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# 'God is always on time'

## Woman pardoned from life sentence a part of prison church plant

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Sometimes help comes from unexpected places — Gary Farley can attest to that.

Six years ago, Farley knew he needed somebody to lend a hand in planting a church at Federal Correctional Institution (FCI), the new women's prison in Aliceville, but he didn't know exactly who.

He had thought he might recruit some volunteers from Pickens Baptist Association, where he served as director of missions at the time. He found a pianist, a worship leader and some other folks willing to go in and hold a regular church service.

But as the first women began arriving at the prison camp in late 2012, the warden told Farley another plan might be more effective.

"He told me that church works better if you use people from the prison rather than carrying church in from the outside," Farley said. "He told me there would be folks on the inside who can do church really well."

So Farley decided to take his advice — a move that would change his life and his ministry.

### Getting involved

"I began to try to get the women involved in planning the services," he said. "They were able to provide quality music and we drew on their talents to start the church."

One of the musicians said she had some friends who were being transferred in from Tallahassee who could



Alice Marie Johnson, a grandmother who had served more than 20 years of a life sentence for a first-time, nonviolent drug offense, was released from prison last year.

help out too. One of those was Alice Marie Johnson, a grandmother who had served more than 20 years of a life sentence for a first-time, nonviolent drug offense.

"Alice was really good at putting together dramas," Farley said. "I found her to be just a charming lady and a very committed Christian. She wrote and directed a passion play and put it on several times. It was just amazing."

Johnson had a knack for pulling together the different cultures and gifts inside the prison camp, Farley said. She gathered some Hispanic women to sing "Via Dolorosa," and she put together a variety of music and even included humor, he said.

And over the years, with Johnson

and the other women working alongside Farley and other chaplains and volunteers, the congregations that met within the walls of FCI became

**"[The warden] told me that church works better if you use people from the prison."**

**Gary Farley  
retired director of missions,  
Pickens Baptist Association**

the biggest church in the county. More than 500 or 600 inmates gather for worship each week, some in the camp, some in the main prison and some in a Spanish-language service.

That's a miracle, Farley said. And they've seen more miracles happen.

One of them was Johnson's recent release.

In 2016, Johnson published a piece on her plight. Her family and job life had been good for years, but in 1989 she and her husband divorced, and not too long after, her youngest son was killed

(See 'Faith,' page 3)

## Farley continues prison ministry after retirement

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Gary Farley says the whole fabric of his ministry looks different because the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) was built in his area a few years back.

"In reading Matthew 25, I felt like I had tried to do what I could with the feeding people, clothing them and giving them water part, but I hadn't done anything about the visiting people in prison part," Farley said. "I knew we had to do something."

He hadn't known what to expect. He was committed to the task, but he thought he might meet a group of tough, hard-to-relate-to inmates.

### Passion for ministry

What he found instead was a group of women he quickly cared about and a passion for prison ministry that would continue well into his retirement years.

It's evidenced by the way things looked at his last annual meeting as Pickens Baptist Association director of missions in October 2017.

"The Lord allowed the choir from the prison camp to come and sing at that meeting," he said.

And at his retirement reception, one of the women in the choir — an opera singer — sang "Amazing Grace" while Farley played the harmonica.

Farley has seen several "real" churches planted in the prison, and he's seen dozens of women baptized. He has taught theology classes inside the walls of the prison and seen women go on to disciple others.

"We have 14 nationalities in the prison now, and we've had people from many of them baptized — Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian," Farley said. "Some of the ladies are ... from Central America, and we have tried to

(See 'It has been,' page 3)

To watch the videos from this week's issue, visit our YouTube channel or use the HP Reveal app on your phone or tablet and hover over the segments marked "AR."

# COMMENT

## Recalling the Price of Religious Liberty

Zurich, Switzerland, is an exotic location nestled at the base of the Swiss Alps. Few know of its importance in the struggle for religious liberty, separation of church and state and priesthood of believers.

When more than 300 Baptist leaders from 46 nations gathered there July 1–7, 2018, for the Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), these biblical doctrines were front and center. Most participants left with a greater appreciation for the price paid in blood for these freedoms Baptists cherish today.

Many of us stood just a few feet away from the famous Grossmunster church at the childhood home of Christian martyr Felix Manz. Here the first known believer's baptism in over a thousand years was performed on Jan. 21, 1525.

That baptism of George Blaurock by Conrad Grebel was an act of defiance against state governed religion and an exercise of religious freedom.

On Jan. 17, 1525, Zurich's city council issued a decree intended to end the challenge to the traditional Christian practice of infant baptism. The city council ruled that failing to baptize infants would "rip the Christian fabric" of Zurich society and declared that all who refused to baptize their infants would be expelled from the city.

But those affirming believer's baptism as the baptism taught in the Bible refused to back down. During a Saturday night Bible study Blaurock said he felt compelled to be baptized. The group went to a fountain outside the Manz home where on a cold January night Blaurock became the first documented believer's baptism in over a millennium.

### Believer's baptism

Those believing in believer's baptism became known as "Anabaptists" (baptize again) and the practice quickly spread across parts of Switzerland, Germany, France and into the Netherlands. But the practice drew the wrath of the reformed church as well as the state. Leaders of the Grossmunster church, like its renowned reformer pastor Ulrich Zwingli, joined the persecution of the



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Anabaptists. Eventually hundreds died.

Interestingly, some of those leading the persecution were the same people who only years earlier had been condemned as heretics by the Roman Catholic Church for their role in the Reformation. Evidently, the willingness to use state power against dissenters knew no doctrinal bounds.

### One of many martyrs

Manz was one of the many martyrs. On Jan. 5, 1527, he was executed by drowning in the Limmat River which runs through Zurich.

Reports say his hands were tied behind his back and then lashed to his feet. A pole was jammed under his elbows so he could not move. A rope was placed around his neck and he was dragged from a platform into the freezing water.

Standing beside him was a priest from the Grossmunster, where Manz's father served as canon, urging him to recant his belief in believer's baptism and save his life. From the bank of the river, his mother urged him to hold to his faith, even unto death.

All the while the crowds cheered at the irony that one who promoted believer's baptism was going to die in a type of baptism.

It was not until 1983 that the Swiss Reformed Church issued a formal apology for their persecution of the Anabaptists and in 2004 a plaque was placed along the riverbank near the site where Manz and others were martyred.

It was against this background that the Swiss Reformed Church invited the BWA to meet in Zurich and jointly sponsor a forum on religious liberty which, ironically, was held at the Grossmunster church where Zwingli once served as pastor.

Today most of the churches coming out of the Reformation embrace the doctrines of religious liberty, church-state separation and priesthood of believers.

Today most understand that the sacred space between humanity and God can only be occupied by Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest. He alone is Lord of the church. To allow anyone

or anything (including government) into that space is idolatry.

That is why Baptists and others believe in religious liberty for all and its corollary of church-state separation. That is why Baptists and others believe in the priesthood of believers.

In addition to the jointly sponsored forum, the BWA Annual Gathering featured a special program devoted to the importance of religious liberty that included expressions of concern from Baptists facing religious persecution in places as varied as Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Of special concern was Russia and its tightening restrictions on religious liberty and a resolution about a conflict area in Ukraine where Russian-backed forces threaten to limit the work of all churches except the Russian Orthodox.

This writer is privileged to be a member of BWA's Religious Liberty Commission.

Listening to the experiences of fellow Baptists from different parts of the world only reinforced appreciation for the price paid by early Anabaptists in Zurich as they stood for religious freedom and separation of church and state. Obviously that struggle continues today.

The supportive voice of the BWA, representing more than 48 million Baptists from about 240 member bodies in 124 different countries, was an encouragement to fellow Baptists.

A few days after the annual gathering, my wife Pat and I visited a small church in the Dutch village of Marken which is north of Amsterdam. A handout about the church related how the members of the church joined the Reform movement in 1578. One of the reasons for the change was religious liberty.

Another interesting point about the church is that it has the names of all the pastors who have served that village church printed on posters mounted at the front of the building. One can read of the unbroken witness of the Christian faith in a village that still has fewer than 2,000 inhabitants as one follows the names of the pastors from 1578 to the last pastor called in 2017.

### Cardinal Baptist beliefs

Before there was a group of Christians known as Baptists, Christian champions were contending for what many today consider cardinal Baptist beliefs. As in Marken, these beliefs have impacted Christian believers for centuries and they still do.

May God make us as faithful to these important tenants of our faith like those who have gone before. And may the day soon come when all know the blessing of religious freedom. 🇳🇵

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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 subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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# 'Faith ... carried me'

## Delayed release offered more opportunities for ministry

(continued from page 1)  
in a motorcycle accident. Under the weight of that burden, Johnson made some poor decisions, she wrote.

"I want this part to be clear: I acknowledge that I have done wrong. I made the biggest mistake of my life to make ends meet and got involved with people selling drugs."

During that time, Johnson was a telephone mule, passing messages between the distributors and sellers.

"I am only one of thousands of first-time, non-violent offenders given mandatory and lengthy prison terms after committing crimes under financial distress," she wrote. "In 1996, I was given a death sentence without sitting on death row. I was convicted as a first-time, nonviolent drug offender to life behind bars in federal prison."

Since she was convicted, the

laws governing her crime have changed, and if she were convicted today, her life might look very different, she wrote.

In 2016, President Barack Obama granted clemency to 231 people — many of them in jail on drug-related charges — but Johnson wasn't among them.

It was hard to stay hopeful, she wrote. "For 20 years I have been incarcerated and I won't lie — it's hard to keep the hope of freedom alive for that long. But my faith in God has carried me this far."

Farley said they have prayed often over the past few years for her release and

were disappointed when it didn't happen in 2016.

"But she felt like God's timing was perfect and that things would come out all right," Farley said.

Then in 2017, Johnson's case caught the attention of reality TV star Kim Kardashian West, who

**"[Alice Marie Johnson] understands that ... God's plans are always smarter than ours."**

**Gary Farley**  
retired director of missions,  
Pickens Baptist Association



Photo courtesy of Pickens Baptist Association

Gary Farley (right) and his wife, Jacquie, transitioned into a new season of ministry when he retired in late 2017 from his position as director of missions for Pickens Association.

## 'It has been amazing to see what God has done'

(continued from page 1)  
encourage them to be missionaries when they head back to wherever they are going."

Pickens Association adopted a resolution during its annual meeting thanking him for his 20 years of service, a ministry that was "for such a time as this."

"We thank him for his leadership ability, his preaching and teaching that have meant so much to our association, and

we thank him for the vision that he has had in preparing us and the future association to serve the Lord in the prison field at Aliceville," the resolution stated.

In his retirement Farley hasn't stepped back from prison ministry.

"It has been amazing to see what God has done, and I feel like God had me here to do this," Farley said. "It's a good way to finish up." ✠

got an attorney on Johnson's behalf. In early June, Johnson got a call from West, who told her she could go home.

### 'On time'

"God is always on time," Farley said. "If she had been released earlier, she might not have the platform she has now. She under-

stands that and that God's plans are always smarter than ours."

And it's possible more people came to faith because of Johnson's continued presence there at FCI, Farley said. "One of the neat things that Alice did, she involved non-Christians in some of the passion plays she put on, and some of them were saved." ✠

## Piedmont's Faith Baptist loses fellowship hall to fire



Facebook photo posted by Cherokee County EMA

Fire destroys the fellowship hall of Faith Baptist Church, Piedmont, in Cherokee Baptist Association, on July 7. The church's sanctuary, which sits 20-30 yards from the fellowship hall, was unharmed.

Members of Faith Baptist Church, Piedmont, in Cherokee Baptist Association, were upbeat after a fire destroyed the church's fellowship hall on July 7.

"They realize the building can be replaced and are thankful nobody was hurt," said Wendell Dutton, director of missions for Cherokee Association, who attended worship at Faith on July 8, the morning after the fire.

Dutton said the church was holding a Saturday evening fish fry prior to the fire.

A strong thunderstorm blew up during the evening with lightning, which the state fire marshal's office determined to be the cause of the blaze.

Spring Garden Fire Chief Butch Jacobs said the church members did an outstanding job evacuating

the fellowship hall after the fire was discovered.

Firefighters from three local fire departments fought the fire, according to Cherokee County Emergency Management Agency Director Shawn Rogers.

### Sanctuary unharmed

The church's sanctuary, which sits 20-30 yards from the fellowship hall, was unharmed by the fire, which was fortunate because both buildings had vinyl siding exteriors and the heat from the blaze was extreme, Dutton said.

Faith Baptist pastor Jeff McElroy said the building was insured. He said the church plans to rebuild once the insurance company completes its required investigation, a process that normally takes about 90 days. (TAB)

# Gaming: a new missions field

## Gamers engage other players online to share the love of Christ in virtual world

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

Jimmy Dodson grew up a military kid, worked as a police officer and has volunteered in youth ministry for years. He is also a gamer. “When my sons were younger, they both really wanted to stream,” Dodson said. That is, they wanted to livestream their game play and watch videos of other people playing video games. Dodson admits he didn’t get it. Why would anyone want to watch somebody else play video games?

Dodson, a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, Florida, began watching and he didn’t like what he heard — profanity and hateful comments that players refer to as “toxic” language. But he also started playing and found an opportunity to connect with his kids and stay relevant with other high schoolers. As he saw it, the gaming world was a wide-open missions field.

So in April 2018, Dodson started JFreak0989, a channel on Twitch.tv where he streams himself playing online games with his kids and friends. As he plays, he looks for ways to engage viewers by sharing Scripture, asking for prayer requests or just talking about Jesus.

### Engaging people

His friend, Andy Hunter, a member of Westwood Baptist Church, Alexandria, in Calhoun Baptist Association, is helping with the channel. The two worked together in Aniston years ago and kept in touch through playing games on the Xbox.

After learning more about Twitch, a live-streaming platform affiliated with Amazon, they decided the site offered a great opportunity to engage people “from all walks of life and around the world and all kinds of ages” with the gospel.

“They get on Twitch because they’re interested in gaming,” Hunter said. “We start

talking about the game we’re playing but we do what we can to steer the conversation toward Jesus.”

Hunter said he usually signs off by asking if there are any prayer requests. The goal is always to reach out to anyone who wants to talk and see where it goes from there.

### ‘Largest opportunity’

“I’ve been on the missions field from the middle of Alabama to the Middle East, but of all the places I’ve been to share the gospel, my Xbox and a headset have given me the largest opportunity to engage people and share the love of Christ,” Hunter said.

Dodson said people from Poland, England and Asia have viewed and commented on the channel. He recently had the opportunity to talk with a young man whose friend was considering suicide. A viewer from Oregon asked Dodson to pray for his nephew who had just gotten out of prison.

The ability to relate to so many different people on this level would be difficult in the real world, Dodson said. But in Twitch the common interest in gaming combined with the anonymity of users allows a special kind of interaction.

Matt Souza, pastor of GodSquad Church, the first online church for gamers, says a lot of gamers play to cope with the stresses of life. That may sound odd to people who wrongly think of gamers as primarily teenagers.

Among the more than 150 million Americans who play video games, the average gamer is 34 years old. Most (75 percent) are 18 or older. And it’s not just men — women age 18 and older represent a greater portion of the video game-playing population (33 percent) than boys under age 18 (17 percent), according to statistics from the Entertainment Software Association (ESA).

Many keep their hobby a secret because



Photo by Blizzard Entertainment

Venues like Blizzard Arena Los Angeles allow gaming fans to watch competitions live, but Twitch allows fans to watch their favorite gamers from home.

of stereotypes that label gamers as nerds or immature, Souza said. But the immersive nature of the games, which usually involve sports, science fiction/fantasy or war, provides an escape.

“Life is super frustrating when you fail,” Souza told a group of students at the University of Valley Forge in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, in 2016. “In video games when you fail, you can simply just try again.”

The industry is a big business too. In 2016 the video game industry sold over 24.5 billion games and generated more than \$30 billion in revenue, ESA reports.

Souza said many non-gamers think like Dodson in the beginning: Why watch someone else play a video game? He turns the question back: Why watch someone else play football?

Gamers are just ordinary people with unique personalities and talents who should be allowed to be themselves without fear of being teased or bullied, Souza said.

They also need the gospel because gaming is a harsh environment, said Kendrick Washington, also known as TheRealApok, team leader of NonToxic eSports, a competitive gaming team that requires members to adhere to a strict standard of clean language and play.

The idea for the team came out of Washington’s own experience of being on the receiving end of toxicity in his early livestreaming days. He was an adult playing for fun but another player yelled at him the entire time because he was a beginner.

Washington said it broke his heart to think of kids being exposed to that kind of bullying and shaming, so he started Non-Toxic eSports to create a safe and encouraging environment within gaming for kids to play without all the toxic language.

Most parents don’t want that toxicity for their kids, but too many parents don’t understand the gaming world and take a hands-off approach. That’s a mistake, Washington said.

### Raising gamers

“What’s really happening is that most kids who are into gaming are being raised, talked to and educated by the gamers, not by their parents,” he said. “When parents look at electronics and games they see something that’s foreign to them, but when they ignore it they allow YouTubers to raise their children.”

Washington wants gamers of all ages to know they can be competitive gamers without being toxic.

His community has begun to draw both casual and competitive players, and commentators have praised NonToxic eSports as some of the nicest guys in the gaming world, Washington said. But there are still thousands of games out there that don’t have non-toxic gamers playing and where toxicity is still rampant.

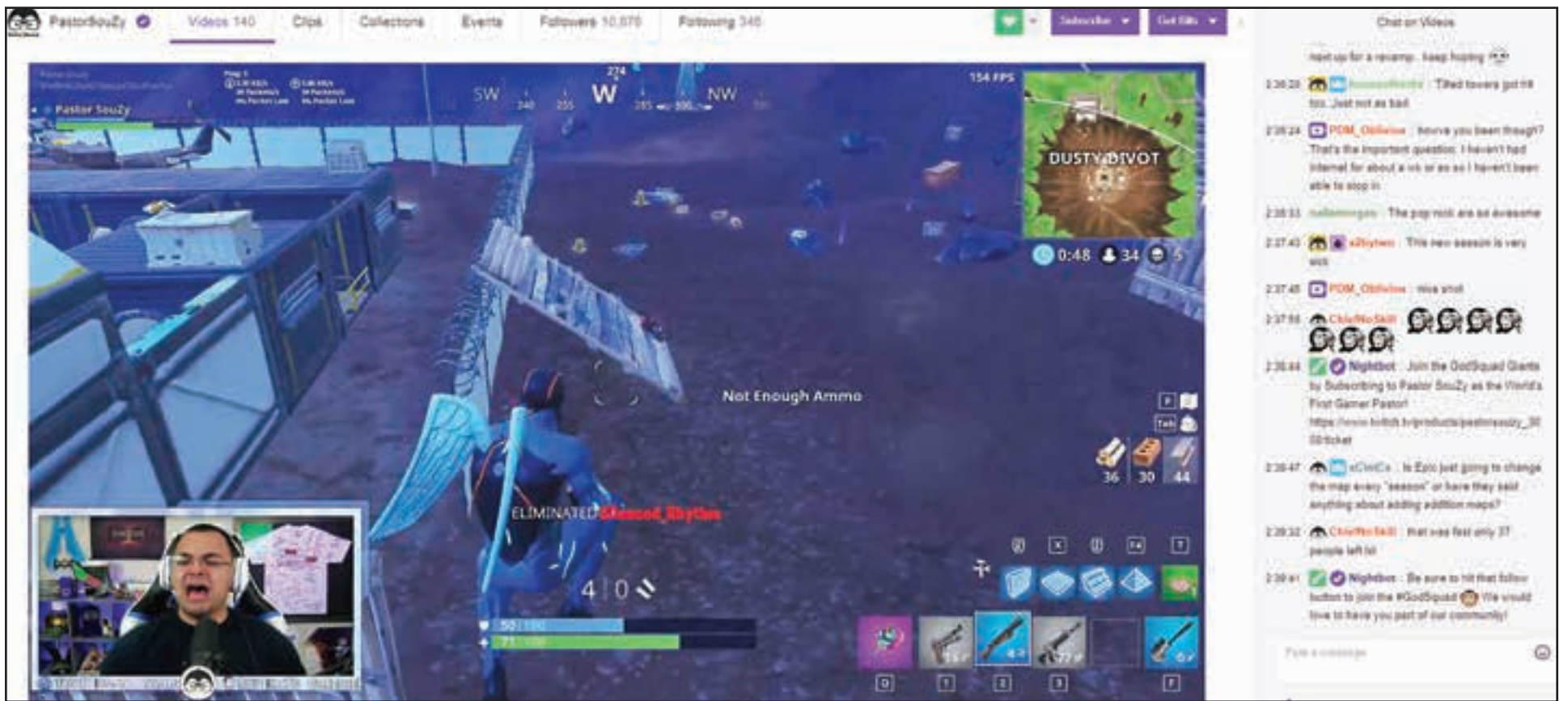
Believers could change that, Washington said.

“It’s time that Christians stop ignoring the biggest and most accessible missions field on the planet,” he said. ✠

Online gaming draws big audiences. More than 36 million unique viewers and 14 million concurrent viewers tuned into the 2015 League of Legends World Tournament, where 16 teams competed for more than \$2 million in prize money.



commons.wikimedia.org



Graphic courtesy of Amanda Souza

Led by pastor Matt Souza, AKA Pastor SouZy, GodSquad Church uses online games and the platform's lingo to reach and disciple gamers.

## Online church first to reach out to estimated 1.8 billion gamers worldwide

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

Every Saturday night at 7:30 Eastern time, 100 or so gamers log on to GodSquad Church on Twitch.tv. Their gaming handles appear in the chat box. Fluffy2840, bengineer8, 8\_bit\_dad, PastorBos and others greet each other with words and emojis ranging from praying hands to excited “HYPE, HYPE!” emoticons.

In the first few minutes of the livestream, it's clear GodSquad Church is very much a typical worship service and at the same time unlike any church service most people have ever attended.

There's prayer, announcements about small groups and volunteer opportunities, an offering time and a sermon by pastor Matt Souza, or Pastor SouZy as he's

known in the gaming world. Every first Saturday of the month, there's communion, with reminders ahead of time to have your juice and crackers ready.

There are also bright graphic backgrounds, folks wearing headsets, game play clips, electronic music interludes and occasionally a reminder in the chat room to keep the comments clean.

The entire service is energetic and exciting — just like the video games that led Souza to start GodSquad Church in the first place.

### Largest 'nation' in the world

If the online gaming community were a nation, it would be the largest country in the world, ahead of China, India and the United States, Souza says.

An estimated 1.8 billion people worldwide consider themselves gamers — not

just people who play the occasional game on their phones but those who actively and regularly play video games, often with others online.

Gamers are the kind of people who if they didn't have a job would play video games all the time, Souza said. Their best friends are their online friends.

Gamers play 1.6 trillion hours every year or 30 billion hours each week — numbers that Souza said made him think.

The numbers represent real people who really need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ but who are “spending so much time playing video games ... they must not be spending too much time in their public restaurants, local libraries and they're definitely not spending too much time in their local churches,” Souza said.

Souza began to wonder: “How do we get the gospel to people who don't leave their homes?”

The answer was GodSquad Church, begun in 2016 with the mission of “leading gamers from virtual life to eternal life.”

The church's name reflects the invitation in John 1:12 to become God's children, part of “His squad,” Souza said.

“The strategic part of our name is that there is intentionally no space between God and Squad. This goes to show that sin had placed separation between God and His people but because of Christ's death on the Cross, we have been forgiven and no longer separated from God. Once again, God and His Squad have been reunited,” Souza said.

### Seeing success

The concept is working, Souza said. GodSquad Church has brought the gospel to more than 300,000 individual gamers and more than 700 people have made decisions to follow Christ.

There are plenty more gamers to be

reached though. Millions all over the world have never before heard the “amazing story” of how Christ died on the cross for our sins.

“They've never heard. This is how we can give them an opportunity. By going where they're at and showing them the truth of God's love,” Souza said.

Souza said he's heard from people who say, “I don't even believe what you're saying but there's something inside of me that wants to watch. The Holy Spirit is drawing them.”

And once they do believe, GodSquad Church is committed to growing disciples by helping members “level up.”

### Focus on community

In the gaming world, to “level up” is to gain experience, perhaps enough to acquire new abilities or gain access to items needed to reach a higher score in the game.

GodSquad Church offers Experience Groups, small groups that meet once a week to dive further into the Bible, ask questions and enjoy time together.

The goal is for each participant to grow in their relationship with Christ. The result is that gamers all over the world are beginning to learn the truth of God's Word, Souza said.

In Experience Groups, Bible study and GodSquad Church, the focus is always on community and that emphasis on relationships is one big reason gamers are attracted to GodSquad Church, Souza believes.

“Gamers are searching for a community to embrace them. GodSquad Church does that. We embrace gamers for who they are,” Souza said. “I really believe as Christians if we are going to obey the Lord and His command to go into all the world then I really believe we must also go into the virtual world.”

## AHSAA sanctions eSports

Online gaming will be an official high school sport in Alabama this fall.

At its April board meeting, the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) Central Board of Control approved eSports competition for member schools. The two-year experiment will allow student teams to compete with each other on school-sanctioned teams. The program is being provided by National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSH) Network partner PlayVS.

According to an AHSAA factsheet:

► The same skills a team needs to succeed in traditional sports are required in eSports.

Teams need to work together as a unit,

think strategically and put forth strong individual effort in order to win.

► Research suggests students who participate in structured eSports activities have positive education outcomes, such as increased interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), higher GPA and the formation of stronger bonds as a team.

Students will compete at school, bringing gaming to campus where students will be surrounded by teammates and supported by a live audience. The AHSAA will not limit team numbers for schools and teams will be co-ed.

PlayVS expects 15–20 states to be involved in the eSports initiative in 2018. (TAB)

# Across ALABAMA'S Associations

## BALDWIN

► **Fairhope Avenue Church** will hold a concert featuring Day Three on July 29, 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. Jerry Brown is pastor.

## BIGBEE

► **First Church, Livingston**, will hold a concert featuring Eternal Vision on July 29, 6 p.m. For more information call 205-652-2154. Thomas Fletcher is pastor.

## COFFEE

► **Newbia Church, Elba**, will hold a concert featuring the Cavaliers Quartet on July 28, 6 p.m. A love offering will be taken. For more information call 334-308-7510. Will Jordan is pastor.

## ETOWAH

► **Goodyear Heights Church, Gadsden**, will hold a homecoming service Aug. 5, 11 a.m. A covered-dish lunch will follow the service. An afternoon singing featuring the Heirborn Quartet will follow lunch. Tommy Ferguson is pastor. ► **East Gadsden Church** will hold a fifth Sunday singing July 29, 6 p.m. featuring Frank Jones. A love offering will be taken. John Dickinson is pastor.

## FAYETTE

► **Shepherd Church, Fayette**, will hold a revival Aug. 5–8 featuring Shannon

Knight. The Sunday service will begin at 6 p.m. and the Monday–Wednesday services will be at 7 nightly. Gary Hill is pastor.

## MADISON

► **Owens Cross Roads Church** will hold a fifth Sunday singing July 29, 10:30 a.m. featuring The Fishermen Quartet. Charles Miller is pastor.

## MORGAN

► **South Chapel Hill Church, Decatur**, will hold a concert featuring The King's Messengers on July 29, 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome. Cake and coffee will follow. Billy Hayes is pastor.

## RUSSELL

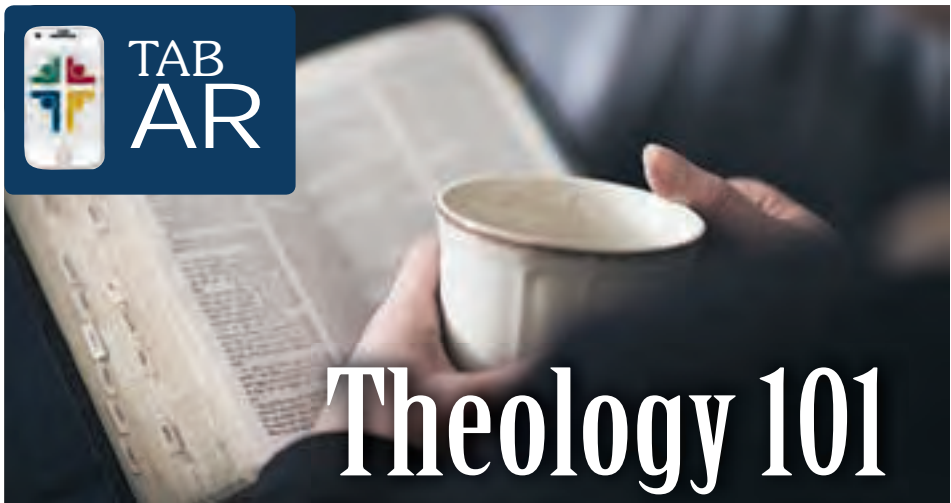
► **Pine Grove Church, Phenix City**, will hold a homecoming service Aug. 5, 10 a.m. Lunch will be served at noon. Philip Camp is pastor.

## ST. CLAIR

► **McEntyre Church, Ashville**, will hold a singing July 29, 2 p.m. featuring Steel City Revival. Bobby Joe Winningham is pastor.

## TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Pepperell Church, Opelika**, will hold a fifth Sunday singing July 29, 6 p.m. featuring the James Brown Trio. Mike Newman is pastor.✝



# Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

## Christology Through Imagery

# Alpha and Omega

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

One of the earliest tasks most of us faced in our education was memorizing from A to Z the 26 letters of the English alphabet.

Had our education been in Greek rather than English we would have had to memorize only the 24 letters from alpha to omega.

Interestingly the New Testament refers to Christ in terms of the Greek alphabet, recording in the opening chapter of Revelation that He introduced Himself as both the first and the last letter of that alphabet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord" (1:8).

In the last chapter of Revelation Christ referred to Himself the same way, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (22:13).

When we look closely at these passages we discern several truths about the person of Christ. Along with His omnipotence as "the Almighty" we discern His eternal nature "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Heb. 7:3).

Had Christ been speaking in English instead of Greek, He might have said "I am the A and the Z, the first and the last." To this claim we could add that He is not only A and Z but also everything in between. Since we are English-speaking rather than Greek-speaking we might think of Christ in terms of being the first and the last and every letter in between.

Taking this as a pattern for thinking about Christ in this last installment of our theme of Christology through imagery, we might come up with something like the following.

### Christ is our:

- Atoning Sacrifice and our Advocate;*
- Builder of His Church;*
- Captain of our salvation;*
- Deliverer;*
- Eternal Son of God;*
- Firstborn from the dead;*
- Good Shepherd;*
- Holy One of God;*
- Image of the invisible God;*
- Just One;*
- King of kings;*
- Lord of glory;*
- Master;*
- Narrow Gate;*
- Only-Begotten of the Father;*
- Prince of peace;*
- Quickening Spirit;*
- Redeemer;*
- Savior of the world;*
- Teacher of truth;*
- Ultimate Sacrifice for sin;*
- Victor;*
- Way, Truth and Life;*
- Express image of God's Person;*
- Yes and Amen to God's promises;*
- Zealot for God's house.*

When we have exhausted the alphabet Christ is still the incomparable and inexpressible fullness of the godhead with infinitely more qualities than these.✝

*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.*



## Mobile hosts Distinguished Young Women finals



Photo courtesy of Kathy Dean, University of Mobile

University of Mobile (UM) hosted 50 young women on campus June 22 during the 61st national finals for the Distinguished Young Women scholarship program, held each year in Mobile. Outstanding recent high school graduates from every state were on campus for a day of mentoring. 'It was a joy to have these outstanding high school students on campus for the day. ... They have been identified as the best of the best through their academic success, talent, leadership and character. We were excited to have the opportunity to meet them and introduce them to our university,' said Kathy Dean, UM assistant vice president for university communications.

## VOICE YOUR OPINION

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

### Remember to:

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

# Is your church in need of revitalization?

## Resources available for Alabama Baptist churches in state of plateau, decline

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Over the years Rob Paul has consulted with dozens of churches that needed revitalization. Some were on death's doorstep, he said. Others didn't even realize they were headed toward trouble.

"They appeared healthy," he said. "A few of them were even growing. Most of them had a lot of activity and plenty of money. But all of them needed church revitalization."

How do you know if your church needs revitalization? And what do you do about it if it does? Paul, a former Alabama Baptist pastor, decided recently that there's such a big need for churches and pastors to walk alongside each other in figuring these things out that he started the Revive and Revitalize Network for pastors of small-to-medium-sized churches.

### Networking

"I'm involved in a couple of networks myself, and I know how valuable those have been," said Paul, who has done revitalization consulting work off and on since 2012 and now does it full time.

His network is for any church that "is finding itself struggling and feeling the need to get unstuck," he said. It offers monthly online video helps and access to a closed Facebook group of other leaders who can share encouragement and ideas. It also offers access to consulting services from Paul.

He listed these eight factors as signs you might need some support:

► **Plateaued or declining attendance.** Sometimes if the decline is gradual churches may not even notice or believe it's happening, Paul said.

► **Lack of evangelistic fruit.** Look at how many baptisms are happening and celebrate every baptism, he said. But also assess whether these are adult baptisms — people being won to faith — or simply the children of adult members.

► **Church does not reflect the community.** If there's no evangelistic fruit growing in the congregation, there will come a day when the church doesn't look like the community around it anymore. "That is a major sign of impending trouble," Paul said. "God has placed each church in its community for such a time as this. The church should reflect the community ethnically, generation-



Photo by Tommy Strickland

Rob Paul (top, center), a church revitalization consultant, talks with Talladega-area pastors about ways their churches can reach their changing communities and bring new life to their congregations.

ally, culturally and economically."

► **Missing generations in attendance or leadership.** Is there a whole generation missing? Are there any church members un-

der age 50? It's important to look at these factors and ask why, Paul said.

► **An idealized vision of the past.** If people are longing for "the good old days" of the church, this can be a sign your church is not in a healthy place, he said.

► **Preoccupation with other churches.** Is there jealousy or wondering why your church can't do

or have what another church has? "When a church is overly focused on what other churches are doing it is heading for trouble," Paul said.

► **Competing agendas within the church.** Whether it's the music style or something else, when there are competing agendas, the pastor is constantly bogged down in having to intervene and redirect, Paul said.

► **Allowing a person or group to exer-**

cise power and control. When an individual or group that bullies the other members is allowed to be in charge of a church, the church can't grow, Paul said.

All of these things can be assessed and helped with the support of others, he said.

Tommy Strickland, pastor of Ridgeview Baptist Church, Talladega, said he recently got to sit down with a group of pastors in his area and talk through their needs with Paul.

"It was a time when we could say, 'Here's a legitimate concern I have in my church or community,'" Strickland said. "Talladega churches are facing a shifting demographic. We're in an area not seeing new growth and the whole community is kind of stagnant and churches are stagnant."

Being in a network setting got everyone on the same page like players on a team, he said.

"It was more 'how can we grow the kingdom' instead of 'how can we grow our church.'"

Strickland said nothing is off the table right now as far as he is concerned.

"We want to reach people for Christ, and

if that means bringing in someone with an outside view and fresh eyes, we want to do that," he said.

### State Board resources

Another place where churches can find revitalization resources is through the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), which provides coaches and church assessments with costs covered by Cooperative Program funds.

Tim Cox, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Chelsea, said he called the SBOM after church leadership realized the congregation was in a five-year plateau and wasn't as effective at reaching the community as it could be.

"We called a partner to come in and help us identify needs, identify challenge areas and help walk us through a plan of action toward a healthier ministry today," he said. "We have seen the impact of revitalization — new life, new energy, new strength, with more people attending, an increase in giving and a vibrancy in the congregation celebrating what God is doing."✠



PAUL

**For more information about the SBOM's church revitalization ministry, visit [alsbom.org/revitalization](http://alsbom.org/revitalization) or call 334-613-2210. For more information about Rob Paul's ministry, visit [robpaul.net](http://robpaul.net).**

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You can continue to help children just like Allison by standing with churches across America for kids in foster care on **November 11 for Stand Sunday**, in connection with Orphan Sunday. Below are a few ways you can take part in this national movement:

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**HOST A NEEDS LIST DRIVE** | We have a variety of specific needs at our locations across the state, ranging from household items, cleaning supplies, pantry items, and more. You can encourage your church to host a drive based on the needs of a location near you: [alabamachild.org/needslist](http://alabamachild.org/needslist)

**INVITE A SPEAKER** | If you want a clear picture concerning our ministry to hurting children, you can request a speaker to share with your church the many ways you can all make an impact on children and families in need across Alabama: [alabamachild.org/speakers](http://alabamachild.org/speakers)

*More details and resources for Stand Sunday are available at [alabamachild.org/StandSunday](http://alabamachild.org/StandSunday).*



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*\*Photo has been changed.*



# Read The Alabama Baptist Day

**Sunday, August 19**

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or call 1-800-803-5201, ext. 100.

# ALABAMA UPDATES

PEOPLE, CHURCHES MAKING NEWS ACROSS THE STATE

## Samford's Philip Poole named RCCongress coordinator

Philip Poole, recently retired executive director of university communication at Samford University in Birmingham, has been named coordinator of the next Religion Communication Congress (RCCongress), a once-a-decade international gathering of professional religion communicators from a wide range of faith traditions.

"Philip's background in and commitment to interfaith communication and initiatives, his involvement with previous congresses, his leadership in multiple organizations and his administrative skills all resonated with those of us tasked with enlisting a coordinator," said Shirley Struchen, executive director of Religion Communicators Council (RCC).

Poole served as program co-chair for RCCongress 2000 and was on the steering committee for RCCongress 2010. He has served as national president for two religion communications organizations — RCC and Baptist Communicators Association. Poole was recently elected into the Public Relations Society of America's College of Fellows which honors practitioners and educators who have left a significant footprint on the public relations profession. (TAB)



**POOLE**

## TAB book reviewer celebrates 20 years with paper

Martine Bates Fairbanks had finished her doctorate in educational leadership and was working for the Morgan County Board of Education when she saw a new challenge in the pages of *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB).

"I saw a notice that (TAB) was looking for writers, so I went to a training at the Madison Baptist Association," Fairbanks said. That was in 1998. Soon after, she pitched an article and the idea was accepted. She kept her eyes and ears open for potential stories and found "they were everywhere."

She became a regular correspondent for TAB and continued to work as an educator, serving as a principal, a university professor and currently as pre-K facilitator with Morgan County Schools.

When the opportunity to review books for TAB opened a few years ago, she jumped at the chance. Fairbanks said she has been a "voracious" reader all her life and had reviewed books for other publications. Through the years she has reviewed other media but books remain her favorite.

"I love getting new books to review, and I love helping authors get the word out about their books," she said. (TAB)



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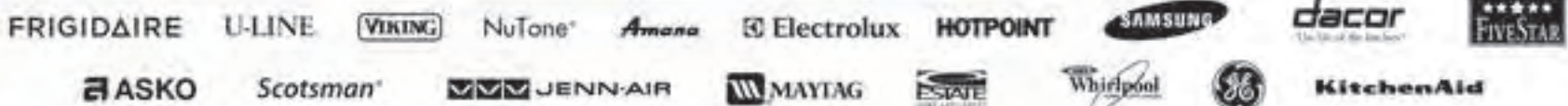
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# Serve app moves sign-up sheet online

By Carrie Brown McWhorter  
The Alabama Baptist

Organizing volunteers for a missions or service project can be a daunting task. A new application called Serve hopes to make it easier.

The Serve app was developed by Church of the Highlands, a nondenominational multi-site church headquartered in Birmingham. Ron Hogland, outreach director of Church of the Highlands, said the app was developed to help Highlands organize volunteers for Serve Day, an annual day of ministry when the church “goes out into our communities and loves our neighbors.”

## Staying connected

“The projects have been largely executed by our small groups,” Hogland said. “However, we have members who are not in small groups during the summer months, and there has been a need for a better way to get them

connected to a project.”

The lack of communication between team leaders and volunteers hindered planning, said Linda Harrison, a member of the Highlands’ Fultondale Campus and financial administrator for *The Alabama Baptist*.

“The team leaders wouldn’t know how many they would have coming until the folks got there,” Harrison said.

The Serve app solves that communication problem by creating something similar to a virtual sign-up sheet, she said.

“With the app, the team leader can say how many folks they need and if someone is looking for a project they can check out the app, decide on a project, click to participate and the numbers are updated in real time,” Harrison said.

She likes that the projects are searchable by activity, so if a volunteer wants to clean, paint or do yard work, for example, they can search projects by those tasks.

“For a church member, it makes it easy to find the Serve project of your choice. You know what you are going to do and who you are going to help,” Harrison said.

Though the app was created for Highlands’ Serve Day effort, the church wanted other churches to have access to the tools so they too could have an easy way to organize and communicate with

volunteers, Hogland said. Regardless of church size, the Serve app is a way to connect people within the church to those outside it.

“The Serve Day app is just an-

other tool we want other churches to have to help share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the people in their communities,” he said.

Interested churches can download the Serve app free from Google Play or Apple’s App Store. The user then registers within the app by signing up for an account. Once the account is active, users can create projects, adding details including project name, description, team leaders and ages appropriate for the project. Other options include number of people, skills, supplies and tools needed for the project.

The process is similar for volunteers, who first sign up for an account then choose their church name. Within that area users can view a list of projects offered and sign up all within the app.

Volunteers will see their projects listed in the “My Serve” area of the app.

Another feature is that team leaders and team members can communicate within the app,

similar to social media platforms like Facebook that allow in-app messaging. Churches utilizing the app also can choose a web domain address (“mychurchname.serveday.com”) that can be linked to a church website and take volunteers directly to church-created projects.

## Wide variety of contexts

Additionally, ideas and resources for teams are posted to the Serve Day blog at [ServeDay.tumblr.com](http://ServeDay.tumblr.com) and to the website [ServeDay.com](http://ServeDay.com), which both feature how-tos and considerations for serving in a wide variety of contexts.

The Serve app and additional resources are all part of Church of the Highlands’ mission to proclaim the gospel by meeting needs in local communities, Hogland said.

“Through these acts of service, we hope people’s hearts will be opened to the love of Jesus.”



## TAB CLASSIFIEDS

For information on pricing or placing a classified ad, contact the advertising department of The Alabama Baptist at 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or [ads@thealabamabaptist.org](mailto:ads@thealabamabaptist.org). Copy deadline is two weeks before publication.

### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### PASTOR

Enon Baptist Church is looking for a pastor. Send resumé to: Mitchell Harrison, 8393 Grissett Bridge Road, Atmore, AL 36502. Phone: 251-862-2527. Email: [brian.presley46@yahoo.com](mailto:brian.presley46@yahoo.com).

#### SENIOR ADULT MINISTER

First Baptist Church, Pelham, is seeking a dynamic, spirit-filled part-time senior adult minister. Send resumé to: 2867 Pelham Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124 or email: [pat@fbcpelham.org](mailto:pat@fbcpelham.org).

#### ASSOCIATE PASTOR FOR WORSHIP & MUSIC

Concord Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Anderson, S.C., is seeking an associate pastor for worship and music. This person must have the calling, gifting, training and heart to lead a large and diverse ministry of worship. We are excited about our future! For a job description and/or to submit a resumé/profile, please contact [jjames@concordbaptist.com](mailto:jjames@concordbaptist.com). Please also visit [concordbaptist.com](http://concordbaptist.com) for more information about our congregation.

#### WORSHIP PASTOR

Redeemer Community Church in Oneonta, Alabama, seeks a full-time worship pastor to lead

worship that is radically Christ-centered, theologically rich and stylistically modern. Please send resumé, references and videos to: [matt@redeemeroneonta.org](mailto:matt@redeemeroneonta.org).

#### BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

Hopewell Baptist Church, Hanceville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational music minister. Send your resumé to: Hopewell Baptist Church, ATTN: Ed Hart, P.O. Box 423, Hanceville, AL 35077. [eedhart@yahoo.com](mailto:eedhart@yahoo.com).

#### YOUTH PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church, Russellville, Alabama, searching for youth pastor. Send your resumé to: Southside Baptist Church, ATTN: Joseph Medina, P.O. Box 60, Russellville, AL 35653.

#### STUDENT PASTOR

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Moulton, Alabama, is seeking a full-time student pastor to plan, promote and lead activities for students 7th grade through college. Anyone interested in applying should send a resumé to: [uarome@bellsouth.net](mailto:uarome@bellsouth.net) or contact Jerome Porter at 256-565-5103.

### OTHER POSITIONS

#### DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Butler Baptist Association

is accepting resúmes for a part-time director of missions position. The deadline for resúmes is Aug. 1. Please submit your resumé to: Calvary Baptist Church, ATTN: Resúmes, P.O. Box 67, Georgiana, AL 36033 or email: [butlerbaptist@camelliacom.com](mailto:butlerbaptist@camelliacom.com).

#### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Birmingham Baptist Association is a network of biblically faithful churches building one another up and working together to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment of Jesus Christ. The executive director of missions provides visionary leadership for the association staff, its ministries and its financial support. The executive director of missions should be an effective communicator of the gospel who is able to work with leaders from churches of various sizes and settings. The ability to represent the association among other city leaders is vital. Resúmes can be submitted to: Greg Corbin, 2865 Old Rocky Ridge Rd., Birmingham, AL 35243, or [gcorbin@lakesidebaptist.com](mailto:gcorbin@lakesidebaptist.com).

### BUSINESS

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**2** Tap the [ ] icon at the bottom of the screen.

**3** 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.

**4** Look for *The Alabama Baptist (TAB) augmented reality logo* (example shown above). Hold your device over the logo and watch the paper come to life.

**5** Each week when *TAB* arrives, look for the AR logo to watch the video extras.



## Joel "Joey" Scott Williams Blue Springs pastor Williams dies at 58



WILLIAMS

Joel "Joey" Scott Williams, pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church, Opp, died of a heart attack July 12. He was 58.

During his many years in Opp, he also served as chief of the Opp Fire Department.

"He was well loved by everybody and will definitely be missed," said Sandra Sue Edgar, church clerk for the Covington Baptist Association church. "He has a lot of friends in the church and community."

Williams is survived by his wife, Gail; daughter, Kristen; sons, Chad, Spencer and Isaac; and eight grandchildren. (Grace Thornton)



## Old Town Creek Baptist Church celebrates bicentennial

Old Town Creek Baptist Church, Moulton, in Muscle Shoals Baptist Association celebrated its bicentennial May 27. The anniversary's theme was "Celebrating the Faithfulness of God."

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), was the guest speaker for the service. He also presented the church with a certificate on behalf of SBOM. Special music was presented by the church choir and Abundant Life Trio.



Photo courtesy of Old Town Creek

Jerry Armor from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque to Robert Smith, director of missions for Muscle Shoals Association, who gave the service's invocation.

Each family in attendance received a booklet detailing the history of the church and drawings of the four buildings that have housed Old Town Creek Baptist through the years.

"It was a Christ-honoring service," Pastor Brandon Kerby said. "The church was packed out." (TAB)

## West Point celebrates centennial after tornado destroys its building

On May 20, West Point Baptist Church, Jacksonville, was destroyed by a tornado that ripped through its town just two months before the church planned to celebrate its centennial.

Pleasant Valley Elementary School opened its doors to the congregation after the tragedy and that's where the church celebrated 100 years of gospel preaching.

West Point Baptist, in Calhoun Baptist Associa-

tion, welcomed former pastor Charles Stone as the guest speaker for the service and the choir performed special music.

The celebration went "really well," said church member Pam Johnson. "We were happy to be together."

Sonja Adams presented the church with a commemorative certificate from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Pastor Ronny Moore read a letter from Rep. Mike Rogers, congressman for Alabama's 3rd district. (Jessica Ingram)

## Bethlehem Baptist celebrates 150th anniversary

Bethlehem Baptist Church, Centreville, in Bibb Baptist Association, celebrated its 150th anniversary May 27.

The guest speaker for the service was George Harris, who grew up in Bethlehem Baptist, and special music was performed by Jon Ray Ministries.

Former choir members joined in leading worship in the afternoon service.

Angie Cooper from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate to the church. Old church minutes and Vacation Bible School scrapbooks were displayed. More than 500 photos documenting the history of the church scrolled on a monitor at the back of the church.

Church member Robert Poe thought the day went great. "It was fantastic," he said. "It went better than expected."

Poe read a letter from Gov. Kay Ivey and a proclamation sponsored by state senator Cam Ward to the congregation.

An old-fashioned dinner on the grounds was served following the service. Tom Conroy is pastor. (Jessica Ingram)



Photo courtesy of Bethlehem Baptist

## Homeland security workshop will focus on safety threats

A one-day Active Shooter Preparedness Workshop will be held Aug. 14 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla.

Church and school officials from across the state, as well as any organization or business dealing with large groups

of people in one place at one time, are especially encouraged to attend.

Registration is open through Aug. 12. To attend, participants must bring a driver's license or other approved ID.

For more information and to register, visit [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org). (TAB)

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### SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

► **Samford Graduate Named One of 51 U.S. Phi Kappa Phi Fellows:**

Samford University Fellows honors program alumnus Keely Smith, who graduated in May 2018, is one of only 51 national Phi Kappa Phi Fellows named in June. The award will help support Smith in her first year of study in Princeton University's Ph.D. program, where she earned a scholarship to study Native American folkways.



SMITH

► **Samford Professor Earns Distinguished National Award:** Samford University Psychology Department chair and internationally recognized expert on teaching and learning Stephen

Chew has earned the American Psychology Foundation's Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award. He also has earned the Society for the Teaching of Psychology's Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence Award and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's state and U.S. professor of the year honors.

### UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

► **University of Mobile History Department Hosts Civil War Teacher's Institute:** University of Mobile hosted 36 Alabama and Florida teachers as part of the School and University Partners for Educational Renewal Teacher Program. The workshop focused on the Civil War in the American South. Lonnie Burnett, executive dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at University of Mobile, and Sean Adams, chair of the history department at the University of Florida, served as lead scholars for the week.✝

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For July 29

**Explore the Bible** By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.  
Dean, Office for Global Engagement, University of Mobile

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**RESTORED**  
**2 Samuel 19:1-15**

Restoration comes at a cost. Restoring furniture begins with removing the old finish before applying the new. Restoring an ancient landmark may require removal of rubble and broken foundations before rebuilding the structure. Restoring fellowship within a church demands repentance of sin and respect for the authority of God's Word. David's reign was restored but at a heavy price.

**Mourning (1-4)**

Absalom was dead. David's rebellious son — who murdered his brother, who raised an army to revolt against his father and who shamed the women of the palace — died at the hands of Joab. Though Absalom had dishonored him, David loved his son. The news of his death was devastating to the king.

Instead of trumpets blasting in victory, David's army returned home in silence, hearing the bitter laments of their king. David wept over the loss of another loved one. Though those close to him sought his life, David did not return evil for evil. He loved Saul and spared him twice. He loved Absalom and gave strict instructions for his men not to harm the prince (18:5, 12). David mourned for his fallen son.

**Confrontation (5-8)**

Joab, Absalom's murderer and commander of David's army, confronted David's emotionalism with rage. He accused David of loving his enemies and hating his supporters. He also accused David of bringing shame on his own army and treating them as worthless men. He threatened to lead David's army away if the king did not snap out of it and address the troops. He warned that David's trouble as a young man under Saul's pursuit would pale in comparison to the trouble he would face unless he listened

to Joab. This general was about to discover that one must be careful what one asks for.

**Restoration (9-15)**

Perhaps Joab saw David as weak or old or a coward. After all, David was weeping in the midst of victory. He did not want to rally the troops. He ran away from a fight when Absalom came for Jerusalem. Joab was unaware that the king still had plenty of life left.

David took his place among the elders at the city gate, the place for making public decisions for the benefit of the community (Deut. 25:7-8; Ruth 4:1; and Prov. 31:23). Meanwhile, the rumor mill was rampant about restoring the king after Absalom's death, and David used his connections to regain favor with the people of Israel. He challenged the armies of Judah who had sided with Absalom to return to the king's service. As his own kinsmen, they belonged with him. Upon their return Amasa would become commander of David's army. Joab was finished. Mike drop. Checkmate. Game, set and match.

Jesus is our greater David. His compassion for lost sheep far surpasses that of David. His willingness to intercede for and lay down His life for enemies far exceeds David's mercy toward adversaries. His glorious resurrection demonstrates His undeniable authority over sin and death, which is far superior to David's restoration to rule over the hills west of the Jordan River.

In Christ God grants us restoration from our fallen state. Through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, we receive the message of reconciliation with God (2 Cor. 5:19). As regenerate followers of Jesus, we are ambassadors — communicators of His restorative work (2 Cor. 5:20). In fact, the purpose for the church is to serve in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), sharing the gospel of Christ with people alienated from God. ✠

**PLAN**  
**Nehemiah 2:1-8, 17-18**

Throughout the history of the people of God, a sense of need must be united with a careful action of planning to enable the work of God to be completed. The goodwill of people must be carefully harnessed to fulfill a purposeful plan. Nehemiah does not underestimate the difficulty of achieving his goals of seeing the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. He knows that he needs to work carefully in order that God's purposes might be fulfilled through his life.

**Opportunities call for action. (1-5a)**

Nehemiah waits for the right time to begin his plan of action. Waiting for the right time to act is as important as acting itself. Waiting time is not wasted time. Well over 100 days came and went, and each day he was waiting and each day he was ready. Nehemiah prayed in 1:11 that God would give him success through his relationship with the king. Nehemiah is ready, and when the king asks him why his face is so sad, Nehemiah immediately offers another simple prayer to God for help, and then takes the opportunity granted to him to begin the process of going back to Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, when the opportunity arose, he was frightened. Frightened of saying the wrong thing, frightened of wasting this valuable opportunity. However, his fear did not leave him speechless. Though he was afraid, he spoke.

**Service includes planning. (5b-8)**

The moments of quiet reflection over the past four months meant that he knew what to say and that he had to say it. There was nothing haphazard in his speech. He combined dependent prayer with deliberate planning. He was eager to offer his best into the service of God. When the

time came he knew exactly how to express himself to the king, describing his people's needs and asking specifically for the king's help in returning to Jerusalem. When the king asks him how long all this will take, Nehemiah supplies the specific answer. He had thought it all through so that he wasn't taken by surprise.

Service includes meticulous planning. Trusting God to accomplish his purposes does not mean that we are excused from being carefully involved in seeking for those purposes to be fulfilled. Nehemiah asks for time to return to Judah and makes specific requests for letters of safe-conduct and permission to take trees from the king's forest to rebuild the gates of the city. He is audacious in the requests which he makes, but he knows what he needs to accomplish the work of the Lord.

When the king agrees to all that he requests, Nehemiah recognizes that although he had made the plans and the requests, God's hand was on him. In the mystery of God's providence, human acts are woven into God's plans.

**Service involves the commitment of the whole community. (17-18)**

Nehemiah recognizes that he cannot accomplish all this by himself and so in verses 17-18, after Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he gathers the leaders together and tells them of the way in which God has been with him and encourages them to unite together to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah brings them to their senses. They had been living in the midst of the ruins and had not realized this was a disgrace. It was a reproach on the name of God. It was leading the enemies of God to laugh. To the pagan mind, the ruined walls were a sign that God was impotent and had forgotten his people. Nehemiah calls them to action. ✠

## Christian Crossword

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**Across**

- All things work together for \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom. 8:28)
- Thou shalt be a \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 12:2)
- Provoke not your children to \_\_\_\_\_. (Col. 3:21)
- Capably.
- The Lord \_\_\_\_ high is mightier. (Ps. 93:4)
- And \_\_\_\_ her head. (2 Kings 9:30)
- His deadly \_\_\_\_ was healed. (Rev. 13:3)
- Weeded, cultivated.
- National Recovery Administration. (abbr.)
- \_\_\_\_ the time appointed. (Gen. 18:14)
- Ensign. (abbr.)
- He \_\_\_\_ is my rock. (Ps. 62:2)
- A precious stone.
- Royal Society. (abbr.)
- Vigor, strength.
- For our lamps are \_\_\_\_ out. (Matt. 25:8)
- Sent men from Jericho to \_\_\_\_\_. (Josh. 7:2)
- Indicates three.
- Earns, gains.

- \_\_\_\_, thou art the Son of God. (John 1:49)
- Turned into the \_\_\_\_ of summer. (Ps. 32:4)
- Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, \_\_\_\_\_. (Rom. 8:15)
- Because thou didst \_\_\_\_ on the Lord. (2 Chron. 16:8)
- A period of time.
- Perhaps, possibly.
- Let him \_\_\_\_\_. (James 1:6)
- Learn to \_\_\_\_ well. (Isa. 1:17)
- Shall we \_\_\_\_ with the sword? (Luke 22:49)
- He that shall \_\_\_\_ unto the end. (Mark 13:13)
- I \_\_\_\_ the door. (John 10:9)
- Have \_\_\_\_ to righteousness. (Rom. 9:30)
- The Lord stirred \_\_\_\_ the spirit. (Ezra 1:1)

**Down**

- A \_\_\_\_ of sycamore fruit. (Amos 7:14)
- Leeks, and the \_\_\_\_ and the garlic. (Num. 11:5)
- Fabled giants.
- But in \_\_\_\_ and in truth.

- (1 John 3:18)
- Sin is the transgression of the \_\_\_\_\_. (1 John 3:4)
- Horns of ivory and \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 27:15)
- To pronounce indistinctly.
- I ever taught in the \_\_\_\_\_. (John 18:20)
- Do thyself \_\_\_\_ harm. (Acts 16:28)
- Strain at a \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 23:24)
- Rural Delivery. (abbr.)
- An individual part of a whole.
- A ligure, an agate and an \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 39:12)
- We live therefore, \_\_\_\_ die. (Rom. 14:8)
- Butter in a \_\_\_\_ dish. (Judg. 5:25)
- From Engedi even unto \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 47:10)
- A bracket on the ship's mast to support the trestle trees.
- He said, \_\_\_\_, Father. (Mark 14:36)
- Symbol for element iridium.
- Saint. (abbr.)
- He will bless the house of

- (Ps. 115:12)
- But whom say ye that \_\_\_\_? (Mark 8:29; 2 words)
- Minerals from which metals can be mined.
- The garden of \_\_\_\_\_. (Joel 2:3)
- Height times width.
- \_\_\_\_ yourselves in the love of God. (Jude 21)
- \_\_\_\_ it also in writing. (Ezra 1:1)
- The nations are \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 51:7)
- District Attorney. (abbr.)
- Right. (abbr.)
- And it shall come to pass \_\_\_\_ the last days. (Isa. 2:2)





**TV/MOVIES**

# Media reviews

## ‘Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood’ leads July’s family-friendly spotlight

By **Michael Foust**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

**T**here was a time I enjoyed watching the news, perusing Twitter and scanning Facebook.

No longer.

Those days are long gone due to a culture that has forgotten how to disagree without being disagreeable. Friendly dialogue has been replaced on those platforms with a cesspool of shouting and endless arguments — and it’s affecting every part of our culture.

Perhaps we need to go back to the basics, beginning with how to have conversations and make friends. Perhaps a visit to “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” would help.

The man behind the iconic show — Fred Rogers — would have been 90 this year. He died in 2003 but is being remembered in 2018 with a theatrical documentary, “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”

Rogers did not discuss his faith

explicitly on his program but nevertheless wanted it to be his “ministry” to the country. He was an ordained Presbyterian Church (USA) minister and graduated in the 1960s from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Shortly thereafter, he launched his TV program.

More than 100 episodes of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” are already streaming on Amazon Prime. It’s much-needed television for our children, but it’s helpful TV for adults too.

In what other television show can you learn how to forgive others, how to make orange juice and how to tie your shoes?

Also worth watching this month:

▶ **“America’s Got Talent”** —

Most modern-day talent shows spotlight singers. NBC’s “America’s Got Talent” — now in its 12th season — gives everyone the stage: illusionists, dancers, contortionists and, yes, singers too. Occasionally the acts borderline on the risqué, but most stay in the family-friendly realm.

Still keep the remote handy.

This summer Michael Ketterer, a worship leader at a nondenominational California congregation, Influence Church, is trying to win. He received the coveted “golden buzzer” in the early rounds, sending him automatically to the final rounds. He’s also the father of six children — five of whom were adopted through foster care.

“America’s Got Talent,” a staple of summer television, airs Tuesday nights.

▶ **“The Star”** — Affirm Films, the same studio behind “Courageous” and “Heaven is for Real,” released this animated faith-based movie last year. It’s now on Netflix. “The Star” (PG) tells the story of Mary, Joseph and the birth of Christ through the eyes of the animals who witnessed the event. My kids loved it. It’s suitable for all ages.

▶ **“Father Brown”** — This live-action British mystery series is based on novels by theologian and author G.K. Chesterton, but that doesn’t mean the TV show is appropriate for children. I’d recommend it for adults and teens. It was made by the BBC but is now on Netflix. (The sixth season recently was added.)

The plot is simple: A murder takes place in a small British village and Father Brown tries to solve it.

This recommendation comes with a caveat: Some of the episodes (such as the first episode in season 1) cover questionable topics I don’t find entertaining. Skip them and watch the others.

▶ **Gospel film series: Matthew, Mark, Luke** — Have you ever wanted a biblical movie that



Photo courtesy of PBS  
Fred Rogers would have been 90 this year. He died in 2003 but is being remembered in 2018 with a theatrical documentary, ‘Won’t You Be My Neighbor?’



doesn’t take liberties with the text? If so, then these films are for you. Three movies — “The Gospel of Matthew,” “The Gospel of Mark” and “The Gospel of Luke” — are now on Pureflix. They were released to DVD in the past five years and received little media attention, but they are

some of the best biblical movies I’ve watched. These films are unique for two reasons. First, the screenplay uses the biblical text, word for word. Second, the films use Middle Eastern actors and actresses. More than likely, you’ve never seen anything like it. 🇺🇸

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### Meet the reviewer

*Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.*



Photo courtesy of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel  
Pastor Ziad Farraj of Turaan Baptist Church speaks at Vacation Bible School.

# Baptists *in* Israel

## Association in the Holy Land serves 3,000 believers

**T**uraan is not famous like many other towns in Israel. It is not directly mentioned in the Bible like its neighbors Nazareth or Cana of Galilee, but scholars and locals are certain Jesus passed through this village in his many trips between Nazareth and Capernaum.

According to tradition, Turaan is the location where Jesus' disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath. Today it is mainly a Muslim town with a minority Christian population.

A small Baptist church was planted in Turaan in the late 1950s. The church opened the first day care center in the history of the town. Pastor Suheil Ramadan, who served as pastor of the church between 1972 and 2003, and his wife, Fida, were pioneers in building relationships with Messianic believers in the area.

When Jewish extremists burned the meeting place of the Messianic fellowship in Tiberius in the late 1980s, it was Turaan Baptist church that welcomed these believers to meet in their church until they found a better place. The Ramadans also were instrumental in planting a church in the nearby village of Eilaboun.

### Faithful lay members

After the passing of Pastor Ramadan, the church went through difficulties, but faithful lay members continued to pastor the flock.

Two years ago a young, energetic pastor was introduced to the church. Ziad Farraj and the church have been growing ever since. The main service is fully attended, a youth meeting has restarted and 100 kids attended Vacation Bible School (VBS) last year.

People are growing in their faith and the church is receiving recognition in the community.

The growth of the church is mainly because of the

grace of God, said Bader Mansour, development officer for the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel (ABC), an 18-church association serving a community of 3,000 believers. The vision of the ABC is to spread the good news of the gospel, to strengthen the Christian presence in the Holy Land, to support missions work in the region and to develop trust and cooperation between congregations by sponsoring common ministries in the community.

### Baptist ministry

Baptist ministry in the Holy Land began in 1911. Southern Baptists supported the work from 1923 until 1991, when the ABC became the umbrella organization for Baptist churches and ministries throughout the Holy Land.

The Turaan church is just one example of how the ABC is continuing the more than 100-year legacy of Baptists in the region, Mansour said. That legacy includes seminary education opportunities for local ministers, support for

congregations looking for a pastor and coordination of volunteers and funding for summer VBS programs.

Farraj received his divinity degree at Nazareth Evangelical College while working full time as a special education teacher — the only way he could finish his theological education. Turaan Baptist Church also received a new playground, funded and built by a team from a church in the United States that had a vision to help churches around the world install playgrounds. With help from an ABC loan program, Turaan turned its parsonage into a guest house, which now has the potential to provide income for church ministries as people traveling in Galilee stay there.

Mansour said all this would not be possible without worldwide partners who support the gospel mission of the ABC to help "churches like Turaan as they fulfill their calling." (TAB)

For more information about the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, go to [www.baptist.org.il](http://www.baptist.org.il).



### Jailed Eritrean pastor released, sources say

ASMARA, Eritrea — A pastor imprisoned for more than a decade for his Christian activities has been released, according to Voice of the Martyrs.

Pastor Oqbamichel Haiminot, senior pastor of the Kale Hiwot (Word of Life) Church, became the first senior Eritrean church leader to be imprisoned for his Christian activities in 2003. At that time, he spent a few weeks in prison.

In January 2005 while participating in a wedding ceremony, Pastor Oqbamichel, the bride and groom and 66 other evangelicals were all arrested. Most of the Christians arrested were gradually released over the next few months, but Pastor Oqbamichel and five others were kept in detention.

A spokesperson for Voice of the Martyrs said government officials in the small northeast African nation closed all evangelical churches in 2002 and made Christian activity illegal.

Open Doors ranks Eritrea on their 2018 World Watch List as the sixth worst country for Christian persecution. (TAB)

### Islamist violence stops worship, injures pastor

MAZUBA, Uganda — Islamist threats against a pastor and his family have halted worship services and construction of a church in eastern Uganda.

Threats by Muslims in Mazuba village, Namutumba District, stopped worship services in a half-constructed church building and led the pastor to send his children to another town, he said.

"The church members are now living in great fear for their lives and have stopped attending church services," Pastor Maseruwa Budallah said.

In Uganda's Butaleja District a pastor was knocked unconscious when irate Muslims threw rocks at him during a debate on Christianity and Islam in Kuwait village, sources said.

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

### Pastor in India arrested for forcible conversion

NEW DELHI — A pastor in Uttar Pradesh state was filing affidavits stating that 16 people had become Christians of their own will this week when Hindu extremists came and accused him of forcible conversion — resulting in his incarceration.

The affidavits are self-declarations that the signees willingly choose to follow Christ, want to get baptized and were not coerced or offered inducements.

After jailing the 58-year-old pastor on June 18, the Hindu extremists went to the 16 new Christians' homes and threatened to expel them if they did not recant their faith, but their baptisms were still set to happen, sources said.

India ranked 11th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the most persecution. (MS)

### Christians ambushed, killed in Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria — Two Christians died and another was seriously wounded in an attack by Muslim Fulani herdsmen on June 10.

The three men were on their way home from a church service at the Evangelical Church Winning All in Kwall. According to local sources, they were riding a motorcycle when they were ambushed and brutally attacked.

Attacks on Christian communities in the Bassa area intensified last year and have continued in spite of the presence of military personnel, sources said. Since February, 11 Christians have lost their lives in the area at the hands of Muslim Fulani herdsmen, including a 17-year-old high school student. Nigeria ranked 14th on Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians suffer the most persecution. (MS)