

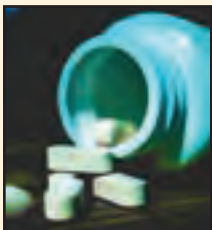


November 30, 2017
Vol. 182, No. 47

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Opioid abuse continues to be of concern in Alabama, US

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Main photo: Puerto Rico's infrastructure was devastated by Hurricane Maria.
Small photos: Alabama Baptists help with recovery.



Photo by Bradley Williams

Picking up the pieces

Alabama Baptist associations to partner with Puerto Rican pastors

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It's not an easy thing to look at a hurricane in the face and be thankful for it.

But Mel Johnson said he heard a pastor say that very thing when he visited storm-ravaged Puerto Rico in mid-November.

"He said he was thankful ... because now his church had come together and was trying to seek how to reach outside of their church," said Johnson, director of missions (DOM) for Autauga Baptist Association.

"He said they hadn't been open before this."

Ever since Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico in September, the Caribbean island has been struggling to get back on its feet. Only about a third of the island has power. Residents are leaving in such large numbers that some predict the island could lose a significant part of its population in the next few years.

Loss of membership

And with that goes a large part of the Church.

"When we were there, we met with seven pastors, and some had lost a significant amount of their membership, maybe even 30 percent," John-

son said. "That's 30 percent of your church family, your church leadership and your church financial support. Those pastors are really struggling. Churches are working to meet physical needs with very limited resources and need outside support."

That's why the North American Mission Board put out a call recently for Baptist associations nationwide to consider adopting a Puerto Rican pastor and his family to help them get back on their feet.

At least 19 Alabama Baptist associations have committed, including Autauga, Elmore and Tallapoosa, who are partnering together for the

effort. The list also includes Birmingham, North Jefferson, Shelby, Bessemer, Montgomery, St. Clair, Sand Mountain, Morgan, Limestone, Colbert-Lauderdale, Pickens, Clarke, Washington, Covington, Choctaw and Escambia.

Joining in the effort

Hugh Richardson, DOM for Shelby Baptist Association, noted, "There are 60 or so churches down there and we will be taking on one of them," he said.

"The island is devastated and the pastors don't have many resources, (See 'Alabama,' page 5)

Coming next week ...

Dealing with self image issues



COMMENT

A Dot or a Trend?

Observers are not sure what to make of these actions.

Thom Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, predicted that during 2017 a trend to watch would be multisite congregations becoming neighborhood churches. So when The Village Church in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex in Texas announced in late September that it was transitioning the six sites where the church meets each week into independent neighborhood churches people took notice.

Is this the beginning of a new trend, many asked?

Warren Bird, director of research and intellectual capital at Leadership Network, does not think so. “Whenever a high visibility church (like The Village) makes the shift, people ask if this is a new trend or even a sign of multisite failure. I say no to both counts.”

The Village Church is a Southern Baptist congregation with headquarters in the Flower Mound area of greater Dallas. It averages about 11,400 in weekly worship with about half attending at Flower Mound. The church went to the multisite approach after six weekly worship services in Flower Mound proved inadequate to accommodate those in attendance.

Matt Chandler has been pastor of the church during this phenomenal growth period. He also serves as president of the Acts 29 church planting network, making him a prominent voice about church growth.

Reaching Dallas

Chandler said the reason for the decision to transition multisite locations into local autonomous churches is because the new approach offers the “best possible ability and capacity to contextually reach the city of Dallas with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Said another way, concentrating on individual local churches offers the best opportunity for witness and ministry to local communities and for church planting. The new churches will be expected to start new churches to help reach the 7 million people of the Dallas metroplex.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

One of the six locations has already rolled off into an independent church. The other five will do so in the next five years.

Beau Hughes served as local pastor of the Denton campus of The Village Church. Now he serves as pastor of the new church. Hughes said in an interview that becoming an independent church “increased the unity of the congregation.”

‘Beautifully united’

“In the last 10 years of being a pastor here, I’ve never seen anything that has more beautifully united us and formed us together as a congregation that this transition because it thrust upon us the responsibilities that come with being a church,” he said.

Interestingly, The Village Church is the second major multisite congregation this year to announce it is abandoning the multisite approach in favor of independent local churches. In May, Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City announced each of its three campuses will become independent churches. Redeemer Presbyterian is not as well-known as its pastor Timothy Keller who recently announced his retirement from pastoral ministry. Keller is one of the most influential voices in evangelical circles today.

The church, which averages about 5,300 people in New York City, has been involved in social ministries from its founding in the late-1980s. But the hope is that the three smaller churches will each be more effective in witnessing and ministering to their particular communities.

It also is anticipated each of the three churches will plant new congregations, growing the Redeemer network from three churches to six to nine neighborhood-based churches within 10 years. Already one new church has been launched called Redeemer Lincoln Square.

Just as one dot doesn’t make a line, two examples do not make a trend. Still there are some interesting similarities at both The Village Church and Redeemer Church.

Both seek to be more involved in local communities. The big word is to “contextualize” witness and ministries. Both churches concluded this could be done more effectively as independent churches rather than through the

multisite approach for a megachurch program.

Initial reaction to the change has been positive from campuses becoming independent churches. The Denton campus pastor quoted above called it a “beautiful” process and reports indicate reactions from other campuses are just as positive. In New York, Redeemer West Side has already started a church plant.

More people are being drawn into leadership as responsibilities have to be assumed and decisions made by now independent congregations. That means more trained and functional church leaders.

These similarities are hauntingly close to observations made in the 1970s by the late James L. Sullivan, then president of the Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay).

In a book titled “Rope of Sand With Strength of Steel,” Sullivan wrote the Southern Baptist approach was to start several neighborhood-based churches in an area rather than create one megachurch.

He explained that having many churches allowed for a variety of cultures to attract different people. The combined attendance of the neighborhood churches would outstrip the attendance of the megachurch, he said, and neighborhood churches could minister more effectively to their communities than a single large church could. He also said that more Christians were trained for leadership roles through neighborhood churches than in a single large congregation.

Not mentioned but evidently true judging from reactions shared by both The Village Church and Redeemer Church is that members seem to take on more responsibility when they have to make decisions rather than having decisions made for them by someone else.

Also interesting is that Redeemer made its decision to separate into independent neighborhood churches at the time of Keller’s retirement. Chandler also noted that transitioning to independent churches eliminates concerns about succession.

Celebrity pastors

In 2015, Christianity Today studied multisite ministries and concluded that when led by a celebrity pastor, multisite ministries can work well. “But when things go poorly, multisite churches can become another struggling American franchise, precariously built on the brand of a celebrity pastor — and one step away from collapsing like a house of cards.”

Whether The Village Church and Redeemer are the front edge of a trend or just isolated examples remains to be seen. Whatever the ultimate answer and whatever strategy is embraced, the goal for all of us must always be to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to fulfill our Christian vocation of reflecting God’s glory into the communities where we live and work. ✝

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

(ISSN 0738-7741;
USPS 011-080)

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

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'National health emergency'

Opioid abuse continues to be of concern in Alabama, US

By Martha Simmons

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It's Sunday morning. As you settle into your favorite seat before the service starts, take a look at the people lined up along your pew: One out of every 10 of them is likely to be using illegal drugs ... and may very well be suffering from a deadly addiction.

Judge not. It might even be you, especially if you have grown dependent on widely prescribed painkillers.

According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "In 2014, 27 million people aged 12 or older used an illicit drug in the past 30 days, which corresponds to about 1 in 10 Americans (10.2 percent)."

While illegal marijuana use is still the primary driver of these statistics, a stratospheric rise in opioid abuse and overdose deaths are sounding the alarm bell across the United States. President Donald Trump recently proclaimed opioid abuse a national health emergency.

It's an especially dire problem in Alabama, the state with the highest rates of opioid prescriptions in the nation. And it's not just a city problem — doctors in rural counties such as Colbert, Franklin and Walker write opioid prescriptions at rates nearly double that of the rest of Alabama.

Doctor prescriptions

"Our doctors wrote 5.8 million prescriptions for pain pills in 2015, according to the Centers for Disease Control," wrote Rep. Anthony Daniels, D-Huntsville, minority leader of the Alabama House of Representatives, in a recent op-ed for AL.com. "That amounts to about 1.2 prescriptions per person (compared to the national average of 0.71)."

In 2015 alone drug overdoses accounted for 736 deaths in Alabama. The National Insur-



Unsplash.com

ance Journal reported 5,128 deaths from overdoses in Alabama from 2006 through 2014, increasing at a startling 82 percent rate during that eight-year period.

"Opioids — prescription and illicit — are the main driver of drug overdose deaths," the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported. The CDC noted that opioids were involved in 33,091 deaths nationwide in 2015, and opioid overdoses have quadrupled since 1999.

Recent high-profile prosecutions of Alabama doctors operating so-called "pill mills" underscore the rising rates of addiction suffered by patients with legitimate pain, as well as how excess medications can become available for illegal purchase on the street. Moreover, there are illegally manufactured synthetic opioids now circulating on the black market, and addicts unable to feed their spiraling habits for prescription drugs often turn to heroin, a particularly lethal form of opioid.

While government and law enforcement agencies search for solutions, the opioid crisis has received little attention from the pulpit but many believe that should change. Opioid abuse is an insidious evil that churches need to start

addressing, according to Phillip Bethancourt, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

"The opioid crisis is the pro-life issue evangelicals aren't talking about," Bethancourt said, writing for ERLC's website in August. "The opioid crisis is a silent epidemic in America that demands further engagement by the Church."

Despite silence on the subject from most churches, the opioid crisis is so pervasive that many members know somebody who abuses or is addicted to opioids, Bethancourt said.

"Almost as many people have opioid prescriptions in America (92 million, or 38 percent of the population) as the number of people subscribed to cable and Netflix combined (99 million). Five percent of Americans admit to misusing prescription opioids they've acquired through illicit means. An astounding 1.9 million Americans report having a full-fledged addiction to opioids, an increase of 493 percent since 2010."

Give it urgency

Overdoses claim the lives of the equivalent of two average-sized church memberships every day, he pointed out. It's time for churches to bring the issue into the light and give it the urgency it deserves, Bethancourt said.

"Until evangelicals embrace the opioid epidemic as a pivotal aspect of championing a whole-life pro-life social ethic, the church will continue to overlook the crisis all around it. The Bible calls Christians to embrace a holistic view of life that defends the most vulnerable from conception to resurrection," Bethancourt said.

"Ministering in the midst of the opioid crisis is a key area where churches can protect human dignity by embracing the many ways in which this epidemic is a pro-life issue."✠

What is an opioid?

Here are the basics, according to the CDC:

Prescription opioids

- ▶ Can be prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain.
- ▶ Can have serious risks and side effects.
- ▶ Common types are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine and methadone.

▶ Often prescribed following surgery or injury, or for health conditions such as cancer.

▶ In recent years there has

been a dramatic increase in the acceptance and use of prescription opioids for the treatment of chronic, noncancer pain, such as back pain or osteoarthritis, despite serious risks and the lack of evidence about their long-term effectiveness.

Fentanyl

▶ Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever, approved for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain.

▶ It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, is pre-

scribed in the form of transdermal patches or lozenges and can be diverted for misuse and abuse.

▶ Illegally made and distributed fentanyl has been on the rise in several states and is linked to most recent cases of fentanyl-related harm, overdose and death in the United States.

▶ It is sold through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect and is often mixed with heroin and/or cocaine as a combination product — with or without the user's knowledge — to increase its euphoric effects.

Heroin

▶ An illegal opioid.
▶ Heroin use has increased sharply across the United States among men and women, most age groups and all income levels.

▶ Some of the greatest increases occurred in demographic groups with historically low rates of heroin use: women, the privately insured and people with higher incomes.

(Compiled by Martha Simmons)

Loving God & serving people

Member of Collinsville's Mount Vernon named Outstanding Missions Volunteer

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

John Yarbrough knows about power — the electrical kind and the spiritual kind.

By profession Yarbrough, the 2018 Outstanding Missions Volunteer of the Year, is an electrician at Goodyear in Gadsden. But throughout the year, he puts his skills to work on a variety of missions projects in his community and beyond.

“John is a deeply devoted Christian who is a highly skilled craftsman, a strong leader, a planner, an organizer and a man’s man with an incomparable servant’s heart,” said Lookout Mountain Baptist Association Director of Missions Lloyd Borden, who nominated Yarbrough for the award.

Terry Burke, Yarbrough’s pastor at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville, said Yarbrough’s heart is with missions work. He noted the multiple trips Yarbrough has made to Honduras since 1999.

“He has spent his vacation time in Honduras every year for several years with a medical missions team,” Burke said. “John isn’t a doctor but he makes sure they have power and does crowd control as well as evangelism along the long lines during the waiting period for medical and dental treatments.”

Another annual project is a two-day work trip to the Alabama Baptist Children’s Home in Oxford. Over the years, Yarbrough and his team have cleared brush, built fences and completed other jobs on the campus.

Yarbrough assisted in disaster relief work following Hurricane Katrina, where his electrical skills came in handy, just as they did on construction projects in Kentucky, Georgia and Alaska. Locally,

Yarbrough has helped out around his church through the years, repairing lighting, servicing air conditioning units, adding lights to recreational areas and generally maintaining anything that requires electricity. Yarbrough



Photo by Bethany Rogers

Scotty Goldman (left) presents John Yarbrough of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Collinsville, with the Outstanding Missions Volunteer of the Year award.



Photo courtesy of John Yarbrough

John Yarbrough (center) has made multiple trips to Honduras since 1999. He has spent his vacation time there with a medical missions team. He is not a doctor but he makes sure they have power and does crowd control as well as evangelism.

is a deacon his church depends on greatly, Burke said.

Yarbrough also serves as men’s ministries director for Lookout Association. In that role, Yarbrough “encourages youth and young adult men to participate and mature as volunteers, based on their Christian obligation to help others,” Burke said.

And Yarbrough sets the example. Over the years, his list of missions projects in northeast Alabama include repairing an air conditioner for a local widow; working with several different Carpenters for Christ groups on church buildings and fellowship halls; and helping build and wire a home for a mother and her son whose mobile home had been destroyed by fire.

The criteria for nomination for the annual award given by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions is to have served in each of the four fields that are mentioned in Acts 1:8 — Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, said Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions. Goldman noted that Yar-

brough’s work mentioned more than human accomplishments.

“For every one of those journeys, it was mentioned the number of people who were led to Christ,” Goldman said. “It’s not just a missions trip, it’s a missions experience with people coming to know the Lord as a result of faithful volunteers.”

For Yarbrough, every missions experience is a joy, Borden said. Whether walking the roofline of a house, squirming around a crawl space or riding a bus for 12 hours along a bumpy dirt road in Honduras, Yarbrough is always smiling.

“All because he loves God and loves serving people. And because he values the sharing of the gospel of Christ above any other life experience.”

Yarbrough said he was humbled by the award, and he encouraged others to see the opportunities God has put in their lives to serve Him through missions work.

“What better could a person say when you die than he served God during his generation with his abilities?”

Whether walking the roofline of a house, squirming around a crawl space or riding a bus for 12 hours along a bumpy dirt road in Honduras, Yarbrough is always smiling.

**Lloyd Borden
director of missions, Lookout Mountain Baptist Association**

REFLECTIONS



Alabama Baptists focus on long-term recovery effort

(continued from page 1)

but they were looking for ways to reach out.”

That’s why Johnson said response is so important.

“We want to help pastors who have really been under the gun seeing to the needs of their own families but also their church members,” he said. “They have a lot of opportunity to help families who have experienced emotional trauma pick up the pieces in their lives.”

And they are open to Alabama Baptists’ help, he said.

“We met with pastors and talked with them about their needs, prayed with them, encouraged them and shared our vision for coming in and assisting,” Johnson said. “They were wide open to that opportunity. They welcomed that.”

Mark Wakefield, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions disaster relief and chaplaincy ministries strategist, said the area that he and Johnson visited — the western portion of the island — is the part where Alabama Baptists will be focusing.

“We want to partner with them to help them help their community in whatever ways we can,” he said.

The work is still in the planning stages. For some churches, that partnership will mean some rebuilding of physical structures. For others, that will mean providing ways to filter water, providing other resources or meeting spiritual needs.

Wakefield says he and the DOMs who have signed up to partner with pastors on the island will be going down as a group to meet them sometime in the first two weeks of December.

Opening doors for ministry

“There are a lot of spiritual and emotional needs there, and we see time and time again that the mere presence of people who are willing to come a long way and help opens doors for ministry and gospel conversations,” he said.

Those needs have been on Alabama Baptists’ radar ever since the hurricane hit. Larry Dover, DOM for Franklin Baptist Association, said his churches shipped 25,000 pounds of diapers and other needed supplies to a contact on the island in October soon after the storm.

“Everybody had heard how devastating it was,” Dover said. “The Lord just put it in place where we had those contacts and could get them there quickly.”

Now that statewide response is shifting to a more long-term recovery effort, according to Wakefield.

“It’s not a traditional disaster relief response but we want to come alongside them and provide what they need to get back on their feet and minister to their communities,” he said. ✝

‘Living out God’s Word’

Valleydale Baptist deacon draws from faith as SEC official

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It was a simple “yes” in 1987 that changed the next 30 years of Marc Curles’ life — yes, he did want that extra ticket to the Georgia football game.

“When I was in college, my sister was a year behind me, and her roommate’s father was an official in the SEC,” Curles said. “He sent tickets to his daughter, and they had a spare ticket to the game he was calling that weekend.”

Curles took it — he loved football. And he watched the Bulldogs, sure — but for the first time, he was watching the guys in the black and white stripes just as much.

“I watched her dad all during the game, and it looked like it was a lot of fun,” Curles said.

‘Gratifying to not be noticed’

He remembers leaning over the fence that night and asking her dad how he could become a referee too.

“He encouraged me and connected me with a high school officials’ association in Atlanta,” Curles said.

In the years that followed, Curles would make hundreds and hundreds of official calls. He would work his way up from high school through the college divisions and into the SEC in 2006.

“It’s the most gratifying feeling when you walk off the field and feel like you officiated a really good game and no one even noticed you were there,” he said.

One such game was the 2016 Alamo Bowl, where TCU came back from trailing 31–0 at halftime to beat Oregon 47–41 in triple overtime. They tied the record for the biggest comeback in bowl history.

And the referees just faded into the background, Curles said.

“It was an exciting atmosphere and we had a well-officiated game,” he said of his eight-person crew. “There were tight, difficult calls, and on review of the game, we got them all correct.”

But he would never forget the power of a small decision. In addition to taking the Georgia ticket, there’s another call that would be seared in his mind forever. It happened in 2009 when the Arkansas Razorbacks played the No. 1 team, the Florida Gators.

To Curles, it felt like the call heard round the world.

The Gators were trailing in the fourth quarter, and out of the corner of his eye, Curles saw what looked like a vicious blow that knocked a Florida player completely out of the play.

He threw a flag — unsportsmanlike conduct on the defense.

But several hours later when he watched the tape, he saw that he’d been wrong.

“Where I made the mistake is I didn’t see the whole thing,” he told ESPN in an interview later. “I didn’t see how it developed. I saw out of the corner of my eye what I thought was a foul. I can’t think something is a foul. I (must) know it. ... And that was my mistake.”

Curles said he was sick at himself.

And so was the entire Arkansas fan base — whether his call had made the difference or not, Florida had come back and won. His home and work voice-mail filled up with messages, as did his email.

It was a rough season, he said. His crew had been under fire for a few controversial calls or no calls, and people weren’t holding back their feelings. Refs don’t normally talk to reporters, but in the midst of the storm, Curles bared his soul to ESPN. He didn’t make excuses — he simply said that he was human and no one was harder on him than he was.

It was then the tide turned, he said.

“I got overwhelmed with emails of support from literally around the world,” he said. “That was amazing. I’m hoping that the way I withstood all of that was kind of an example of how to handle things.”

His faith was key in that season, he said. It still is now.

Praying for critics

“I got an email a few weeks ago before an Arkansas game from a lady who hadn’t forgotten that call from 2009,” Curles said. “She said she was battling cancer but was going to work until the day she died to see that I got fired.”

Curles said he doesn’t respond to those kinds of emails, but he prayed that she would find faith and perspective in life.

That’s what grounds him and that’s what he wants for others. As he travels with his crew — 1 of 9 such crews in the SEC — he tries to be a spiritual leader for them. They live together, work together and build a lot of camaraderie, he said.

Working together

“When you watch a football game, there are really three teams on the field — the two football teams and the crew of officials,” Curles said. “We’re functioning as a team and working together and trying to play our game perfectly as well.”

That type of relationship gives Curles a lot of opportunities to share his faith.

“Over the years, I’ve always closed the pre-game meeting with prayer, and we also do devotionals when we meet,” said Curles, a deacon at Valleydale Baptist Church, Birmingham.

Curles said he made a decision for Christ at age 14 in the south Georgia church where his mother played the organ, but

his faith didn’t become real to him until after college and after life took a few bumpy turns.

Along the way, he moved to Birmingham, got a full-time job and got involved in Valleydale Baptist. On the day he and his wife, Toni, got married, they were both baptized a few hours before the wedding. These days, he works full time as a financial adviser and then as a referee on the weekends. He and Toni have three children.

Patrick Sawyer, men’s ministry director at Valleydale, said Curles’ faith is evident in his life and work.

“Marc is an example of living out God’s Word in your daily lives,” Sawyer said. “Marc often shares his faith and love for Jesus during the SEC football season through leading Bible studies with his SEC official team members while on the road.” ✝



Photo courtesy of Marc Curles

SEC official Marc Curles calls a field goal good during the 2011 football season. Curles has been with the SEC since 2006.



Across ALABAMA'S Associations

BALDWIN

► **First Church, Silverhill**, recently hosted "Touched by the Master," a drama about seven women from the Bible who were affected by Jesus during His earthly ministry. About 70 women from across Baldwin Association were served seven courses of era-appropriate food by the men of First, Silverhill, and entered the event by going past Roman soldiers. They also had their hands washed and listened to a reading of Psalms. ► **Bayside Church, Lillian**, will hold a Christmas choral presentation Dec. 17, 10:30 a.m. There will be Scripture readings, choral selections, congregational music and solos including "Mary, Did You Know?" and "O Holy Night." This will be a time to celebrate Advent and birth of Jesus. For more information call 251-256-0226. Tom Harris is pastor.

WASHINGTON

► **Fairhope Church, Tibbie**, will hold "A Night in Bethlehem" on Dec. 8-9, 6-8 nightly. This is an event to experience Bethlehem and what it must have been like

when Jesus was born. Those planning to attend are invited to dress in Bethlehem attire and will "visit the marketplace, see the potter, taste the bread and talk with Mary and Joseph." Rocky Pierce is pastor.

BIBB

► **First Church, Woodstock**, will host The Blackwood Brothers Quartet in concert Dec. 8, 7 p.m. For more information call 205-938-7479. Larry Bonner is pastor.

ETOWAH

► **Kevin Blackwell** is the new interim pastor of **Twelfth Street Church, Gadsden**. He began Nov. 19. He also serves as assistant to the president for church relations and executive director of the Ministry Training Institute at Samford University in Birmingham. He and his wife, Lorie, have four children.✝



BLACKWELL



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Afterglow

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

We are now a week past Thanksgiving Day. In the aftermath of its celebration we may notice a few more pounds of weight. However, there are hopefully some more noble features to its afterglow. For example, many are left with the recollection of a family gathering around a table of abundance. At that meal, likely someone voiced a prayer of thanksgiving for God's bounty. Perhaps we are living in the afterglow of reliving a special thanksgiving worship service, at which time we joined a host of fellow believers in a community expression of gratitude. If we take the longer look we may well experience a recounting of blessings in the year past and anticipation of those yet to be. Just maybe in this week of reflecting back on Thanksgiving Day we are filled with resolve to make every day more consistently a thanksgiving day. If so, how so?

What is the process by which we can maintain a Thanksgiving afterglow that will last until the fourth Thursday of November in the upcoming year? Theology 101 offers a three-part approach to enlarging our hearts of gratitude. The first item on the list has to do with an inward sentiment. We might call this a heart feeling of deep gratitude to God and others for how they continue to bless our lives. The starting point, of course, is within us. We cultivate in our spirits a desire to be more grateful persons. This calls for times of reflection and counting our blessings, a requirement often hard to meet in the busyness of everyday life. Do we not find that thanksgiving takes its starting point with an inward feeling? We could call this inward sentiment the "want to" in the experience of becoming a consistently grateful person.

A second stage in the process might be termed a "God-ward" expression. The psalmist prayed in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." The second part of this prayer speaks to having a renewed spirit that sees God behind every good

and perfect gift. Given a renewed heart, the pathway for expressing thanksgiving to God is made up of two primary lanes that often are intermingled — prayer and praise. We choose to include expressions of grateful dependence on our generous Heavenly Father in both private and public times of prayer. We also make sure we give thoughtful attention to expressions of praise to Him, both for who He is and what He does. In doing so we are obeying the admonition of Psalm 100:4: "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name." Much praise takes the form of verbal expressions set to music. Songs of praise give God-ward expression to inward gratitude. To do so is a matter of taking seriously the truth of Psalm 145:3: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised."

'Thanks-living'

In addition to the practice of prayer and praise, another stage in maintaining a Thanksgiving afterglow that burns brightly throughout the year might be expressed as outward conduct. People have sometimes coined the word "thanks-living" to capture this idea. Living out daily gratitude involves an upright life that pleases God and reflects Him consistently in our words and deeds. Words are among indispensable expressions of gratitude, but how we choose to live also is a way of expressing a grateful heart. A Thanksgiving afterglow may well depend on how well we do in inward sentiment, God-ward expression and outward conduct.✝

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.



Rogers honored for decades of service



Photos courtesy of Tony Smithson

Rosedale Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, honored Betty Wilson Rogers for more than 63 years of faithful service to the church's music ministry Sept. 3. Pastor Kenny Overstreet presented her with a gift from the church — windchimes designed to play 'Amazing Grace.' A luncheon in her honor was held following the recognition service.

Rogers began playing the piano in church at 13 and accompanied J.T. Swan, the pastor at that time, in revival services. At age 20 she began serv-

ing full time as the church pianist and served for 40 years until she suffered a massive stroke in 2015.

Along with serving the music ministry at Rosedale, Rogers also taught Sunday School, served as church clerk and served as church secretary.

Pictured to the right is Rogers with her daughters, Deborah Rogers Smithson (left) and Nancy Rogers Walker. Pictured to the left is Rogers with her granddaughter, Sophie Walker, who has spina bifida. The small inset photo is of Rogers in the early 1970s. (TAB)

TAB editor responds to comparison of Moore's situation to Mary, Joseph

With continued accusations emerging against Roy Moore in recent weeks, Alabama has been a focal point in the news. But in the midst of the fray, particularly shocking to Editor Bob Terry, were comments by Alabama state auditor Jim Ziegler who attempted to compare Moore's situation to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, her husband. Ziegler's comments were published in a Nov. 9 opinion column in the Washington Examiner, a political journalism website.

Terry responded Nov. 10 with a website post that called the comparison "morally inappropriate" and "factually wrong." The post was retweeted more than 100 times and had more than 2,200 hits with dozens of shares and comments on Facebook.

The full text of Terry's opinion piece is printed below.

Reference to Mary and Joseph 'inappropriate'

By Bob Terry
Editor, The Alabama Baptist

Whether it is possible to say a word that brings "light" rather than "heat" in the midst of a political turmoil is an open question, but that is the intent of these comments.

Yesterday (Nov. 9) an attempt was made to explain away the charges of sexual abuse of a 14-year-old girl by Roy Moore in past years by comparing the incident to the relationship between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, her husband.

That comparison is not only

morally inappropriate, it is factually wrong and cannot be left unchallenged.

The biblical story of Mary and Joseph tells the story of two people legally married to one another. The story currently in the news asserts abuse of a young teen by an older man who had no relationship other than a casual acquaintance. To equate the two is morally indefensible.

The Bible describes Joseph as a righteous man, one who tried to live by the Jewish law. Most assume he was older than Mary though his age is never given but it was not unusual in that culture for an older man to wed a girl who had just come of age.

When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant he was "troubled," the Bible says. A modern-day translation might call him heartbroken because he knew there had been no sexual contact between him and his wife. Legally, Joseph could have insisted Mary be stoned to death. That is what the strictest reading of the law required.

But Joseph had a compassionate heart and would do no physical harm to Mary. He decided to

"put her away quietly," the Bible says. That way he could maintain his sense of righteousness and not cause Mary physical harm at the same time.

It was after Joseph had decided to act compassionately toward

Mary — despite what he thought was her unfaithfulness — that God spoke to him through the angel. The angel told of Mary's courage — her obedience to God even though it could have resulted in her death.

Joseph immediately became Mary's defender. He invited on himself all the gossip and slander. Before anyone could harm Mary, they would have to go through him. And during the months

between the angel's visit and the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the Bible says Joseph and Mary had no sexual contact.

Wrong to compare

The biblical story of Mary and Joseph is an account of righteousness, compassion, protection, self-sacrifice and self-control. It has no relationship to the other story currently in the news and it is factually wrong to compare the two.✝

"The biblical story of Mary and Joseph is an account of righteousness, compassion, protection, self-sacrifice and self-control."

Bob Terry
editor, *The Alabama Baptist*

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Pastor beaten after leading families to Christ

HYDERABAD, India — Weeks after a pastor led five families to faith in Christ in southern India, masked men on motorbikes intercepted him and tried to kill him, sources said.

Pastor Banothu Sevy, 26, was in a coma for 48 hours after the drunken Hindu extremists beat him in Govindapuram, on the outskirts of Jamandlapalli village in Telangana state, on Oct. 5.

Sevy was riding his motorcycle home from a church service where more than 60 Banjara villagers had gathered at his relative's house to study the Bible and worship. As he rode home on a motorcycle, he noticed the masked men following him.

Doctors said he had blood clots in the cerebral area, brain coordination problems, injury to his eye and a damaged eardrum.

Extremists had threatened Sevy twice before and accused him of fraudulent or forcible conversion. Sevy said he ignored the threats and did not complain to police officials but did respond when the extremists questioned what he was teaching.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in May 2014, attacks against non-Hindus have increased. India ranked 15th on Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of the countries where Christians experience the most persecution. (MS)

Churches ordered to stop holding worship

CHENNAI, India — Officials and police in India's Tamil Nadu state have ordered 10 churches to discontinue worship services, sources said.

Hindu extremists compelled state officials and police to issue orders to the churches to stop worship unless they obtain permission from the collector's office, and the extremists intend to target 20 others in the same way, church leaders said.

"It is a well-planned conspiracy against the Christian community, as the Hindu extremists know that it is not easy to approach the collector's office for such permissions," said Pastor Johnson Sathyanathan, president of the Synod of Pentecostal Churches of Coimbatore. "The time to get such approvals can stretch from a year and a half to many more years."

A Christian delegation met the minister of Internal Affairs of Tamil Nadu early last week and expressed concern and fear about the recent notices. The state minister called on the deputy superintendent of police and the local member of the Legislative Assembly of Sullur to look into the matter and take steps to ensure that the worship services can resume, Sathyanathan said.

The hostile tone of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's National Democratic Alliance government against non-Hindus has emboldened Hindu extremists in several parts of the country to attack Christians, religious rights advocates say. (MS)

Muslims ambush, kill 9 Christians in Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria — Nine Christians were ambushed and killed by Muslim Fulani herdsmen in north-central Nigeria on Nov. 9, sources said. The victims, all members of the Church of Christ In Nations (COCIN), were returning from a nearby market. Three other men were injured and were being treated at a local hospital, according to a church elder. Dacholom Datiri, president of the COCIN, confirmed the killing of members of his church.

"We are saddened again by yet another attack on members of our church," he said. "We have continued to be forced into mourning the death of some of our members for no just cause. Whatever it is, our faith is dependent on Jesus Christ, our Savior."

A similar attack was carried out in the same area a few weeks ago when a Christian woman and two children were brutally killed by armed Muslim Fulani herdsmen who have been raiding Christian communities in the central Nigerian states of Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Niger.

Christians make up 51.3 percent of Nigeria's population. Muslims living mostly in the north and middle belt account for 45 percent. Nigeria ranks 12th on Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List of countries where Christians suffer the most persecution. (MS)

Statement against sexual assault gaining support

A statement denouncing the sexual abuse, assault, harassment and exploitation of women had been signed by 100 Alabama Baptist leaders as of Nov. 22.

A group of Alabama Baptist pastors decided it is time to speak out on these issues and they are urging other pastors across the state to join them.

Daniel Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, said, "We felt the need to speak to what is going on in our culture right now. ... Any given Sunday every single one of us (pastors) have men and women in our congregations who have been victims.

"If we don't speak to it now, then we lose our credibility to speak to it in the future," he said. "In this current climate of all these accusations that are flying around,

we as the Church must be on top of speaking out to the issues that are relevant in culture."

In the past six months news outlets have been inundated with allegations of harassment and assault from women across the country

against various high-profile subjects. These allegations have sparked a national conversation on sexual harassment and assault.

The statement can be found at albaptistpastors.wordpress.com. (TAB)

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Change in board structure

Samford OKs Baptist trustees from outside Alabama

By Bob Terry
The Alabama Baptist

Trustees of Samford University in Birmingham recently amended their bylaws to permit Baptists from outside Alabama to serve as trustees of the institution.

Implementing the change may take years, Samford President Andrew Westmoreland said, but it puts the university in a healthier position in light of its regional and global reach. The new trustees recently elected are all Alabama Baptists.

Several amendments to the school's charter and bylaws were approved in September as the school contemplated changes that needed to be made in light of the altered relationship between Samford and the Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC) following the school's decision to withdraw from Cooperative Program funding.

The first announcement of the changes was made Nov. 14 during the Samford Relationship Study Group report at the ABSC annual meeting in Huntsville (see Nov. 23 issue for the article on the study group report).

'Professing Christians'

The new section of the bylaws related to board members reads, "Trustees shall be professing Christians who are supportive of the university's Christian mission, vision and values and active members of a Baptist church. No less than 75 percent of the active members and life members, in the aggregate, shall be residents of the state of Alabama."

The reference to "professing Christians" also is new.

Previously the university bylaws referenced only membership

in an Alabama Baptist church.

The new wording of "active members of a Baptist church" rather than an "Alabama Baptist Church" is meant to help the school expand its racial diversity among board members, officials

explained. Specifically this wording will open the door to African-American leaders who are members of churches that may not yet be dually aligned with ABSC.

Samford President Andrew Westmoreland called the changes "minimal," saying they were "in line with the consensus that we developed through June, July and August in consultation with Rick Lance (executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions) and the members

of the study group from the SBOM."

The vast majority of Baptist-related colleges and universities already have trustees from outside their home state, Westmoreland said. He emphasized that under the new bylaw no more than one-fourth of the trustees can be from outside Alabama.

Westmoreland said he had intended to speak to the changes in trustee policy at the recent annual meeting in Huntsville in order to convey "both the letter and spirit" of the changes but changed his mind when he realized convention rules limited responses to only two minutes per speaker.

He added that had he recognized the limited time available for responding to the study group's report beforehand, he might have chosen other options to share information about the changes to the institution's charter and bylaws.

While convention officials did allow Westmoreland to exceed the time limit by a minute, he still

focused on sharing Samford's commitment to Alabama Baptists in a more general fashion.

In a later interview, Westmoreland called the bylaw changes "a strong expression of our commitment to remain closely affiliated with Alabama Baptists."

He pointed to the recently amended article on dissolution in Samford's charter. The article specifies that in the event of Samford's dissolution, "all of its remaining assets ... shall be paid to the Alabama Baptist State Convention or ... as determined by the Alabama Baptist State Convention."

The amended charter also continues Samford's commitment to "the promotion of the Christian religion throughout the world." Article III of the charter lists that as the school's primary purpose. It specifically authorizes "the training of ministers to preach the gospel, of musicians to conduct and develop sacred music and of laymen to do educational and other religious work."

'Our fidelity'

"In my brief remarks (at the recent annual meeting) I especially wanted to demonstrate our fidelity to Alabama Baptists. Everything else was secondary. Our charter and bylaw changes reflect that fidelity," Westmoreland declared. ☛



"Our charter and bylaw changes reflect [our fidelity to Alabama Baptists]."

**Andrew Westmoreland
president, Samford
University**

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Baptist NEWS BRIEFS

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Compiled by the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and TAB

Southwestern Seminary continues staff cuts

FORT WORTH, Texas — Escalating health care costs, increased expenses for utilities and other higher education costs have prompted a third round of personnel cuts at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). Thirty full-time staff members were laid off “in selected areas where functions can be covered in other ways or by organizational change,” according to a Nov. 7 news release by Charles Patrick Jr., SWBTS vice president for strategic initiatives and communications.

Recent budget cuts have included reductions in dining services, copy center hours and the fleet of vehicles at the 200-acre campus. Also, the administration has not filled positions vacated through natural attrition. (BP)

October CP giving below projected budget

NASHVILLE — Contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national and international missions and ministries received in October were 1.34 percent below 2016’s opening month of the convention’s fiscal year and 5.53 percent below the projected budget for the first month. As of Oct. 31, gifts received for distribution through the Cooperative Program Allocation Budget totaled \$15,114,641.08, or \$205,368.92 below the \$15,320,010 received in October 2016. (BP)

IMB appoints 32 new missionaries to serve

RICHMOND — The International Mission Board (IMB) appointed 32 new missionaries during a Sending Celebration in Richmond, Virginia, on Nov. 16.

IMB President David Platt called the appointees to continue to pour out their lives in selfless love for Christ.

“I pray that what you do in the days to come will merely be an overflow of a love relationship with Jesus ... that a heart for Him — a love and affection and adoration for Him — is what drives you on a day-by-day basis,” Platt told the appointees. (IMB)

Ulcanush celebrates 200th anniversary

You don’t turn 200 years old every day. So Ulcanush Baptist Church, Coffeetown, in Clarke Baptist Association, decided to make it count with a big celebration and a journey to the past.

On Oct. 14 — the day before the anniversary service — Ulcanush held Old Fashioned Day, a celebration with old-fashioned games and singing, face painting, inflatables and plenty of food. Church members furnished horseback rides and horse and buggy rides. Others brought things to look at, like Rex Rush’s Gristmill and Obie O’Neil’s 1929 Ford.

Then on Sunday, Oct. 15, former pastor Alan Johnston brought the message and the congregation sang old songs. Jerrol Hare presented the church with a certificate on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Loren Robinson, director of missions (DOM) for Clarke Association, and Jack Wright, retired Clarke DOM, presented recognitions from Gov. Kay Ivey and the State Board of Missions.

Members shared special memories at the end of the 9 a.m. service, then broke for dinner on the grounds before a special celebration service at 2.

Lineville’s Bellview marks 75 years

Before the church building was constructed, Bellview Baptist Church, Lineville, used to meet under a big oak tree across the street. But the 75th anniversary of the church Oct. 22 found the congregation meeting in a building that had been framed up in 1945 and bricked around 1953 or 1954.

For the semisecular centennial celebration, Pastor Wayne Adams preached, Sheila Spurlin read the church’s history and “Shotgun” Giddens provided special music.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented Bellview Baptist with a certificate, as did Bruce Willis, director of missions for Carey Baptist Association.

The church recognized former pastor Eugene Robinson, who spoke briefly during the service.

It was a “wonderful day,” Adams said.

Fairhope Ave. celebrates 50 years

If ever there were an occasion to bake more than 750 cookies, Helen Stopa says the 50th anniversary of Fairhope Avenue Baptist Church, Fairhope, was it.

On Oct. 15, members and honored guests at the Baldwin Baptist Association church each got a commemorative mug filled with some of the more than 63 dozen chocolate chip cookies.

The celebration was a week later than planned — Fairhope Avenue Baptist moved the date because of the impending landfall of Hurricane Nate the weekend before. But it was worth the wait — lunch featured prime rib and fried chicken, and those in attendance at the morning service heard a message from former pastor Robert Taylor, who served the church from 1970 to 1972.

The choir provided special music, and Sheila Carroll and Paul Maggard sang solos. A slide show prepared by media coordinator Vickie Akin played in the Family Life Center during the meals.

Pine Springs celebrates 50 years

October 1 was a special day for Pine Springs Baptist Church, Irvington, in Mobile Baptist Association. The congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary, and Pastor Terry Castleberry celebrated his 10th year at the church.

Before he came as pastor, the church had nearly closed. But in the past decade, they have seen 250 saved and 200 baptized — a reality that’s pushed them to start a new building program.

During the anniversary service, they had a time of reflection in which members shared parts of the church’s history. Charter member Frances Brown was recognized, and Chuck Davis of Mobile Association presented the church with two certificates — one on behalf of the association, and one on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

Old photos were displayed for members and guests to look at.

“It was an amazing day,” Castleberry said. “The church was packed.” ✠



Photo by Dalton Campbell



Photo by Lonette Berg

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Sardis Association annual meeting 'old school' with special traditions

James Preachers says that way down south in Sardis Baptist Association, they have some traditions that they love.

At annual meetings, they're "old school," he said. They love big, homestyle dinners with two different kinds of fried okra.

"That's a big hit always," he said.

But not only that — they love hearing all the reports.

One of those reports is given every year by Lonette Berg — who, thanks to the hospitality of Sardis Association, now has a tradition of her own.

"My husband, Steve, and I go to the annual meeting there every year to celebrate our anniversary," she said.

They didn't really start that tradition on purpose. Six years ago the association's annual meeting happened to fall on Oct. 11, the 25th wedding anniversary of Berg — executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission — and her husband.

"I needed to be there to give my report that night, and he said, 'I'll go with you,' and he took a vacation day and we went down there," Berg said.

Warm welcome

When they got there, they found a warm welcome. Everyone sang "happy anniversary" to them. Other speakers mentioned them from the pulpit. Another entity head recited a poem for them.



Photo courtesy of Lonette Berg

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, and her husband, Steve, have celebrated their wedding anniversary with Sardis Baptist Association for the past six years.

"Steve had such a good time that he decided to go back the next year," Berg said. "They are such sweet, welcoming and encouraging people."

Preachers said they love the Bergs.

"Lonette is very passionate about preserving church history, and she's dynamic in her role," he said. "When she gets up to speak, her demeanor is so contagious. She brightens things up when she gets on stage."

One year, Sardis Association even made Steve Berg the AV man for the meeting, she said.

Sixth year

This year on Oct. 12 was their sixth time to celebrate with Sardis Association, then they headed on to Disney World.

But not before the okra. "They make some of it cooked down to a mash — that's the way I grew up eating it," Berg said. "It's wonderful." (Grace Thornton)

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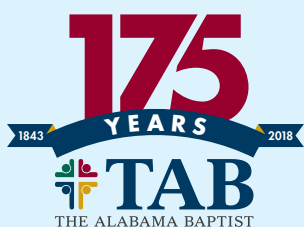
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TAB



According to the Jan. 22, 1856, issue of *The Alabama Baptist*, the growth of Seventh-Day Baptists (better known as Sabbatarians at the time) was the focus of a news story. The editor reported that in 1800 the group had only eight churches in the United States. By 1820 that number was 12. By the end of 1855 there were 67 Seventh-Day Baptist churches in the nation. The group also sponsored colleges in Wisconsin and New York. Missionaries from the group served in Palestine and China.

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RELIGION in America

Compiled from Wire Services

Museum offers 3-D tour of 'tomb of Christ'

WASHINGTON — You can now tour the "tomb of Christ" located at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem without ever leaving the U.S., thanks to a 3-D virtual experience at the National Geographic Museum in Washington.

The 3-D exhibit, called "Tomb of Christ: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre Experience," offers a glimpse into the site that some believe to be the tomb where Jesus' body was laid after the Crucifixion.

The church was recently renovated, and during those updates National Geographic explorer Corey Jaskolski created a 3-D record of the tomb using LIDAR scans, high-resolution photos and video, according to The Christian Post.

Also during the renovations, archaeologists found what they believe could be the original limestone bed on which Jesus' body was laid.

"I'm absolutely amazed. My knees are shaking a little bit because I wasn't expecting this," Fredrik Hiebert of National Geographic said at the time. "We can't say 100 percent but it appears to be visible proof that the location of the tomb has not shifted through time, something that scientists and historians have wondered for decades."

The Washington exhibit, which allows visitors to virtually walk through the church and tomb, is open until fall 2018. (TAB)

Sexual harassment in workplace concerns rising

WASHINGTON — Attitudes about sexual harassment in the workplace have dramatically changed during the past 20 years, according to a report by Gallup.

Currently, 69 percent of U.S. adults, up from 50 percent in 1998, describe sexual harassment in the workplace as a major problem. According to the research, women and men are almost equally likely to take sexual harassment seriously — 73 percent versus 66 percent, respectively.

About 4 in 10 women (42 percent) and 1 in 10 men (11 percent) say they have been a victim of sexual harassment. Gallup's report noted virtually no difference in women's reports of being sexually harassed by age: 41 percent of those aged 18 to 49 and 44 percent of those aged 50 and older say they have been victimized.

Women are more skeptical than men about workplace harassment being taken seriously, and a majority of both women (63 percent) and men (54 percent) say people are not sensitive enough to the problem. Women surveyed also reported a greater willingness to file a sexual harassment lawsuit as a result of recent news events than in the past.

The latest findings are based on Gallup polling conducted Oct. 30–31 in the wake of sexual abuse allegations against several prominent Hollywood and media figures. (TAB)

Gallup finds slim majority want new gun laws

WASHINGTON — Results from Gallup's annual "Crime" poll show that 51 percent of Americans want the government to pass new gun laws rather than focus only on enforcing the current laws more strictly.

The poll was conducted Oct. 5–11 in the month between the Oct. 1 mass shooting in Las Vegas and the Nov. 5 mass shooting in Sutherland Springs, Texas. A 2012 survey on the same question found only 47 percent of Americans supported new gun laws. It is the first time that a majority of Americans have favored passing new gun laws since Gallup first asked this question in 2000.

In terms of the types of new laws they would favor, the vast majority of Americans want stricter controls on the sale of guns, such as universal background checks and mandatory waiting periods.

At the same time, they are split on whether there should be an outright ban on semi-automatic guns, while they broadly oppose making it illegal for civilians to own handguns. (TAB)



Photo by Joe Salmi

A tent revival held in Russell County draws crowds of up to 2,000 each night Nov. 5–9. It was called Power at the Point, because the tent was pitched in a corner lot that came to a point between two highways in Seale.

'When God shows up'

Russell Association sees God move at tent revival

Marty Holley said he's heard people say tent revivals are a thing of the past, but he doesn't really buy it. "Tent or no tent, it doesn't matter where you are when God shows up," he said with a laugh.

Holley, director of missions for Russell Baptist Association, saw several hundred people make decisions for Christ during a tent revival held Nov. 5–9 in the Seale community. The gathering drew crowds of up to 2,000 each night, with dozens making decisions to follow Jesus.

But once again, Holley emphasized — you may be surprised where God shows up. The planning committee sure was.

"The revival started before we ever got to the tent Sunday night," he said.

Evangelist Ken Freeman, the speaker for the event, preached in the two morning services at Golden Acres Baptist Church, Phenix City, and 60 people made salvation decisions.

"I think the pastor was overwhelmed," Holley said.

That spirit carried over into the tent services each night, where Freeman preached and the Akins provided the music.

The vision for the event first started when Richie Ashburn, pastor of Silver Run Baptist Church, Seale, read an article in *The Alabama Baptist* in 2016 about a tent revival held in Monroeville. The

article quoted revival organizers describing the event as "electric" and "unifying" as well as emphasizing the importance of bathing in prayer ahead of time.

"He envisioned that for Russell County, so 10 of us got together to pray about it," Holley said.

By the next week's meeting, they had 30, and the following week 40 showed up, pastors from across denominational and racial lines.

Power at the Point

"During those three weeks, we prayed and brainstormed and felt like God was calling us to have this event," Holley said.

They called it Power at the Point, because the tent was pitched in a corner lot that came to a point between two highways in Seale. The total number of decisions from the week's events landed at 390.

"It's exciting. It's been awesome," he said. "God has heard our cry for revival. It's been a powerful move of God, and we hope it spreads across Alabama and the nation." (Grace Thornton)



Photo by Joe Salmis

Nearly 400 decisions were made during the week's events in the Seale community.

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

Andrews, **Dusty**, Ozark: Rusty Andrews
Andrews, **Lomax**, Ozark: Rusty Andrews
Glass, **Patricia**, Gallion: Providence BC of Gallion

Jaye, **William G. "Bill"**, Frisco City: G.H. & Mary Ann Jaye; George Cobb Adult II Men's Class, Eastwood BC of Monroeville
Ross, **Mary Lynn** Hueytown: Concord BC of Bessemer
Reddinger, **Jim**, Birmingham: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce
Wilson, **Charles**, Indianapolis, IN: Mr. & Mrs. J. Wray Pearce

THANK YOU!

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

Rashional THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

SNAPSHOTS OF LIFE WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Am I really letting everyone down?

Keeping count of the number of friends and family who feel they are letting everyone around them down can no longer be done with my fingers. I'm not sure what has so many stuck in this season right now but it is a feeling I fight from time to time myself.

I've determined it is never quite as extreme as it seems but when the feeling hits, it is hard not to believe it is every bit as bad as it feels.

When I experience the "letting everyone down" moment, I am typically overwhelmed.

Because high expectations and countless requests are part of my everyday life, I count it a success that most days I can bounce between them all — whether successfully or not — with energy and a smile.

But some days are different. What changes when the routine becomes discouraging?

For me, I am more vulnerable and emotional when I'm overly committed, tired, not exercising and spending too little time in God's Word.

But even then I don't tend to move into the "letting everyone down" mode until I begin sensing disappointment from those closest to me that I'm not focused on them enough. It might mean I'm not physically present; it might mean I'm not in tune emotionally; it might mean I'm not doing enough to help out.

Can be crippling

I can't speak for others nor have I done any research to truly understand where they are and what they are facing, but I know how they are feeling and understand the crippling nature of where it leads.

As for my journey, I've determined what I'm sensing in those moments is my own guilt and disappointment in myself. I truly want to be present for everyone in my life and I want to be caring and helpful at all points but sometimes there are

more needs than I can handle alone.

It is always hard for me to not step up, jump in or assist. It's equally as hard for me to admit I'm not always the best or right choice to help and, in some cases, that I'm already overcommitted and can't add another item to the list.

But what about the unexpected serious needs that arise, those things we absolutely know need our attention?

Those are the times we do what we have to do and figure it out in the mix of it all. And we work to build margin in our lives so there's wiggle room in our schedules to handle the unexpected without taking us down in the process.

Remembering to share the load is another good choice to make. It may mean one person gets more credit than another. It may mean some roles are more popular than others. But if we can humble ourselves to do what needs to be done and not worry about who gets to do what or who gets credit, then we can be a powerful force of assistance in taking care of the need at hand.

I expect a lot of myself and others. Others expect a lot of me. I'm thankful for that because I do believe high expectations keep us sharp, growing and doing our best.

At the same time, I'm still learning how to prioritize the expectations so those who should be receiving the best of me aren't getting the leftovers.

I'm also working to give a gift to those in my life I sense are overwhelmed by being super selective about what I ask of them. I've decided not to be a person who is only focused on clearing my own to-do list each day.

Instead I want to find something I can do every day to make someone else's load a little bit lighter while also being realistic with the load I'm choosing to carry. ✝

RASHIONAL Extras ...



Building trust with your team

By DOM Barry Cospers
Bessemer Baptist Association

I recently read an article by Charles Stone on "5 Ways to Build Trust with Your Team."

Without trust, a church staff or ministry team simply will not function at its best. Many times during the mistrust there will be suspicions of motivation.

In a recent article that appeared in the Harvard Business Review the author quoted some dismal statistics about the workplace which probably hold true in the ministry realm as well.

According to the 2013 Edleman Trust Barometer, fewer than 20 percent of respondents believe leaders are actually telling the truth when confronted with a difficult issue in their organization.

Furthermore, a study conducted by the Human Capital Institute and Interaction Associates in 2013 found only 34 percent of organizations had high levels of trust in the places they work. A paltry 38 percent reported that their organizations had effective leadership running the show.

Research firm Gallup found that between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of engaged employees in the workforce was 30 percent or less. So 70 percent of employees spent more than a decade essen-

tially collecting a paycheck, an almost Shakespearean spectacle of tragic ambivalence.

Can you imagine? If only one-third of our church staff teams experience a high level of trust, then we have a lot of work to do. Here are five simple ways to build trust with your team:

1. Intensify personal relationships. Depending on the size of your staff, you may not have time to build strong relationships with everybody. At least do so with your key players.

2. Share when you have failed. When others hear from us what we learned from our failures, we endear ourselves to them. When you mess up, admit it.

3. Don't abuse your authority. If you're in a place of leadership over others, don't lead from position. Lead from character. Lead in such a way that others would want to follow you.

4. Invite input from your team. We seldom know all the answers. When we invite input from our team, we give them ownership of the ministries and the changes we want to implement. Ownership builds trust.

5. Never, never, never condescend. When people feel patronized and condescended to, they deeply resist. ✝

Jesus repeatedly clarifies that every person falls into one of just two categories: separated from God by sin or connected to God by redemption. ... In Jesus' view, all who are not yet reconciled to God fall into the same category — regardless of human labels. ... We act as if pride, jealousy, greed and bitterness are less egregious sins — because they are our sins. ... Incidentally, if we were to argue scripturally that any single sin is the "worst," that sin would ... be either religious hypocrisy or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. ... We are either washed by the blood of the Lamb or we are not. But the point is that, according to Ezekiel, being "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned" were the sins God most remembered about Sodom.

John S. Dickerson
"The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church ... and How to Prepare"

Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.

U.S. Military and government leader Colin Powell

We become adult toddlers when we refuse help from people and believe the lie that seeking assistance is a sign of weakness.

Author Jon Acuff

Excerpt from his article "Don't Let Perfectionism Kill Your Goals" in *Relevant* magazine

Pastors, missionaries and all Christians have a lot of daily demands. If we are going to be able to serve God with all of our might, to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices, we need to condition them for the work. If you don't practice, how will you succeed at game time? The demands of ministry will destroy you if you do not prepare both physically and spiritually for the rigorous gauntlet of the Christian life.

Chad Ashby, South Carolina pastor
Excerpt from his blog post "4 Reasons Every Pastor Should Exercise"

When parts of your body stop working, you die. What happens when the members of the Body of Christ stop working?

Joel Dison
@jldison

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 3

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE Acts 13:26-39

Acts is the unfolding story of the people of God, filled with the Spirit of God, engaging in the mission of God. The Book of Acts teaches us that the purpose we have as the Church is to glorify God by making disciples through the gospel, in community, on mission.

The life-changing reality we learn in our Scripture this week is that every follower of Jesus needs to learn to live as a missionary where God has them. As we intentionally look for opportunities to share the gospel, we can expect to face opposition.

Having sailed from Cyprus to Perga, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Pisidian Antioch in Asia Minor. In the synagogue Paul was invited to share a word of encouragement. Acts 13 records this first and longest sermon of the apostle Paul. Paul's sermon had three parts: Jesus is the culmination of history, Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy and Jesus is the justifier of sinners. Let's examine our core passage.

Crucified (26-29)

The salvation that had been promised in the Old Testament and proclaimed by John the Baptist has now come to the people in Pisidian Antioch. Paul anticipated and answered two questions that might have arisen in the minds of his hearers. The first question was one Jewish people have wrestled with from apostolic times until now: If Jesus is the Messiah, why did the Jewish leaders fail to recognize Him as such? Paul declared that it was because of their hardened, sin-darkened hearts. The so-called Scripture experts failed to understand its teaching.

Paul then answered a second question that would have arisen: If the Messiah was rejected, does that nullify God's plan? Absolutely not. Jesus' crucifixion fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. The cross was God's

Plan A from the beginning. Jesus' death by crucifixion fulfilled many different prophecies. God looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, to bear His wrath against our sin on the cross.

Resurrected (30-37)

Of all the proofs that Jesus is the Messiah, His resurrection from the dead is the greatest. As evidence for the resurrection, Paul cited the fact that for many days Jesus appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. There were more than 500 witnesses (1 Cor. 15:6), including Paul himself (1 Cor. 15:8).

Paul concluded this section on the resurrection by showing how the resurrection fulfilled three specific promises God had made in Scripture. Psalm 2:7 declared the Messiah's sonship. The resurrection magnified and glorified Christ's sonship. A second promise, from Isaiah 55:3, came true when God raised Jesus from the dead. A dead Messiah could not have been the channel for "the holy and sure blessings" God had promised to David and his posterity. The third promise comes from Psalm 16:10. The Holy One of God will not see corruption. David died, was buried and saw corruption. Jesus, however, was raised up by God and did not undergo corruption.

Proclaimed (38-39)

If we're going to live as missionaries where God has us, we must proclaim the gospel faithfully. The gospel is the good news that the just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin by resurrecting Jesus from the dead so that everyone who turns from their sin and believes in Jesus will be reconciled to God forever. †

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

JESUS CALLS Mark 1:14-20

What was Jesus' first "mighty act" that initiated the Kingdom of God He had announced? He called four ordinary people to follow Him. They would be with Him throughout, present in almost every scene, until Gethsemane. Some might even call this a miracle that predates the turning of water into wine at Cana. For Jesus to call this ragtag bunch to help turn the world upside-down — and for them to do so — is nothing short of extraordinary.

Jesus calls us to repent and believe in Him (14-15).

"Arrested" also means "delivered over" or "betrayed," the same word used for Jesus, who was "handed over" to the authorities. Note that Jesus does not begin His ministry until John has ended his. For Mark this signifies a significant change of "testaments," with the Baptist ending the time of the Old Covenant and Jesus introducing the New Covenant age. The hopes of the Old Testament are now being realized — the new age of the gospel has begun.

In first century Judaism, the Kingdom of God was understood on three levels: the eternal rule of God, independent of all human action; the present rule of God in the individual lives of those who obey God (hence, the Kingdom is "the reign of God in the hearts of His people"); the future rule of God when He returns to re-establish His Kingdom over all creation. For Mark, God is at present King over the whole creation, but His kingship has been illegitimately seized by Satan and his forces. God's kingdom as prophesied dawns in the ministry of Jesus, and Jesus' return will mean the mighty and whole re-establishment of His kingship.

"Repent" literally means a "change of mind." So repentance calls for a complete

reorientation from the way that people of the world normally think. Thus Jesus rebukes Satan for setting Peter's mind on human things rather than divine things (Mark 8:33). Later Paul exhorts us not to be conformed to this world but to "let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Rom. 12:2).

Jesus calls us to follow Him (16-20).

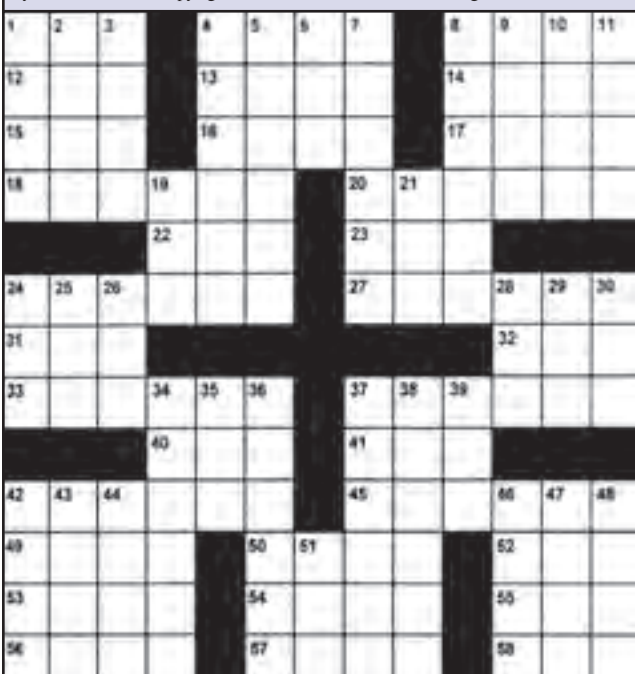
Jesus "sees" two fishermen working at their trade. He sees them; they do not see Him. They are not looking for anything except fish. At this point, their becoming disciples is not a conscious goal in their minds. The initiative is entirely with Jesus. His call is intrusive and it disrupts their lives. Their new status as disciples is conferred not earned.

The metaphor of fishing is multilayered. In the Hellenistic world, fishing was a metaphor for teaching. In the Old Testament the metaphor was used for coming judgment (Jer. 16:14-16; Ezek. 29:4-5). Jesus embraces both of these imageries and combines them with the idea of netting people for salvation. Fishing for people involves teaching the good news that delivers them from lostness to light.

The disciples' call is not to join Jesus to study a philosophical field or learn a certain set of truths but to join Jesus on the "way" that He is going. Jesus has a way that they are called to follow (Mark 1:3), but they will not learn the destination until later. Fishermen were not wealthy but worked with their own hands. Nor were they the poorest of the poor. They owned boats and had houses (Mark 1:29) as well as employees (Mark 1:20). Hence most fishermen in Jesus' day were what we would classify as middle class. As such, they really do have something to leave and they leave it. Later they will rightly claim that they have "left all" (Mark 10:28). †

Christian Crossword

By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



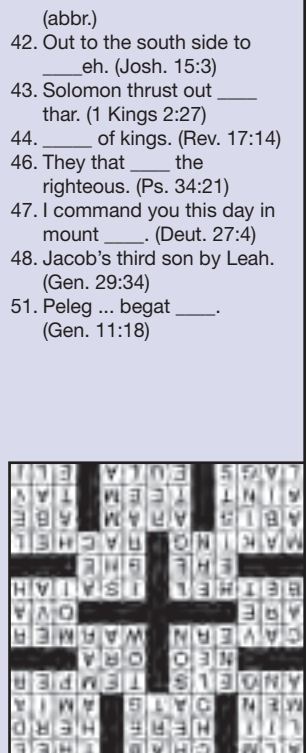
Across

1. Rather give ____ (s). (Luke 11:41)
4. Crustacean.
8. Like a ____ planted by the rivers. (Ps. 1:3)
12. Roman numeral 52.
13. Samuel answered, ____ am I. (1 Sam. 3:4)
14. Saul came after the _____. (1 Sam. 11:5)
15. Who will have all ____ to be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)
16. Grain.
17. How ____ (ble) are thy tabernacles. (Ps. 84:1)
18. He shall give his ____ charge over thee. (Ps. 91:11)
20. Meekness, ____ ance. (Gal. 5:23)
22. New. (prefix)
23. Mouths.
24. A cave.
27. The flesh of the child waxed _____. (2 Kings 4:34; comparative)
31. ____ not two sparrows sold. (Matt. 10:29)
32. Eggs. (Latin)
33. But seek not _____. (Amos 5:5)

37. The vision of ____ the son of Amoz. (Isa. 1:1)
40. Before. (poetic)
41. And ____ brought forth her firstborn son. (Luke 2:7)
42. Of ____ many books there is no end. (Eccles. 12:12)
45. Sons of ____; Joseph and Benjamin. (Gen. 35:24)
49. Belonging to Hezekiah's mother. (2 Kings 18:1, 2)
50. Kemuel the father of _____. (Gen. 22:21)
52. Short for Abraham.
53. Is not. (slang)
54. To be prolific.
55. The 23rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
56. Loiters behind.
57. Good woman's name.
58. The sons of ____ were sons of Belial. (1 Sam. 2:12)

Down

1. ____ Mater.
2. Property right.
3. Chinese dynasty.
4. He was moved with ____ against him. (Dan. 8:7)
5. Let us ____ together. (Isa. 1:18)
6. Nathan said to David, thou ____ the man. (2 Sam. 12:7)
7. Though I ____ all my goods to feed the poor. (1 Cor. 13:3)
8. Absalom had a fair sister whose name was _____. (2 Sam. 13:1; alt. spelling)
9. Star of your god ____ han. (Acts 7:43)
10. Great Lake.
11. Southward were Kabzeel, and _____. (Josh. 15:21; alt. spelling)
19. Compass direction.
21. Historical period.
24. The fourth part of a ____ of dove's dung. (2 Kings 6:25)
25. Form of to be.
26. Former serviceman.
28. Me. (French)
29. Madame Peron.
30. Stadium cheer.
34. Robberies. (slang)
35. Sea eagle.
36. Ambassador.
37. Hear, O _____. (Deut. 6:4)
38. Bezer, and Hod, and _____. (1 Chron. 7:37)
39. Atomic Energy Commission.





(augmented reality)

Follow these instructions

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- 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.



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

'The Case For Christ' tops streaming entries for November

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Lee is a journalist who wants to prove that there is no God, and he's going to use his award-winning reporter skills to do it.

Sure, it sounds difficult, but if he examines the evidence and interviews enough experts, the case will solve itself. Right? At least, that's how he's cracked criminal cases his entire career.

"Facts are our greatest weapon against superstition, against ignorance and ignorance tyranny," he says.

His war against God started at a restaurant, where his young daughter nearly died while choking on food but was saved by a stranger sitting at a nearby table. That stranger, a middle-aged woman, tells Lee that she nearly didn't come to the restaurant that night. The implication: If she hadn't changed her mind, the girl might be dead.

"It wasn't luck. It was Jesus," the woman says.

The event transformed Lee's wife from skeptic to Christian but he still isn't convinced. Soon he's traveling the country to save his wife from this "myth" — and perhaps even to change the course of history.

"The Case For Christ" (PG), now streaming on Netflix, recounts the incredible tale of Lee Strobel's journey in the early 1980s from radical atheist to sold-out Christian apologist.

It stars Mike Vogel ("Cloverfield," "The Help") as Strobel; Erika Christensen ("Parenthood") as his wife,

Leslie; Mike Pniewski ("Madam Secretary," "Blue Bloods," "Killing Reagan") as Lee's Christian co-worker, Kenny; and Academy Award winner Faye Dunaway as scholar Roberta Waters.

"The Case For Christ" is one of the best films of 2017 and perhaps the most inspiring. It masterfully

weaves a spoonful of apologetics into an engaging plot that parents, teens and older children can enjoy together.

It contains no sexuality, language or violence, although there are a few scenes that might be too much for little kids: Strobel gets drunk at home, and he and his wife then have an intense argument. He shouts at his father and says a few things he later regrets. A family member also dies. 📺



Photos courtesy of Pure Flix

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a writer and podcast host for Heirloom Audio. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four small children.

Also streaming this month

Netflix

► **"The Boss Baby" (PG, 2017).** A 7-year-old boy gets a new baby brother who can talk. He's also a sassy brat, and soon the two are in a selfish fight for their parents' attention. This one ends with a positive message, but the sibling rivalry — which comprises most of the film — made me uncomfortable. Rated PG for some mild rude humor. Nov. 22.

► **"42" (PG-13, 2013).** A man named Jackie Robinson becomes the first black player in Major League Baseball. Of course, we've read about him in the history books, but it's just different to watch the racial ugliness and baseball heroics unfold on the big screen. Caution: This one has lots of n-words and about five instances of GD. Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, including language. Nov. 1.

► **"The Pursuit of Happiness" (PG-13, 2006).** An entrepreneur (played by Will Smith) struggles to find a job while taking care of his 5-year-old son. Eventually both end up on the street.



'The Pursuit of Happiness'

Smith received an Academy Award nomination for his performance. Rated PG-13 for some language. Nov. 1.

► **"If You Give a Mouse a Cookie" (unrated, 2017).** The beloved children's book is now an animated series. You know the drill: If you give a mouse a cookie, then he'll ask for something else, and then something else, and then something else. The series follows the adventures of Mouse, Oliver, Moose, Pig, Cat and Dog. Nov. 7.

Hulu

► **"D3: The Mighty Ducks" (PG, 1996).**

The third and final install-

ment in Disney's Mighty Ducks franchise spotlights the hockey kids' transition into their high school years. Contains some mild language and romantic angles. Rated PG for hockey rough-housing and mild language. Nov. 1.

► **"Treasure Planet" (PG, 2002).** A science fiction adaptation of the popular novel and movie "Treasure Island," "Treasure Planet" takes the adventure into space, as young Jim Hawkins embarks on a galactic treasure hunt. Rated PG for adventure action and peril. Nov. 1. 📺

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'Laying a foundation'

Christian church growing despite persecution in Tunisia

Persecution of Christians in the North African country of Tunisia has grown in the past year, but Tunisian believers are optimistic the gospel will continue to be heard in the predominantly Muslim country.

"Our church is a very young church," says Mustapha, a former civil engineer who now works in full-time Christian ministry in Tunis. Mustapha said the growth of Christianity began after 2000, and since then many Muslims have converted to Christianity.

"We were six to eight people at most at the start, but the Lord has worked a lot with our church," Mustapha told Open Doors

USA, an organization that works to empower and equip persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries. "Now we have 90 members with several couples and there are children of all different ages. We have all generations in church."

Tunisian Christians typically meet in house churches. In 2006 the Church in Tunisia was given permission to use an existing church building where previously only foreign workers had met together for worship.

Those foreigners first brought Christianity to Tunisia in the 1970s, but it was the rise of satellite television and the Internet that allowed the gospel to spread in the 99 percent Muslim majority country. The influence of Islam is a challenge for Mustapha and other Christian leaders in the country.

"In the Muslim world, people know the mosque; that is our background," Mustapha told Open Doors. "It's the place where people go to pray, to do their religious duties. New converts don't understand that they are part of the Church and that Church is about people, members, about ministry, about giving and not only about receiving."

Past teachings

The attitudes of Muslim Background Believers toward the Bible also are influenced by past religious teachings, Mustapha said.

"They look at it like they did at the Quran, a book with the law of their religion but not a book that you should relate to. With this background it's difficult to convince someone to have a true relationship with the Bible, to let it change your life, to 'eat' the Bible. It's not just to listen to or to put it under a cushion before sleeping, you have to know it and have a real relationship with it."

Mustapha said another problem is that many in Tunisia and the surrounding countries don't read for anything other than information. New converts must learn to read the Bible and to take pleasure in reading, he said.

Mustapha recently finished a training offered by Open Doors for church leaders from Algeria and Tunisia.

An Open Doors manager said the organization is working to make the Bible and the New Testament available for new believers.

"We know the importance of the Scriptures for the believers," the manager said. "We also offer discipleship training. There we motivate the participants to read and study the Bible."

Music is another method the church is using to contextualize the gospel for Tunisian believers.

"There exist Egyptian songs. They are in Arabic, but that's another Arabic than we speak," Mustapha says. "So we started to make up our own songs in the Tunisian dialect. When we sing Tunisian Arabic people are more at ease, these songs motivate the people."

Even though Mustapha carries a smile on his face, that doesn't make his task easy. Some days the weight of living in a predominantly Muslim country is overwhelming.

"We're working in the middle of persecution, rejected by society," he said.

A major challenge for Mustapha and others like him is that he has many duties, including managing the worship group, planning discipleship courses and sometimes teaching and preaching.

"We're in the stage of laying a foundation. We don't have a model to follow or a system to work with. We're setting up, creating our system, the administration, and also our own theology, our training, the courses we organize, discipleship training, preaching. It's all up to us," he said.

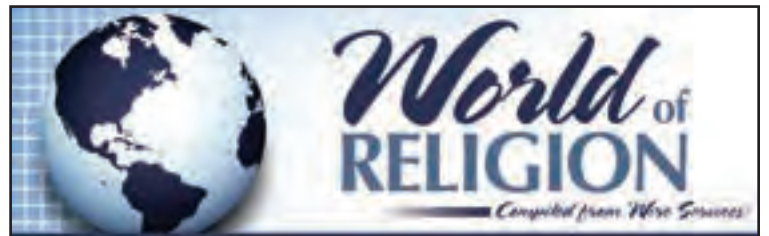
The work can be overwhelming, Mustapha said.

"When I am confronted with all the work, with all these challenges, I become demoralized or depressed," he said. "I do all this work, but I don't see the fruit straight away. Pray for me, that I may hold fast, that I will keep my eyes turned towards the Lord and above all that I will listen to his voice and will not do something by my own intelligence. Truly we are at the point where we just have to do what God tells us." (TAB)

Men play checkers in town near Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.



IMB photo



Pope open to discussion of married priests

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is open to discussion on the topic of married priests, according to published reports in several European media outlets.

The Pope's comments came in response to a question on the matter from Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, the president of the Episcopal Commission for the Amazon, according to the newspaper *Il Messaggero*. There is a shortage of priests in the Amazon region, where the ratio of Catholics to priests is 10,000 to 1, about three times the worldwide ratio of Catholics to priests throughout the world, and more than five times the ratio in the United States, according to Catholic News Agency (CNA).

The comments have been broadly interpreted to mean that Pope Francis is considering opening the door for priests throughout the Roman Catholic Church to get married.

However, Kurt Martens, a professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington, told CNA there is no reason to think the Pope's comments apply to priests worldwide. "Even if the synod would recommend or ask for the ordination of viri probati (married priests) in the Pan-Amazon area, it is important to note that the Pope still would have to accept the request and make it into law, and it would most likely be limited to that area," he said.

"So we are not talking about changing the law on celibacy for the whole Church: it would be the ordination of viri probati for only that region," he added.

The celibate priesthood has long been a tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, with exceptions made only in the cases of married ministers of other denominations who convert to Catholicism and then become priests. A 2019 Synod of Bishops is expected to focus on the Catholic Church in the Amazon basin. (TAB)

Muslim teacher attacks school head in Uganda

KABUNA, Uganda — A Muslim posing as a Christian teacher at a Christian elementary school with 162 children in eastern Uganda recently attacked the school director, sources said.

Mugooda Siraji struck school director Hassan Muwanguzi days after school board leaders asked him to take a leave of absence when they learned he was trying to teach the children how to practice Islam, said head teacher Eric Kakonge.

On Nov. 4 at around 4:30 p.m., Siraji entered the school compound and forced his way into the office shouting "Allah Akbar" and hit Muwanguzi with a blunt object, Kakonge said.

"Muwanguzi suffered face and right hand injuries, with serious bleeding from the face," Kakonge said.

Kakonge said Muslims in Kabuna had met Oct. 12 to determine how to stop activities at the Christian school.

Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with many concentrated in the eastern part of the country.

The incident is one of many recent attacks by nonstate figures on Christians in eastern Uganda. Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. (MS)

Relations with US not priority for Russians

WASHINGTON — Only 29 percent of Russians say it is important for Russia and the U.S. to have good relations, according to a Nov. 10 Gallup report.

A majority of Russians (52 percent) say it is important for Russia to act firmly with the U.S., while 7 percent say Russia should terminate all relations with the U.S. The Gallup survey was based on interviews with 2,000 adults in Russia from June 9 to Aug. 20.

U.S. president Trump and Russian president Vladimir Putin last met in July. Since then, relations between the two countries have grown increasingly strained. Congress has imposed new sanctions on Russia to punish it for meddling in the 2016 U.S. election, and Moscow responded by expelling hundreds of U.S. diplomats.

Support for improving relations between the two countries is highest among Russians aged 60 and older and among those with the highest level of education. (TAB)