excited about it,” Robbins said. “It just took some hard work over time.”

That’s why it’s important to keep ministering to those who have fallen away from your church, Keane said. “We do not minister because we get something back but rather because we are called to minister to those who are hurting. It will be through these counter-cultural acts that they may truly see who Christ really is and what He has called His people to do.” ✠

**More than 40 percent said they would return to the local church if a friend or acquaintance invited them.**

**Thom S. Rainer  
president and CEO  
LifeWay Christian Resources**



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

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J. Rodney Bledsoe, J.D.  
Chief Development Officer

# Members, staff should be proactive to make sure others don't fall away

*(continued from page 1)*  
in the first place. They've begun to assess that people just don't care one way or another."

If you've allowed someone to go multiple weeks — or even multiple months — without a contact, your best opportunity as a church to re-connect with him or her is simply to call and apologize, Edmonds said.

"First take responsibility for having allowed this to go on unabated," he said. "Begin to take actions to show them that they are important, that you do care about them. Then begin the process of loving them back into the church."

And then determine as a church to be proactive in making sure members don't fall away without being contacted, Edmonds said.

Rainer said in a blog post at thomrainer.com that there are six common early warning signs that members might fall away — and that other church members can be intentional about noticing.

## 1. Decreased frequency in attendance.

Keeping attendance records isn't about the numbers, Rainer said — it's about having a tool to help

you notice how often someone is missing.

"If your small group or Sunday School class does not keep attendance records, please begin doing so," he said. Small groups can keep track of members and leaders can check in with missing members to see how they can help.

## 2. No longer attending a group.

If someone stops coming to church, don't wait to contact them — there's an urgent need there that needs to be addressed, Rainer said. People who stop attending small groups usually leave church altogether within three months, he said.

## 3. Decreased giving patterns.

Most pastors and church staff don't have access to the giving records of church members, Rainer said, but when he was a pastor he asked the financial secretary to let him know if someone had a sudden, drastic change in giving.

When she did, Rainer would reach out to them, often taking them to lunch to see how they were.

"In every case I did not bring up the giving issue. But in every case I discovered the ministry need that

precipitated the decline in giving," he said.

## 4. Major participant in a church conflict.

Some church members are frequent offenders when it comes to starting conflict, but if you see church members get involved in a conflict for the first time, pay attention, Rainer said. If they are peacemakers, they may decide to leave church rather than stay involved in the problem.

## 5. Family problems.

"Too many church members are embarrassed when family problems occur," Rainer said. "They fear the church will be judgmental rather than redemptive."

Resolve as a church to be a safe place for people with problems, he said.

## 6. Moral failure.

Church members who fall into a place of moral failure are the most likely to leave church, Rainer said. This may be because they don't want to change or it could be because they don't see the church as a place to heal.

"Too many churches do not know how to deal with members involved in moral failure." ✝

## TAKING THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

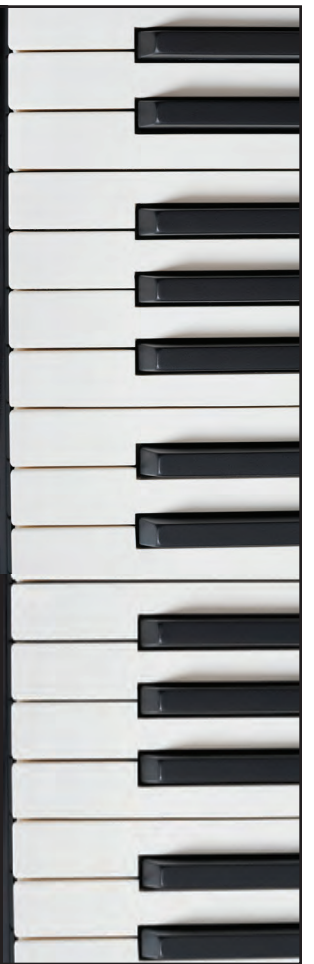
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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 30

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

### HOW DO WE REMEMBER? Matthew 26:17-30

#### Preparation (17-19)

The final week of Jesus' life before His crucifixion coincided with the celebration of the Passover. This was no accident.

Each aspect of the Passover meal, initially done in celebration of the exodus from Egypt, corresponds with the atoning sacrifice that would be made through Christ. The entire exodus out of Egypt is a prefiguring of Christ coming to save us from sin.

For example the Israelites were told to slaughter an unblemished lamb (or goat) and put its blood around the doorframe of their house. Those who did this were spared the wrath of God. In the houses of those who did not put the blood on the doorposts, the firstborn males were killed by the Lord (see Ex. 12).

This event is a foreshadowing of Christ's atoning work. Christ is the sacrifice for the people — the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, according to John 1:29. And for those who accept the sacrifice, the blood is applied to them; they are not subjected to God's wrath.

However, for those who do not accept Christ's sacrifice, God's wrath is poured out on them and they will experience an eternal separation from God in hell.

#### Betrayal (20-25)

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas is seen as the worst type of treachery. One who had experienced the glory of Jesus, seen His countless miracles and was entrusted with taking care of the money bag betrayed the perfect Son of God.

Why Judas decided to turn on his master is up for debate. Some say he was dissatisfied that Jesus was wasting money. Others

say he was trying to force Jesus to bring in His kingdom and end Roman occupation. What is certain is that Judas made a choice to turn Jesus over to the authorities and is responsible for his actions.

Some feel bad for Judas, saying that since this was preordained he had no choice in the matter (see John 17:12 which references the betrayal as a fulfillment of Scripture).

However, throughout Scripture we see two truths — God is sovereign and man is responsible.

Man is always responsible for his actions even though God is sovereign. These two truths are clearly presented in the Bible and we need to do our best to accept the balance.

#### Remembrance (26-30)

Here at the Passover meal Jesus presented the model for communion. By breaking the bread and saying, "This is My body," and offering the cup saying, "This is My blood," Jesus was using a visual representation of what was going to happen to Him on the cross.

His death is given for the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus went to the cross willingly — He knew what He was going to face and He did it anyway for us. We need to be grateful for the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

There are some who believe the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. However, the best reading indicates Jesus is using figurative language, just as Jesus used metaphorical language like "I am the gate" and "I am the bread of life."

Regardless of one's particular view, the important thing to remember is that the Lord's Supper is a memorial in which we reflect on what Christ has done for us, refocusing on the redeeming salvific death of Christ. †

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

### LIFE IN THE CHURCH 1 Peter 4:7-11

Many Scripture passages have to do with right relationships among God's followers: Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New. This is because the Bible was written to the faithful rather than to outsiders. It will take Christians about a century to start writing "apologies" (defenses of Christianity) and "polemics" (attacks of other groups), and even those writings might have been intended for fellow Christians. Context is important, so read all of Chapter 4.

#### Serve one another through prayer. (7)

Like Paul and John the Revelator, Peter thought the end of the current age and the return of Jesus would happen in his own lifetime. Based on verses 1-6, we see that Peter interpreted his readers' sufferings as a sign of the looming end of all things.

Pay attention to what he says; he doesn't say, "Because the end of all things is at hand, abandon your earthly obligations to wait for Jesus." Instead, Jesus' imminence means His followers should devote themselves all the more to prayer. In context Peter is telling his readers to pray for one another. Because of their suffering, this kind of prayer requires special discipline.

#### Serve one another with love and hospitality. (8-9)

While anticipating the Lord's return, we must "maintain constant love for one another" (compare 1:22). The word for "love" here is the one we expect: "agape." It is the love that builds up community. Remember the famous 1 Corinthians 13? Paul was talking about the community there too. We first see the idea in the second half of Proverbs 10:12, to which Peter alludes (also see James 5:20).

Why must Peter tell Christians to keep loving one another? After all in Matthew

5:46-47, Jesus indicates this is natural. Peter probably knows from his own experience among the Twelve Apostles that the threat of danger can cause people to turn against one another. Peter himself denied knowing Jesus with curses. That is the subversive power of fear. Peter says replace fear with love.

In building relationships we become closer as the family of God when we serve one another. Have you ever served members of your own congregation (preparing and serving food, mowing lawns for the elderly, caring for children, writing notes of comfort or encouragement, arranging food to be delivered to new parents or to grieving families, etc.)? Did you notice how your service affected your attitudes about your family of faith? Did you detect a change in the way members of your congregation drew together?

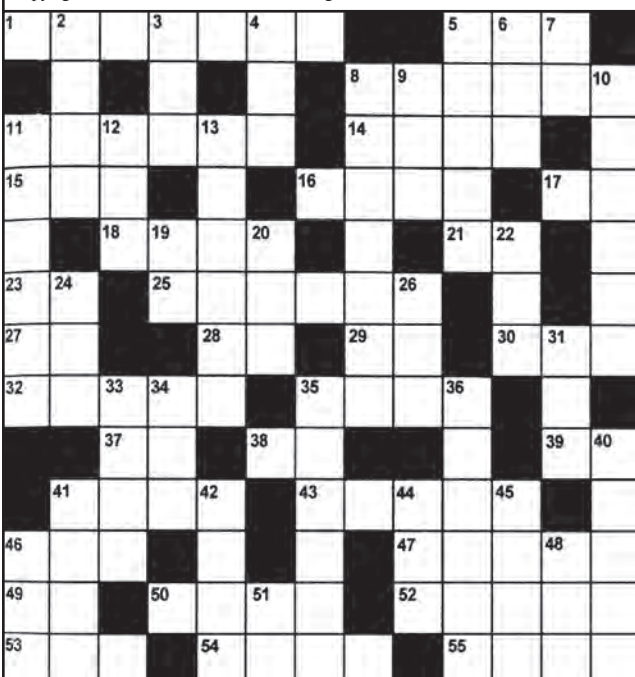
#### Serve one another through your spiritual gifts. (10-11)

Peter uses an interesting mix of ideas here — stewardship and God's grace. Normally stewards administer limited resources — household funds and manpower. But God's grace is "manifold" or "varied," and it is unlimited. Therefore as stewards, we do not have to worry about allocating grace in case we run out. Whatever spiritual gift we have received also has no reservoir with a gauge to warn us when it's nearing empty (although the number of hours in a day and our stamina certainly do: this note is for our ministerial staffs).

In serving God and others, spiritual growth is integrally tied to our relationship with other believers. God has given us not only grace and spiritual gifts, but also one another. Now we know why Peter wrote verse 11: When we speak to one another we speak God's words and when we serve one another, we do it because God gives us the strength. Glory be to God. †

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

- Jonathan \_\_\_ up upon his hands. (1 Sam. 14:13)
- Automobile.
- The Philistines took the ark ... to \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Sam. 5:1)
- Belonging to the son of Jephunneh. (Num. 13:6)
- Lizard, snail and \_\_\_ are unclean. (Lev. 11:30)
- Much \_\_\_ about nothing.
- He is up \_\_\_ good. (2 words)
- Printer's measure.
- Sea bird.
- Prefix meaning into.
- Mother.
- Thou hast followed \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Kings 18:18)
- For example.
- Duty every soldier hates.
- Take thy neighbor's raiment \_\_\_ pledge. (Ex. 22:26)
- National Football League. (abbr.)
- Good \_\_\_ are not everything.

### Down

- Bela the son of \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 36:32)
- Hello.
- Fe, \_\_\_\_, Fo, Fum.
- To exist.
- The strong hold of \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Sam. 24:7)
- To offer a sacrifice unto \_\_\_ their god. (Judg. 16:23)
- What holds up a golf ball.
- To surprise someone.
- I am. (contr.)
- There was a marriage in \_\_\_ of Galilee. (John 2:1)
- He killed Goliath.
- A meat offering baked in a \_\_\_\_\_. (Lev. 2:5)
- Ancient wisdom.
- Rulers of \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 18:21)
- house of \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Cor. 1:11)
- A sweetened fruit drink.
- Rosemary. (abbr.)
- Thy father was an \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 16:3)
- This is my beloved \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 3:17)
- Spoken of by \_\_\_ the prophet. (Matt. 24:15)
- The excellency of \_\_\_ and Sharon. (Isa. 35:2)
- \_\_\_ sat in the gate of Sodom. (Gen. 19:1)
- Belonging to the son of Abinoam. (Judg. 4:6)
- Ebenezer. (abbr.)
- Just a little rest.
- Prefix meaning "not."
- Lost three days \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Sam. 9:20)
- What a cow says.
- Fabulous.
- \_\_\_ of little faith. (Matt. 6:3; 2 words, var.)
- The king carried the people captive to \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Kings 16:9)
- Said Jehu to \_\_\_ his captain. (2 Kings 9:25)

### 36. Joseph and Mary looked for a \_\_\_\_\_ an inn. (2 words)

- Belonging to Gaal's father. (Judg. 9:30)
- Son of Ishmael. (Gen. 25:13, 15)
- Joshua built an altar in mount \_\_\_\_\_. (Josh. 8:30)
- Moses gave unto ... \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom of Sihon. (Num. 32:33)
- Part of a cathedral.
- Given for good service.
- Ye rebelled ... in the desert of \_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 27:14)
- Not "yes."



# Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

COMPILED FROM WIRE SERVICES

## Former BCMD exec. director sues NAMB

LOUISVILLE, Miss. — A lawsuit filed by former Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD) executive director Will McRaney alleges the North American Mission Board (NAMB) wrongly influenced his separation of employment from BCMD in 2015. The suit also claims NAMB personnel engaged in “slander and/or libel” of McRaney and attempted to interfere with his speaking engagements after he left the state convention.

In response to the suit, NAMB said April 12 in written comments it “strongly denies Dr. McRaney’s allegations,” adding the next day, “No one from NAMB has attempted or will attempt to interfere with Dr. McRaney’s ministry efforts and we have not asked anyone else to do so.”

The lawsuit was filed April 7 in Winston County, Mississippi, where McRaney claims he was “uninvited” to speak at a 2016 “missions symposium” because of “intentional interference by NAMB leaders.” The suit asks a county court to award unspecified punitive damages to McRaney.

The lawsuit’s claim that McRaney “was terminated” by BCMD after NAMB leaders threatened to withhold funding from the two-state convention appeared to contrast with BCMD’s March 2016 claim that he “resigned.”

Other allegations include: NAMB leaders made “false and libelous” statements about McRaney in 2014–2015; in late 2015, NAMB posted McRaney’s photo at the welcome desk of its Alpharetta, Georgia, headquarters, communicating implicitly “that he was not to be trusted;” NAMB President Kevin Ezell attempted “to interfere” with McRaney’s scheduled speaking appearance at the 2016 Florida Baptist Convention Pastors Conference.

NAMB said April 13 the entity had not yet been served with the lawsuit and planned to file a legal response within 30 days. (BP)

## Gaines installed as Southern’s visiting professor

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Southern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees approved the installation of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Steve Gaines to a visiting professorship honoring former SBC President Herschel H. Hobbs during their April 10 meeting in Louisville, Kentucky.



GAINES

Trustees established the Herschel H. Hobbs Visiting Professor of Christian Preaching to honor the life and legacy of Hobbs, a two-time graduate of Southern Seminary. Hobbs was SBC president from 1961 to 1963, among other ministry roles.

Alabama Baptist State Convention President John Thweatt serves as Southern Seminary’s board chairman. He said he was especially excited about the Hobbs professorship.

Gaines, installed as the inaugural Hobbs professor, has served as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, since

2005. He previously served in Alabama as pastor of Gardendale First Baptist Church for 14 years. (BP)

## CP giving 4.07 percent ahead of projection

NASHVILLE — Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee are 4.07 percent above the year-to-date SBC Cooperative Program (CP) Allocation Budget projection. They are 0.97 percent below contributions received during the same time frame in 2016, according to a news release from Executive Committee (EC) President and CEO Frank S. Page.

The \$98,348,238.34 received by EC for the first six months of the fiscal year — Oct. 1, 2016, through March 31 — for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget represents 104.07 percent of the \$94,500,000 year-to-date budgeted projection to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America. (BP)



Photo courtesy of Pete Lamont

Banner Baptist Church, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, lost its fellowship hall and sustained damage to another small building during the Nov. 28, 2016, wildfires that burned in and around the resort area.

# Rebuilding lives

## Second WMU grant to help Smoky Mountain recovery

As the Smoky Mountain resort towns of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge continue to recover from devastating wildfires, a \$5,000 HEART (Humanitarian Emergency Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow) Fund grant from the national Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) and WMU Foundation will assist artisans and other workers struggling because of the decline in tourism.

The wildfires that swept through the region in late November and early December 2016 came at the beginning of the busy Christmas tourist season. As a result many who make their living in arts and crafts, service, retail and other tourism-related enterprises lost their homes and jobs.

The needs of these workers are still great, said Vickie Anderson, executive director of Tennessee WMU.

“The decline in tourism is causing reduced hours, layoffs and loss of jobs. Also a lower income housing shortage in Gatlinburg has gotten worse since the wildfires, which means that many workers are having to relocate to Pigeon Forge and beyond,” Anderson said.

Many of the workers did not have cars because they could walk to work from their homes in Gatlinburg. Others lost their cars in the fires. The lack of reliable transportation coupled with the housing shortage has resulted in increased homelessness in the area.

“The homeless population is growing because monthly costs in housing and transportation are in-

creasing drastically for so many,” Anderson said.

Those most affected are people who work in hotels, restaurants, entertainment attractions and shops. Gatlinburg businesses employ many temporary and international guest workers who are ineligible for other forms of assistance.

The HEART Fund grant will be distributed through Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries (SMRM) to help workers with transportation, housing and transitional needs as they rebuild their lives after the fires. As “boots on the ground” in Gatlinburg, SMRM personnel are ministering through the relationships they have developed through many years of faithful service, Anderson said.

A \$5,000 HEART Fund grant awarded in December 2016 allowed SMRM volunteers to give

out gift cards to help fire victims with immediate needs. However, relief funds have slowed dramatically since the beginning of the year, said SMRM Director Bill Black.

### ‘Needs have not stopped’

“Our income has almost stopped in terms of money for helping those affected by the fires but the needs have not stopped,” Black said. “We remain deep in this holy and painfully beautiful fire ministry.”

The HEART Fund was created in response to Sept. 11, 2001. Grants allow Christians to provide relief and rebuilding assistance as they minister to disaster victims in the United States and around the world. (WMU)

**The WMU Foundation is accepting donations to the HEART Fund for disaster relief online at [wmufoundation.com](http://wmufoundation.com) or by mail to WMU Foundation HEART Fund, 100 Missionary Ridge, Birmingham, AL 35242.**



BP photo

Two police officers help distribute school supplies to families during 6 Stones ministry's Operation Back 2 School in August 2016. Officer Vanessa Nilson (right) is from the city of Euless and James Webster (second from right) is from the city of Hurst, both located in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

# 'Be relevant'

## Coalition of Texas churches invest locally, change lives

**J**ohn Meador experienced "a grief, a heart-break" followed by "soul-searching, and a time of prayer and fasting" when he learned about a woman who had no one to help her after an apartment fire.

The church Meador leads, First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, was emerging from millions of dollars in debt and was focused on missions ventures worldwide. Though the church had begun exploring what they could do to help their local community, news of an apartment fire at a complex adjoining the church campus hit close to home.

"It became apparent that we really needed to pay more attention to our Jerusalem," said Scott Sheppard, on church staff at the time. Meador, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference in 2016, tasked Sheppard with finding a way to help the woman who had lost everything.

What emerged from that challenge was a ministry called 6 Stones which has merged the nonprofit, public and private sectors to transform parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

### Ministry start

Since it began in 2008, 6 Stones has repaired more than 500 homes, donated school supplies to more than 26,000 students, provided Christmas gifts for more than 22,000 children, logged nearly 270,000 volunteer hours and invested \$9 million in local communities, according to a 2016 year-end report.

Sheppard, executive director of 6 Stones — a name based on the church's retirement of a \$6 million-plus debt over 28 months prior to launching its community outreach — recounted how eager First, Euless, was to start the ministry.

"They were so moved, so excited about the possibility of investing in their Jerusalem that we went from realizing the need to the church voting and launching a nonprofit in less than 120 days," he said.

Dallas-Fort Worth is among the top destinations for relocation in the world, Sheppard said, noting that people from other countries arrive in New York, Los Angeles or Chicago and realize there are no jobs, and then they turn to Texas, which he said has produced twice as many jobs in the past decade as the rest of the United States combined.

### Federal housing grants

One of the ways 6 Stones got involved was to partner with the city of Euless — with the help of federal housing grants — to revitalize deteriorating homes.

Gary McKamie, a former Euless city manager, described the initiative at a Catalyst of Hope forum in February in nearby Bedford, when a panel explained how churches can replicate the 6 Stones model.

"It was kind of unusual for us to be approached at the city by someone asking, 'What can we do for you?'" McKamie said. "At the time property values were falling. We had all sorts of needs."

Gene Buinger, a former superintendent of the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district, said more than 50 percent of children in the area today come from homes at the federal poverty level or below, and more than 70 languages of the world are spoken in homes throughout the district.

When 6 Stones asked Buinger how they could help the school system, he had "a whole laundry list of things that they could do with us."

Among those projects have been Operation Back 2 School, providing students with school supplies, and Night of Hope, a Christmas experience for those in need.

Sheppard said the city transformation movement is growing as churches across the nation are realizing they must engage with their local communities, but 6 Stones is unique because they've "been able to bridge the gap to the other sectors, whether it's the city, school district, corporate or even collaborating with other nonprofits." (BP)

## RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

### Religious discrimination law applied to LGBT

VALPARAISO, Ind. — The same law that guards against workplace discrimination based on religion, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was interpreted April 4 by a U.S. appeals court to protect against bias based on sexual orientation.

In an 8-3 decision the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit used Title VII's provision protecting against sex discrimination to rule in favor of a woman who said she was denied full-time employment and eventually fired from a community college because she lives as a lesbian.

"We conclude today that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a form of sex discrimination," chief judge Diane P. Wood wrote in the majority opinion posted on the court's website. "We therefore reverse the district court's judgment dismissing Kimberly Hively's suit against Ivy Tech Community College and remand for further proceedings."

The Seventh Circuit is the highest court to interpret Title VII to include LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) employees, the decision indicates.

Hively's case began when she filed a charge in December 2013 with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, alleging Ivy Tech Community College in Valparaiso, Indiana, denied her full-time employment six times between 2009 and 2014 because of her sexual orientation. In July 2014 the college refused to renew her contract for part-time employment.

Jeff Fanter, Ivy Tech's senior vice president for student experience and communications/marketing, said, "The College denies that it discriminated against the plaintiff on the basis of her sex or sexual orientation and will defend the plaintiff's claims on the merits in the trial court." (BP)

### Federal criminal prosecutions decline again

WASHINGTON — The number of federal criminal prosecutions has gone down for the past five years, putting it at its lowest level in almost 20 years, according to new data analysis released by Pew Research Center.

Drug, immigration and property prosecutions — the three most common federal offenses — have all declined since federal prosecutions as a whole peaked in 2011.

In fiscal year 2016 federal prosecutors filed criminal charges against more than 77,000 defendants — down one-quarter from five years ago, according to Pew. Of those charged in 2016, 24,638 were drug offenses — a 23 percent decrease from 2011. The Justice Department also prosecuted 20,762 for immigration offenses, a 26 percent decrease, and 10,712 defendants for property offenses like embezzlement or fraud, a 39 percent decline.

Pew reports that several factors may play a role in the decline, including former Attorney General Eric Holder's guidance issued to federal prosecutors to ensure every case prosecuted "serves a substantial federal interest." New Attorney General Jeff Sessions, from Alabama, indicates that he will increase such prosecutions in the coming years. (TAB)

### Wealthy live longer than poor, study finds

NEW YORK — Wealthy Americans live as many as 15 years longer than the nation's poor, according to a new study on inequality in the U.S. health care system.

"Widening economic inequality in the USA has been accompanied by increasing disparities in health outcomes," the researchers write. "Almost every chronic condition, from stroke to heart disease and arthritis, follows a predictable pattern of rising prevalence with declining income."

Widening gaps of income have caused widening gaps of health inequity since the 1970s, the study explained. It also warned of a coming health-poverty trap unless strategic intervention happens, according to The Christian Post.

The study, "Inequality and the health-care system in the USA," was published in The Lancet, a health care journal. (TAB)p