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Program helps Alabama Baptist churches get technology boost

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ABCH photo

Rod Marshall (center) — president and CEO of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) — joins the ABCH board chairman, ABCH and Pathways Professional Counseling staff representatives, CTSM Architects and D.L. Acton Construction leaders in the Nov. 2 groundbreaking.

'Exciting season' around the state

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries celebrates growth

By ABCH Communications
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Known affectionately by most as the "Children's Home," Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH) is in the midst of an "exciting season of growth and change," according to ABCH leaders.

Dreams of program expansion are being realized across the state, which

will enable the ministry to care for even more children and families through Christ-centered services.

In process are two new construction projects in Decatur, a recent groundbreaking in Birmingham to expand direct care programs, new staff growth, and first-year anniversary celebrations in both Mobile and Auburn-Opelika.

"So far this year Alabama Baptist Children's Homes has served 16

percent more children than we did at this time in 2017," said ABCH President and CEO Rod Marshall.

"Thanks to effective management by our statewide directors and supervisors, during this growth our expenses have only gone up by 6 percent," he said. "It is prayerful and careful stewardship like this that helps us continue to serve children and families so well, 127 years into ministry."

ABCH was founded in Evergreen

in 1891 and moved to Troy in 1923. In 1970, ABCH officials opened a North Alabama campus in Decatur and took over the operations of the Protestant Children's Home in Mobile. In 1999 the administrative service center was moved to Birmingham.

From there, a Campus Care Home was built in Dothan and a Shelter Care Home in Oxford. In the early (See 'Making it,' page 4)

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."

COMING NEXT WEEK

Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting coverage



COMMENT

A New Title, A New Opportunity?

A new title is beginning to pop up in Alabama Baptist life. It is associational mission strategist. That is the title recommended by the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders and endorsed by a number of other groups for the position commonly known as an association's director of missions (DOM).

In making the recommendation a study committee reported the DOM title was appropriate when various levels of Southern Baptist life functioned like cogs in a wheel to promote a common program.

The report continued, "To a great degree, a coordinated program no longer exists." The study committee said the new title attempted to address how Baptist life functions today. Nationally it seems promoting programs to strengthen local churches is no longer a priority for Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entities.

Since the adoption of The Great Commission Resurgence in 2010 state convention resources have been reduced in many places as states prioritized national and international efforts over state missions and helping local churches. A frequent result has been less help available for local churches from state conventions.

Renewed opportunity

The argument will continue about whether this was a "downsizing" or a "rightsizing." But no matter which position one takes, most agree an unanticipated result of these developments is a renewed opportunity for associations to take the lead in local missions efforts.

That is part of the reason for the new title — associational mission strategist.

Historically Baptist associations were the point-of-the-spear in Baptist work. The first Baptist association in America was founded in 1607. That was 138 years before the SBC came into existence. The association provided doctrinal guidance for Baptists coming to America from many different European nations, even to the point of approving ordinations.

The Philadelphia Baptist Association — the first association in America — sponsored missionaries,



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

started schools, published literature, disciplined churches and more. The association provided the missions strategy for Baptist advance in the early colonies.

Now associations face a similar opportunity. Each association can (or must) develop its own strategy for strengthening its churches and reaching the people of its area for Christ.

Alabama Baptists are about missions. That is why the state convention gives more to missions causes through the Cooperative Program than any other state and why Alabama Baptists provided more total missions giving to causes beyond their state than any other convention.

That same commitment is seen in the state's 75 Baptist associations as missions takes precedent over personnel in the budgets of association after association. One association we recently visited pointed with pride to the fact that the 2019 associational budget did not reduce spending for missions and ministry even though it did change the full-time DOM role to part-time.

However, at least two major hindrances stand in the way of most associations becoming catalysts for strengthening churches and implementing strategies to reach people for Christ. Those two hindrances are lack of resources and artificial barriers.

Alabama's DOMs are great servants of God. They are good and godly men offering themselves in service to others. Some serve in a full-time capacity. Many serve part-time or bivocationally. But all face the challenge of insufficient resources.

Fifty-one of the state's 75 Baptist associations lost membership from 2016 to 2017.

And according to the 2017 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual, total receipts of cooperating churches fell by 6.5 percent, or more than \$50 million dollars, from the previous year. As the drop in giving works itself out from church offering plates to the many missions efforts of church-

es, there are fewer dollars for everything including associational missions.

The lack of dollars supporting associational work translates to a lack of personnel, a lack of time, a lack of material and a lack of all the other things necessary to formulate and implement a strategy of reaching people for Christ across the association and helping cooperating churches.

If there were sufficient resources there would still be the challenge of artificial boundaries. In Jefferson County, for example, there are all or parts of five different associations — Birmingham, Bessemer, North Jefferson, Mud Creek and Sulphur Springs.

When the Birmingham Metropolitan area is considered additional associations must be added.

How can a missions strategy for the state's largest metropolitan area be created and carried out when Baptist associations seldom talk to one another about shared missions opportunities?

In the Montgomery area three associations — Montgomery, Elmore and Autauga — are beginning to coordinate ministry efforts under an informal River Region Network title. In the Black Belt some associations are sharing the same DOM, offering the possibility of coordinated efforts for associations facing similar challenges.

In Georgia and other Deep South states a number of associations with similar challenges are beginning to merge in order to better position themselves to strengthen churches and make holistic strategies for reaching the lost. Others are forming entirely new associations. These are ways of responding to Baptist life as it is now working, to reference the report of the study committee mentioned above.

Commitment to missions

Such an approach in Alabama may be difficult. We are proud of our Baptist history and rightly so. But we must be careful not to allow commitment to history to supersede commitment to missions. Just as the new title associational mission strategist signals a changed situation in terms of function, the title may also indicate a new opportunity to realign associational identity to reflect Baptist life as it is now working and not as it was in days past.

But no matter the title or the structure, the bottom line is that changes in Baptist life have made the work of associations in strengthening churches and reaching people for the Lord as important today as it ever was. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity. ☠

"Alabama Baptists are about missions. That is why the state convention gives more to missions causes through the Cooperative Program than any other state."

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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

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'Diligent, prayerful' process led to selection

Chitwood announced as candidate for IMB's presidency

Alabama International Mission Board (IMB) trustee Ken Burnham said he is excited by the Nov. 6 announcement that Paul Chitwood will be unanimously recommended by the trustee's Presidential Search Committee as the entity's 13th president.

"I am excited that we will be considering someone who not only says he supports the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) and its funding mechanisms but has a track record to prove it," said Burnham, a member of Meadow Brook Baptist Church, Oxford, in Calhoun Baptist Association.

Chitwood, 48, has served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention since 2011. For 18 years Chitwood served as the pastor of local Kentucky churches of varying sizes. As a pastor his churches averaged giving 18.5 percent through the Cooperative Program.

During his pastorates he served as an IMB trustee from 2002 to 2010 and chairman of the IMB trustees from 2008 to 2010. His overseas short-term missions involvement includes work in Brazil, Peru, India, China, South Africa, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, England, Spain, Germany and Haiti.

Chitwood's commitment to advancing the gospel globally is a big reason Alabama IMB trustee Jay Wolf, pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, in Montgomery Baptist Association, was pleased with Chitwood's recommendation to be IMB president.

'A proven and respected leader'

"Paul is a proven and respected leader. Additionally he is a tremendous communicator and a brilliant organizer," Wolf said. "He will help us engage many more people in the ultimate cause of sharing Christ with the world. God will use Paul as a catalyst to take His work of doing the Great Commission to new heights."

Alabama IMB trustee Max Croft, associ-



IMB photo

Paul Chitwood, executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and former IMB trustee, has been selected by the IMB trustees' Presidential Search Committee for recommendation as the entity's 13th president.



CHITWOOD

ate pastor of Agape Baptist Church, Scottsboro, in Tennessee River Baptist Association, said he is "im-

pressed with Chitwood's knowledge of the IMB mission and culture."

Alabama IMB trustee Cecil Sanders, pastor of First Baptist Church, Headland, in Judson Baptist Association, said he is thankful the committee made trustees aware of Chitwood's recommendation prior to the Nov. 15 meeting so they have time to learn about him and pray for trustees' dialogue with him.

"I have great confidence in our search committee's selection because I am well aware of the diligent and prayerful process its members undertook to bring forth Dr. Chitwood as the nominee," Sanders said.

A native of Jellico, Tennessee, Chitwood is a 1992 graduate of Cumberland College (now University of the Cumberlands), where

he has served as a trustee. He earned a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1995 and a doctorate from the seminary in 2001. He currently is pursuing a master's degree in nonprofit administration from the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

Vote scheduled for Nov. 15

Trustees will vote on the recommendation of Chitwood as president during their plenary session scheduled for Nov. 15 at 10 a.m. EST, in Richmond, Virginia.

By Chitwood's request, pending trustee approval, Clyde Meador will remain in the president's office as interim executive vice president during the transition. Meador has served as IMB interim president since Sept. 27. (TAB, BP)

Beeson Divinity School receives grant for Thriving Pastors program

Samford University's Beeson Divinity School has received a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the Enhancing the Mission: Beeson Divinity School and Thriving Pastors program.

Through the Thriving Pastors program Beeson will help pastors thrive in congregational leadership by improving the quality of peer and mentoring relationships. The program will seek to fulfill its mission by supporting, resourcing and connecting Bee-

son alumni who currently serve in pastoral roles. As the program grows pastors with no prior affiliation with Beeson or Samford will be welcomed into the project.

Support and enrichment

"The mission of Beeson Divinity School is to prepare God-called persons to serve as ministers in the church of Jesus Christ," said Grant Taylor, Beeson's associate dean and project director of the Thriv-

ing Pastors program. "Through the Thriving Pastors program we aim to enhance our mission through a deeper commitment to our graduates who serve as pastors of God's people. We want to support and enrich them by giving them more of Beeson's personal, face-to-face approach to theological education and ministry."

Pastors face transitions of various kinds, so the program will aim to help pastors transition well through at least three phases:

the transition from seminary to full-time ministry positions, the transition from associate pastoral positions to lead pastoral positions and the involuntary transitions that come when they face acute personal and/or family crises.

Specific activities will include an annual conference for Beeson alumni and other pastors, the development of pastoral peer groups and the enrichment of mentoring relationships between pastors. (Samford)

‘Making it possible to dream big’

Children’s Homes leader ‘deeply indebted to generous Alabama Baptists’

(continued from page 1)

2000s the foster care ministry was expanded and it continues to grow.

Currently more than 200 foster homes exist in Birmingham, Mobile, Dothan, Auburn–Opelika, Montgomery, Oxford and Decatur, with more being added each year.

Counseling service growth

Pathways Professional Counseling also has grown in staff and geographically since the days of ABCH having three counselors on staff in 1999 who served the Birmingham and Montgomery areas.

Pathways now has a network of 45 counseling centers across the state. Counselors provided services to almost 4,500 individuals in 2017.

“With this kind of growth it is no surprise that we ran out of space in our Birmingham offices some time ago,” Marshall said. “On Nov. 2 at the leading of our Children’s Homes board of directors we broke ground on new construction to expand our services in the Birmingham area.

“The timing for this new construction meets a great need,” he said. “Since the beginning of 2018 we have had to turn down services to more than 60 children in foster care because there was no availability in the Birmingham area. In order to add additional foster homes it would require adding additional staff and providing appropriate workspace for them.

“As we continue to grow this expansion will provide more opportunities to do just that,” Marshall explained. “Additionally, because our Pathways counselors have full caseloads, there is a two- to three-month

wait for individuals seeking counseling services in our Birmingham office.”

The renovation plan allows ABCH’s Social Services team to grow from six shared offices to 13 offices, creating adequate space to meet job demands and more effectively serve more children.

Pathways also will be expanded and enhanced with the completion of its new counseling facility on the Birmingham property. The new building will increase the counseling capacity from eight shared offices to 16 offices.

“This will be our largest counseling center in the state and is anticipated to open in late 2019 or early 2020,” Marshall said.

ABCH-related hard hats are being worn in Decatur as well with the coming Ensor Shelter Care Home currently under construction.

Michael Smith, chief operations officer for ABCH in North Alabama, said his vision for the new home is that children who need a secure place to stay in a transitional time would be given a safe place to call home.

Space for crisis situations

“Our Shelter Care homes serve as temporary Campus Care homes for children whose families are in crisis,” Smith said. “Children live here for up to 90 days while their families, social workers and courts decide on a permanent plan that would best meet the child’s needs.

“In this time options can be thoughtfully weighed without children bouncing from one home to another in the process,” he said. “In the end discovering the least dis-



ABCH photo

Grace’s House of Hope in Mobile has served 14 mothers and 20 children so far. The home, which provides stability and hope for the future for single mother families, recently celebrated its first anniversary.

ruptive, most nurturing placement possible for each child is the hope.”

Smith said that while ABCH has served children in Decatur through one Shelter Care home for many years, children often have to be turned away because of lack of rooms available.

With this new home there is now an opportunity to change that and, in turn, change even more lives for God’s good and glory, as these kids are lovingly welcomed into a

safe and godly home in their time of crisis.

The Ensor Shelter Care Home will open in 2019 and will be named in honor and memory of Dr. Herman and Janie Ensor “who faithfully provided for and loved our kids in Decatur as their own,” Smith said.

The Ensors made a generous gift to ABCH through their estate plan, which was distributed upon their death. They designated that 75 percent of the gift would be used to advance the ABCH ministries in Decatur. (To learn about supporting various ministries through estate planning, contact The Baptist Foundation of Alabama at tbfa.org.)

“In addition to the Shelter Care home, we are excited to also build a duplex for house parents to stay during their off-time, for college students formerly in care to come home for weekends and school breaks and for ministry groups who would need a place to stay for weekend-long serve projects,” he added. “This multi-use duplex will have a three-bedroom apartment on one side and a two-bedroom apartment on the other.”

Help for single mothers

Along with Shelter Care and Campus Care, ABCH also offers Family Care such as Grace’s House of Hope in Mobile, which recently celebrated its one-year anniversary.

Grace’s House of Hope serves up to seven single-mother families at one time.

“Single moms come to us without a home for a variety of reasons, but each of them are seeking stability and hope for their futures,” said Rachel Burden, who serves as house manager.

Burden, who formerly served as an as-



ABCH photo

An artist’s rendering of the new Pathways Professional Counseling center currently being built in Birmingham shows how the center will connect to the current ABCH administrative offices.



ABCH photo

Grace's House of Hope in Mobile is part of the ABCH Family Care ministry, which seeks to help families get a fresh start in their spiritual lives, as well as in finances, education, home stability, child care and career opportunities.

sistant in Pathways' Mobile office, said she has seen God work in the lives of 14 moms and 20 children through the house so far.

In Family Care moms are given the chance of a fresh start in many areas of life — finances, education, home stability, child care and career opportunities.

"Our hope is to show them that they not only have the opportunity to receive a fresh start in their physical lives but in their spiritual lives too," Burden said. "They have the chance, if they haven't already, to experience true heart change through the power of Christ. And once they've experienced salvation they can rely on Christ in their day-to-day decisions." Some are building on a foundation already laid and some are starting anew, she added, noting two specific moms in care. "You can see a light in them. It's amazing.

"My heart goes out to the moms," Burden said. "When you hear their stories, you want to get involved with them and help them move to the next level. They come here with nothing and when they leave they have something."

Community support

Burden also noted how the help of the community has made a difference. "Through sponsorships we've been able to gift three cars to lift the burden of finding transportation, and have provided four scholarships for finance classes held in the home this year," she said.

A fresh start is offered each day in light of God's new mercies and ABCH hopes to emulate this hope in a practical way for single mothers and their children who are fleeing crises and seeking safe refuge through Family Care. "God is working every day through this ministry and we are excited to be a part of it," Burden said.

Foster families expanding

Exciting ABCH news also is happening on the eastern side of the state in the Auburn-Opelika area. In one year's time since beginning a new program there the number of licensed ABCH foster families has gone from zero to 10.

Social worker Elizabeth Williams said the ABCH foster families have cared for 24 children during the past year.

"We have seen tremendous growth," she said. "We've also been able to hire a part-time social worker to help with this growth and serve our children and families.

"Our families — they are such a sweet group of people," Williams said. "Foster care is brand new to all of them and they are very supportive of each other. I recall many times of getting ready for when a child leaves their home — which is difficult — seeing other families step in and really help each other in that transition time. They call and check in on each other. I'm very thankful for families who get along and support each other so well.

"In addition to great relationships with

our families we've also been blessed with an outstanding partnership through our host church, First Baptist Church, Opelika," Williams said. "They are wonderful partners. You truly could not ask for a better group. Whatever we need assistance with they're willing to help us with. They give us a place to have an office and a place to teach classes, and they don't ask for anything in return. I feel like we're a part of their church family and it's felt like that from day one. We really appreciate them."

Staff updates

Along with the expansion of services and new construction projects taking place, ABCH also has some staff updates.

Steve Sellers, who served more than 20 years as church relations manager, has transitioned into the role of development and church relations officer for North Alabama. Having previously served the entire state, Sellers is now concentrating his time in North Alabama, serving the Decatur campus and surrounding counties.

Jay Boyd, ABCH director of development, said, "Steve Sellers has been building relationships with Alabama pastors and churches to help care for the fatherless and hurting families across our state for over 20 years," Boyd said.

"Steve will continue being an excellent advocate for children and families in North Alabama as he advances the mission of ABCH."

Marshall added, "Steve has an amazing network of friends in north Alabama. With the demand for services in Decatur and the awesome sense of ownership of that campus by Baptists in the area, it made sense to ask him to spearhead the opportunity for our North Alabama brothers and sisters to learn more about our campus activities and to invest in the construction there."

Sellers said, "I am grateful that the Lord has placed me on the ABCH Decatur Campus to make churches and partners aware of the fatherless around them in North Ala-

bama. Of the two buildings under construction, we are asking churches and partners to help us furnish the homes and with other needs of the campus."

To free up Sellers to tackle this new project, ABCH has added Les Hughes to the team to serve as church relations manager.

Having served as a bivocational pastor, a grocery store manager, a college professor, a pastor of small rural churches and a pastor of a few large churches, Hughes said he feels uniquely prepared by God to serve in this new role.

Hughes most recently served as pastor of a church in Kentucky and previously served at Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster.

"I can see how God has worked upstream in my life to prepare me to serve Alabama children and families through ABCH," Hughes said. "I have the heart of a pastor and a heart for pastors, so I look forward to serving alongside them and the churches they shepherd to help make disciples."

Boyd added, "Les Hughes understands the unique challenges and incredible blessings that pastors face each day because he's been there. He pastored for 30 years — many of those years in Alabama."

Marshall noted, "Les will be a great relay runner to take the church-relations baton from Steve and run toward the next runner. Steve will continue to be in churches most Sundays — just try to stop him! — and soon Les will be preaching in churches all across our state, helping us to get our story in front of pastors who can, in turn, make sure their churches are well-informed about the work of our ministry.

"There is indeed much to be celebrated in this season of the ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries," Marshall said. "We are always deeply indebted to generous Alabama Baptists who make it possible for us to dream big and see what God has in store."

To learn more, visit alabamachild.org.



SELLERS

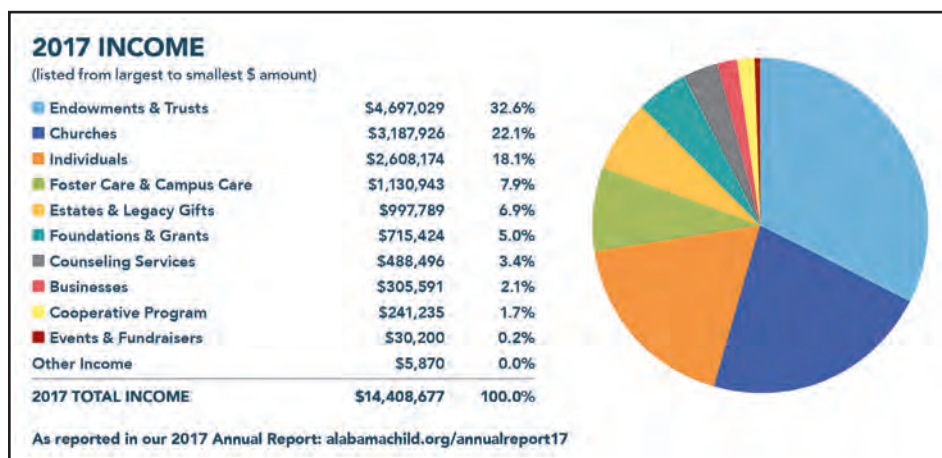


HUGHES



ABCH photo

A multi-use duplex home is currently being built in Decatur for respite care for house parents and college students formerly in ABCH care as well as ministry teams. It will have a three-bedroom apartment on one side and a two-bedroom apartment on the other side.



Source: ABCH 2017 Annual Report

Baptist attitudes about alcohol may be shifting, observers say

For well over a century, Southern Baptists have supported abstinence from drinking alcoholic beverages, but some cultural observers say attitudes about alcohol use among Baptists may be shifting.

Evan Lenow, an ethics professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is one of those who has noted the change. He cites the lifting of alcohol bans at two Christian schools friendly to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC): Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 2013 and Dallas Theological Seminary in 2014. He also recalls a conversation with the former pastor of a notable Southern Baptist church who spoke openly of his own alcohol use.

Following the 2016 SBC annual meeting in St. Louis, a convention goer wrote a blog post titled "Why Baptists Drink but Might Not Want You to Know It." In the post she recounted her attendance at a lunchtime panel discussion during the convention, at which a well-known Southern Baptist pastor referenced his alcohol use. The blogger said she also "has grown to enjoy a glass of wine now and then."

Lenow's conclusion: "I believe we are seeing a change from total abstinence to a trend of acceptance of alcohol among Southern Baptists. The emphasis has moved from warnings about alcohol to highlighting Christian freedom."

Jenny Morrison, a wife and mother who fell prey to alcohol abuse, said "a whole lot" of her Baptist friends "drink socially."

"They won't do it at a sanctioned church function," she said, but about half feel liberty to drink at a "get-together" with church friends and even post it on social media.

"It's such a sticky subject," Morrison said. "... What's the line?"

Two recent studies seem to support the historic Baptist position. The first, published in August in the medical journal *The Lancet*, contradicts previous claims that alcohol has health benefits. The second, published in September by the World Health Organization's Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, claimed 1 of every 20 deaths in the world results from "harmful use of alcohol."

But Lenow said Baptists' view of alcohol is based not so much on health but on Scripture, especially passages in Proverbs and Ephesians.

"Ephesians 5:18 is the clearest and least controversial of the passages," Lenow said. "In that verse, Paul clearly prohibits drunkenness. ... He also includes drunkenness in vice lists such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11."

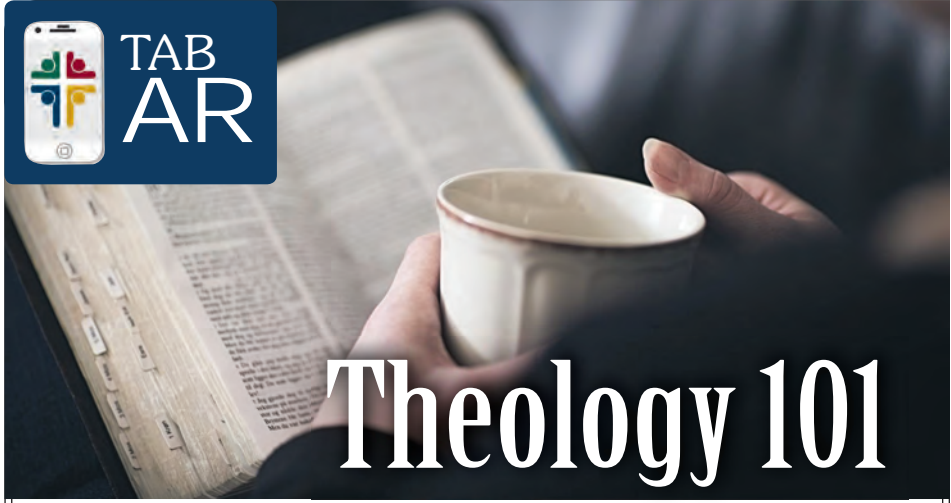
The question for some is how much alcohol is too much, Lenow said.

"Some say that any alcohol is too much" and reference passages like Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 23:29-35. "Some say that you must stop before drunkenness. The problem is quantifying drunkenness," Lenow said.

"Personally I fully abstain from the use of alcohol," he said. "I have seen alcohol destroy people ... I have no desire to inflict that pain on myself or those I love." (BP)

Baptists' view of alcohol is based not so much on health but on Scripture.

Evan Lenow
ethics professor,
Southwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Thinking About Thanksgiving

The Supreme Reason for Gratitude

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

Next week brings us to Thanksgiving Day. In this week leading up to that day Theology 101 takes a look at what might be called the supreme reason Christians have for being persons of gratitude. Of course we give thanks for many blessings, many of which are material or physical in nature. These are by no means unimportant.

However, much about which Christians are grateful for is spiritual in nature. When we narrow down the most important reason for a Christian giving thanks we do well to remind ourselves of 2 Corinthians 9:15: "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." Bible readers usually understand the gift to be Christ Jesus.

While the King James Version terms Christ an "unspeakable gift," other versions employ other translations: the New King James Version and New International Versions both use "indescribable" to refer to this gift. The English Standard Version reads "inexpressible." How does one speak of Him who is unspeakable, describe Him who is indescribable and express Him who is inexpressible? In an attempt to do so we might approach the season of thanksgiving by meditating on seven truths about Christ, our supreme reason for gratitude.

First, He is the eternal Son of God. This divine Gift was Himself fully divine. He was in the beginning with God and was God. He brought the perspective of eternity into time and that of heaven down to earth. He paraded the ways of divinity among humanity that we might grasp spiritual truths.

Second, He is the sinless Son of Man. Born of human lineage, God's unspeakable Gift walked in human sandals, understood temptation without succumbing to it, was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, found Himself touched with the feelings of our infirmities and submitted Himself to mistreatment and indignities without ever committing sin.

Third, He is the Good Shepherd of

the sheep, as we pondered a couple of weeks ago. Appearing among imperfect human beings, God's inexpressible Gift loved ordinary people who were sinners, helped them with their hurts, healed their diseases, lifted their hopes and promised them life everlasting, all because He came to be our caring Shepherd who seeks the suffering, the straying, the sinning and the sorrowing.

Fourth, He is the crucified Savior of the world. From birth He was destined to die for the sins of the world. Even before birth He was designated as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Fifth, in His death He was the perfect sacrifice for sin. What repeated animal sacrifices could not do, Christ accomplished once for all. Dying as the just for the unjust, He takes away sin that He might reconcile us to God.

Triumphant King

Sixth, He is the resplendent sovereign of all. Through the resurrection from a death that could not hold Him and by the ascension to the Father's right hand, He triumphed over death, hell and the devil.

Seventh, He will be the returning and triumphant King of kings and Lord of lords. When the trumpet sounds and the archangel shouts the Lord of Glory will appear the second time to gather those who are His into an eternal future while fitting us for the new heaven and new earth that we might be at home with Him through the endless ages.

And so we who belong to Him can again this year give thanks to God for His greatest Gift.✠

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.



REFLECTIONS



James Smith, associational mission strategist for Tallapoosa Baptist Association, introduces the team from Samford University and *The Alabama Baptist* to the pastors and church leaders in Tallapoosa Association on Aug. 9.

Technology in Ministry

Program helps Alabama Baptist churches get technology boost

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Tom Sibley, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Florence, said his church knew it needed to use the internet for ministry.

“The playing field is equal on the internet, whether you’re a small church or a big church and we knew we needed to be using that,” said Sibley, whose church runs between 50 and 80 in attendance on Sundays.

So they started broadcasting on Facebook, but “we didn’t have a clue what we were doing,” he said.

Then he found out about the Technology in Ministry (TIM) program — a joint partnership between the Center for Congregational Resources (CCR) at Samford University and *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) that offers consulting and a \$2,500 grant to churches that could use a technology boost.

Sibley said he applied immediately and began walking through the TIM program process. “We bought the equipment that they recommended and it worked out great,” he said.

They even had some funds left over to put toward replacing their analog soundboard with a digital one.

“For our shut ins or someone who misses church, they’re able to watch us live and this gives them a much better experience. Plus we have reached several folks who don’t go

to church,” Sibley said. “The TIM program is a ministry that everyone ought to take advantage of. The most help to us was getting Facebook right.”

Michael Wilson, CCR director, said that kind of ministry boost is exactly what grants like Liberty’s are for.

The grants, offered through CCR by the Lilly Endowment, go to help congregations



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

For more information or to find out how to apply, contact Haley Piersol at The Alabama Baptist at 205-870-4720, ext. 118.

enhance their church’s technology in whatever way they might need.

That might mean buying equipment like Sibley’s church did. Or it might mean buying software or hiring an intern.

“The idea is that those grants would help to provide resources — a broad range of things from strategic consulting to networking to the purchase of equipment,” Wilson said.

Three group meetings

To be a part of the TIM program, pastors attend three group meetings. The first is an initial workshop in which they learn about the resources available. This one is usually conducted through their local Baptist association. Then they have two more meetings with a small group of peers in their area to swap ideas.

Along the way they also talk with a CCR consultant who can help them identify ways they can enhance their church’s ministry through technology. And staff from TAB can help them address any needs they may have for social media ministry or a website.

Then they receive the grant to use in the way they’ve deemed best to meet their technology needs.

More than \$100,000 was distributed to 38 churches and seven associations between November 2017 and October 2018.

It’s a great working partnership, Wilson said. The Lilly Endowment provides funds for the grants. Samford provides the administrative costs for CCR to manage and award those grants. And TAB helps get churches connected with the people who can help them with what they need.

“Any church can be a member of a TIM group and be eligible for the grant, but we are particularly interested in helping smaller



Photo by Grace Thornton

TIM leaders Jennifer Davis Rash (right) and Alvin Pelton (second from right) share with Barbour Association church leaders Aug. 23.

congregations — churches with limited financial capacity for ministry opportunities,” Wilson said. And while Alabama Baptist churches have been the primary recipients during this first year of TIM, the funding and training is available to churches of all denominations.

If for some reason a church doesn’t need or want to go through the TIM program and apply for the grant, it can still have access to TAB’s Digital Services — the component that helps them assess their online presence and build a Facebook page if needed. TAB’s Digital Services staff also can assist in building a basic website for a small fee or provide suggestions for developing a website through other options.

“We can help them enhance what they’re doing already or get set up on social media and make the decision about whether they

want to have a website,” said Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB’s editor-elect. “If they decide they do want a website, we help them find a way.”

All the grants have been awarded for 2018, but at the beginning of 2019, a new set will be available. ¶



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Michael Wilson, director of the Center for Congregational Resources at Samford University, shares about the Technology in Ministry opportunity with pastors of Central Baptist Association on Aug. 16 at the association office in Rockford.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Michael Wilson explains how the funds for churches provided by the Lilly Endowment work.

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Bringing 'help, hope and healing'

Typhoon Yutu work begins, other DR efforts continue

Relief and recovery efforts from an active tropical season have kept Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteers busy from the southeastern United States to the South Pacific.

Most recently Southern Baptists have been in the midst of organizing a response to Typhoon Yutu, which overwhelmed the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), a U.S. territory which is part of the Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention (HPBC).

On Oct. 24, Yutu reportedly swallowed the 67 square-mile island of Saipan, endangering the roughly 52,000 inhabitants. Saipan is the northernmost island of CNMI, roughly 3,860 miles west of Hawaii.

In the aftermath of Yutu's destruction officials were working to clear roads and repair the airport,

said Darrell McCain, disaster relief director for HPBC. Only military and humanitarian relief were allowed to fly into the island.

"The Baptist Association of Micronesia (BAM) is sending a disaster relief team to start assessing and working on [Church 360 in Saipan]," McCain said Oct. 30.

Typhoon Yutu delivered a blow to Church 360 tearing down walls and rendering some of their meeting spaces unusable. Church volunteers, however, cleaned up, and they managed to host a worship service the Sunday following the storm.

SBDR teams hope to repair the church and use it as a base of operations to serve the community, McCain said.

"Many homes are damaged or destroyed and will need lots of help," he said. "We will do our best to go and bring help, hope

and healing in Jesus' name."

Chris Martin, the executive director/treasurer of HPBC, expressed his thanks to Rob Puckett, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Guam, and to the churches that make up BAM for their quick response. Puckett serves as BAM's disaster relief coordinator.

'Generous response'

"Please join us in fervent prayer and generous response to the churches and community in Saipan," Martin said.

SBDR volunteers also continue their work in the Southeast in response to Hurricanes Florence and Michael.

In early November, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR) volunteers were serving in Marianna, Florida, as part of a feeding team. ABDR volunteer Charlotte Crane assisted with a team from Five Points Baptist Church, Northport. She said the team stayed busy.

"The needs are tremendous



Photo by Charlotte Crane

Volunteers from Five Points Baptist Church, Northport, prepare a meal as part of a Disaster Relief feeding team staged in Marianna, Florida, a town hit hard by Hurricane Michael.

down here and the people are so grateful for the help," Crane wrote in a Facebook post Nov. 1. "You will be blessed by serving!"

Sam Porter, national director for disaster relief at the North American Mission Board, said he expects Southern Baptist feeding units to be in place at some sites in Florida at least through Thanksgiving.

"We have hundreds of volunteers who are still helping people clean up storm damage, and we will still need hundreds more to volunteer months from now," Porter said. "The damage from these hurricanes has been that extensive."

In response to Hurricane Mi-

chael SBDR has surpassed the 700,000 mark in meals provided. Southern Baptist volunteers have also cleared more than 1,300 homes and yards of downed trees and other storm debris.

Helping the Carolinas

In North and South Carolina, SBDR volunteers provided more than 1.1 million meals, cleared nearly 1,200 homes and performed flood clean-up for more than 600 homes following Hurricane Florence.

So far Southern Baptists have presented the gospel more than 2,100 times through disaster relief work and reported 224 professions of faith. (BP, TAB)

"The needs are tremendous down here and the people are so grateful for the help."

Charlotte Crane, disaster relief volunteer



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Supreme Court tests wall separating church, state

The U.S. Supreme Court is weighing in on the constitutional question of whether the symbol of Christ's crucifixion is necessarily religious.

The high court agreed Nov. 2 to review a lower court ruling that a 40-foot cross at the center of one of the busiest intersections in Prince George's County, Maryland, violates the First Amendment's ban on establishing or favoring a religion.

The Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a 2-1 decision in October 2017 that the Peace Cross standing on government property in Bladensburg, Maryland, breaches the "wall of separation" between church and state mandated by the Constitution.

Primary effect

The majority determined that the monument erected by the American Legion in 1925 to honor veterans of World War I and maintained with government funds "has the primary effect of endorsing religion and excessively entangles the government in religion."

Chief Judge Roger L. Gregory filed a dissenting opinion that "while displaying a religious

symbol" the monument was built to memorialize the 49 county residents who gave their lives in battle, and no reasonable observer would understand it "to be a divisive message promoting Christianity over any other religion or nonreligion."

The American Legion, represented by First Liberty Institute, a conservative religious liberty advocacy and legal defense organization located in Plano, Texas, said the decision will require not only demolition or defacing of the Bladensburg cross, but also removal of two principle World War I memorials in Arlington National Cemetery and hundreds of similar monuments across the country.

The American Humanist Association, which filed the lawsuit challenging the cross in 2014, says the proper question "is not whether the Christian cross at issue can reasonably be perceived as a war memorial, but rather

whether it can reasonably be perceived as a war memorial that commemorates Christians to the exclusion of all others."

"Surely a Christian cross war memorial does not commemorate, and necessarily excludes, the 3,500 Jewish soldiers who gave their lives for the United States in World War I," the association argued in its brief. "It also co-opts a sacred symbol for government military purposes, offending many Christians.

The Beckett Fund for Religious Liberty, among groups filing briefs arguing that the monument should remain, asked the court to clarify what test to use to decide whether a government is unconstitutionally endorsing religion.

In 1971 the Supreme Court established in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* a three-prong test to avoid violating the Establishment Clause. To be constitutional a law must have a secular legislative purpose, neither promote nor inhibit religion and

not foster "excessive government entanglement with religion."

In 2014 the Supreme Court decided 5-4 in *Town of Greece v. Galloway* that church-state conflicts "must be evaluated against the backdrop of historical practice" in upholding a town board's right to maintain its tradition of opening its monthly meetings with sectarian prayer.

'Ceremonial purpose'

"Ceremonial prayer is but a recognition that, since this nation was founded and until the present day, many Americans deem that their own existence must be understood by precepts far beyond the authority of government to alter or define and that willing participation in civic affairs can be consistent with a brief acknowledgment of their belief in a higher power, always with due respect for those who adhere to other beliefs," Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the majority opinion.

"The prayer in this case has a permissible ceremonial purpose," Kennedy opined. "It is not an unconstitutional establishment of religion." (BNG)



commons.wikimedia.org
Peace Cross in Bladensburg, Maryland

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Students assist Ruth Owuor (left, blue suit) and Charlotte Robertson (second from left, pink shirt) during the ground-breaking ceremony for a new school at Mescal's Children's Center of Hope in Luanda, Kenya.



Photo courtesy of Charlotte Robertson

'God just did it'

Clay County Baptists support orphanage named for longtime WMU director

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Kids love to be loved. It's a truth that connects the stories of two women who were born in different countries, in different decades and into different economic means. But the love for children God placed in the hearts of both women is a seed that continues to grow.

One of these women was Mescal Griffin, long-time WMU director at Lineville Baptist Church in Carey Baptist Association. If you grew up in a rural Alabama Baptist church, you probably knew someone like Mescal. In the days before seatbelt laws church ladies drove around the neighborhood, piling kids into cars and into the beds of trucks to take them to church.

Griffin got her first car in the 1940s, and she often said God told her to use that car to take people to

the doctor and to Sunday School. So that's just what she did for years and years.

Providing refuge

The second woman is Ruth Owuor. Ruth came to America in 1996 from Kenya with \$20 in her pocket and a painful past. She left a country where thousands of children were being orphaned because of the rapid spread of AIDS, but she never forgot the children.

She started a small business making jewelry, painting ceramics, crocheting and painting. She sold her handiwork at flea markets and later at a local mall and started sending money home to her family in Kenya to care for abused women and orphans. They eventually bought a piece of land and built a shelter where women and children could find refuge. For 10 years her business supported 30 orphans and four women in Kenya.

In a Bible study at Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Ruth met Mescal's daughter, Charlotte Robertson, who brought Ruth to speak at Lineville Baptist. It was the first time Ruth shared her story.

Mescal died soon after that and Ruth went to her funeral. Person after person stood during the funeral with a simple statement of gratitude: "If it weren't for Mescal Griffin I wouldn't be saved today."

As she heard those testimonies Ruth said God told her to name the orphanage in Kenya after Mescal Griffin. And so Ruth's orphanage became Mescal's Children's Center of Hope.

That was in 2011. And it wasn't long before Ruth felt God calling her back to Kenya to oversee the orphanage. That meant the loss of the financial support she had been giving the center. And that's when Charlotte Robertson got involved.

"My missions pastor said we needed a nonprofit and an accountant friend offered to help," Robertson said. "We got the status in about six months — God just did it. And the rest is history."

Robertson began to tell Ruth's story, which now included Mescal, dozens of children in Lineville and Clay County and orphaned children in Kenya.

Faithful support

The churches of Clay County have become an important part of the Mescal's Children's Center story through faithful financial and prayer support.

This spring the board began to talk about building a school for the children in Kenya.

"In the public schools, there are 80-90 students in each class and many teachers are Muslim," Robertson said. "Our board members there said the best way to make a

long-term impact for Christ is to have a Christian school."

Once again, Clay County churches stepped up. A dinner and night of worship at Lineville Baptist drew a crowd of nearly 200 people and helped raise funds. Seven Baptist churches along with Lineville Methodist Church and Highway Congregational Methodist Church in Randolph County participated.

The results of the fundraising was enough to build classrooms for kindergarteners through second graders and operate the school. They broke ground in June and Robertson will visit again in November to see the progress. The building project will help the children, but it will also make a difference for families in the community as men and women are hired to work, Ruth said.

"The impact of Mescal's being built here is of great importance," Ruth said. "The children's health has improved greatly. Their education is ongoing. And above all they feel the hope of Christ in them. Mescal's is continually changing this community." ✠

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‘Excellence and compassion’

University of Mobile unveils advanced patient care center, ‘living laboratories’

University of Mobile’s (UM) Weaver Hall is home to some new residents and they are changing the way UM students prepare for health care careers.

The new residents are human patient simulators, realistic manikins that can be manipulated electronically to mimic everything from medical emergencies such as a heart attack to labor and delivery. Each manikin rests in a hospital bed surrounded by medical equipment. During a simulation students treat the symptoms presented, which are controlled by an instructor in a nearby room.

The experience is as close as students can get to treating a live patient, which students found out in a recent simulation.

‘What to do’

“For our simulation lab we had a situation where it was a pregnant mother and she was early, she had some high blood pressure, she was having a headache, so we were checking to see how far along the baby was,” said nursing student Jennifer Camp-

bell, a junior from Robertsdale. “Then she coded so then you needed to do chest compressions and give her medication ... just a very typical hospital scenario that we had to play out and figure out what to do and how to do it.”

‘Wow factor’

Jenelle McElroy, UM assistant professor of nursing and director of the Center for Excellence in Healthcare Practice, said a scenario like the one Campbell and her classmates faced is powerful because it’s so realistic.

“Faculty are out of the room and the students have to depend on each other,” McElroy said. “They learn how important each other can be, especially in a time like this when it’s life or death.”

Giving students high quality, practical educational experiences is integral to the mission at UM, and its why UM invested in the high-tech “living laboratories,” said UM President Dr. Timothy Smith, who called the \$4.6 million health care and science education center “the most advanced patient-care educational environment in the South.”



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

Nursing students work on a patient simulator in University of Mobile’s new ‘living laboratories,’ an advanced patient-care center aimed at providing students with real-life medical experience.

UM calls its approach to teaching college courses “Prac-academics™,” which Smith describes as “the educational process of teaching theory or the academics in the classrooms, while providing practice environments to enhance the learning and retention of content taught in the classroom.”

Though the patient simulation labs definitely have a “wow fac-

tor,” the labs are all about preparing students to excel in their future health care careers, Smith said.

“Patients will be cared for with excellence and compassion in the days ahead because of the advanced level of academic preparation that was afforded to their caregiver here at University of Mobile,” Smith added.

Smith joined students, faculty members and guests for a ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 30 to reveal the new labs housed at Weaver Hall.

The 40,000-square-foot renovation, which takes up two floors, encompasses the College of Health Professions and the College of Arts & Sciences — Department of Natural Sciences.

A.J. Nipper, a pre-med major in his junior year at UM, thanked

those gathered at the ceremony whose donations, vision and work made the new center possible.

“This university continually strives to provide the best learning experiences to best prepare us to fulfill the call God has on our lives,” Nipper said. “This facility provides us with strong advantages now so that we may have brighter futures ahead. And that means the world to us.”

The center has more than \$1 million in human patient simulators including a state-of-the-art human anatomical laboratory and a full-size operating room. UM added new technology that enhances learning, including augmented reality, where students can view a virtual 3-D model of the circulatory system and walk around the room to see it from different angles.

The renovated space also includes health and sports science labs and classrooms, and high-tech labs for the study of biology, microbiology, anatomy, physiology and organic chemistry. Both floors include student commons areas, faculty and staff offices and conference rooms.

Student support

The new space will support student learning at all academic levels since UM’s offerings include undergraduate degrees in nursing and kinesiology, graduate degrees in nursing with either a nurse practitioner or education/administration track and the doctor of nursing practice. (UM, TAB)

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Tommy Strickland

‘Gracious givers’

Small Oneonta church sells parsonage, gives money to IMB to reach Asia

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Two decades ago Brent Baty put his skills to work building a parsonage for his church. He dug out the basement, put in the footings and with the help of others poured the concrete slab and built the four-bedroom house brick by brick.

At the time the people of Easley Baptist Church, Oneonta, in Friendship Baptist Association, couldn’t see all the plans God had for that house. They still can’t.

But one thing they know — it’s got a broader purpose than they ever dreamed. “We paid for it in four years and we’ve had some pastors who have lived in it,” Brent Baty said. “But we just didn’t need it anymore.”

The church had gotten small in recent years and their pastor is bivocational and has his own home, said Lois Baty, Brent’s mother.

‘Like a family’

“We’re a small church. We may have five in Sunday School and 15 to 25 for the service, but we’re like a family and our pastor is the best,” she said. “It’s just a joy to go

to church on Sunday. We know everybody really well and have a good relationship.”

But they knew they were past the need for a parsonage so at a recent business meeting Brent Baty recommended that they sell it.

And before the church had even voted they knew where the money would go.

“We decided the money should go toward missions,” he said.

“I told them in the meeting that I’d hate for Jesus to come back and us have money in the bank when it can be sown doing Kingdom work.”

Everyone agreed, including Pastor Toby Hollingsworth.

“We could have used it for some practical needs around the church, but we really felt that what we had was ‘barns of grain’ that were just sitting there. We

wanted to give those resources back to God for Kingdom use,” Hollingsworth said.

“We said, ‘Let’s just sow every bit we can back into the Kingdom and have faith God

will sow back into us and take care of what we need.’”

So they called the International Mission Board (IMB). Doug Medlin, an IMB stewardship adviser, came to visit them and explained some different ways their money could be used.

And Easley Baptist decided to put the entire sale of the house — \$134,000 —

toward reaching the unreached peoples of Asia.

“Now their loving work is going to support others half way around the world,” Medlin said.

“Gifts like these that come (through) the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering are vital to us reaching the lost and discipling the church that is growing in the hard and difficult places.”

The entire church, they’re “just phenomenal people,” Medlin said. And Hollingsworth agreed — he said God’s work at Easley Baptist through the generous members has encouraged and

challenged him ever since he got there.

He’s watched as older members have tithed their social security checks, living in faith that God would take care of them. And he’s watched other members continue to give faithfully even after they’re gone.

Estate giving

He mentioned one couple who were founding members of the church who set up their estate as a trust and even now that they’ve passed away the church gets a check from their estate every month.

“Even from the other side of the veil this sweet couple honors God,” Hollingsworth said. “That’s been such an example to me. That little church is so full of gracious givers.”

And the spirit of the church has gotten even sweeter since the sale of the parsonage, he said.

“The atmosphere, the spirit of the church has noticeably changed,” he said. Everyone’s level of sacrificial giving and sacrificial service seems to have stepped up to an even greater level. And new people have started attending Easley Baptist.

“It’s really just changed the whole church,” Hollingsworth said. ✝

“We wanted to give those resources back to God for Kingdom use.”

**Pastor Toby Hollingsworth
Easley Baptist Church,
Oneonta**

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Dr. John Thweatt
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Photo courtesy of 5:9 Ministries

Rob Bensinger and Jase Vann started 5:9 Ministries as a way to bridge the gap between the Christian and Muslim communities. Each quarter they hold a ‘lunch and learn’ where they talk about a shared moral value or belief from each other’s perspective.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers’

Shades Mountain members start ministry to build bridges with Muslims

When Rob Bensinger was at the North American Mission Board’s SEND Conference three years ago God struck him with a realization. He didn’t know any Muslims. That realization came after Bensinger, a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, heard two things at the conference that changed the trajectory of his thoughts. “One is that God has brought the nations to us — you don’t have to go on an international trip to find them,” Bensinger said.

starts right here where we are. So with that in mind he and fellow church member Jase Vann did some Google searches and found that an Islamic society was really close to where they lived. They reached out through a contact form on the website.

“I wrote that it seems we have some common moral beliefs, maybe we can build on that to unite the communities,” Bensinger said.

The imam wrote them back soon after saying he loved the idea.

In the time since Bensinger and Vann have formed strong relationships with the men at the Islamic center. They invite each other into their homes. And every quarter they do a “lunch and learn” where they get together and talk about some shared

moral value or belief from each other’s perspective.

For example, if the topic is “service to others” or “sacrifice,” the leaders at the Islamic center will share why Muslims believe those things are important, then Bensinger or Vann will share why Christians do.

Building friendships

“It’s meant to get the two groups to talk to each other and let us share truth,” Bensinger said. “But it’s also meant to allow Christians to get to know their Muslim neighbors. When you walk away it’s like a guard has been let down.”

You get to hear what they believe and get to know them better, he said. And you get to see how God is working in Christians’ hearts toward Muslims.

Vann said his ultimate desire is for Muslims to know Christ, but their friendship doesn’t hinge on

that. The whole point is to build relationships — that’s why they call what they do 5:9 Ministries. It’s based off Matthew 5:9 — “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

“We can’t share at all if our cultures are so separate that we never see each other or touch each other,” Vann said.

Vann said another thing it has done is to put an urgency in him that wasn’t there before.

“People are no longer groups of people to me — they are individuals with souls who are going to spend eternity either in heaven or hell,” he said.

Bensinger agreed. “It’s created a love in my heart for people who weren’t on my radar three years ago.”

He said it’s kind of like how a guy who is shopping for a red convertible suddenly notices all the red convertibles on the road — now Bensinger frequently notices the Muslims around him.

“... God has brought the nations to us.”

**Rob Bensinger
5:9 Ministries**

“It’s brought a new awareness to me. I’m always looking and wanting to see who else can I meet, who else can I befriend,” he said. “I have a desire to see and be aware of the nations here around me.”

Through 5:9 Ministries, Bensinger and Vann are also training churches on how they can better build bridges with Muslims and talk to them about Jesus. He and Vann have a tool they use to help church members find the Muslim community around them.

“We can train your church, equip them and assign you a territory to go out and share the gospel very strategically with Muslims in your area,” Bensinger said.

Vann said their heart is to get as many churches trained as possible.

“We want to partner with churches across the state in order to connect with the community around them and track the progress of the gospel,” he said. (TAB)

For more information, visit five-nine.org or [facebook.com/fivenineministries](https://www.facebook.com/fivenineministries).

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BETHEL

▶ **Mike Snow** is the new associational mission strategist for **Bethel Association**. He will begin on Jan. 2, 2019. He currently serves as pastor of Sardis Church, Thomaston. Snow holds a degree from New Orleans Seminary. He served with LifeWay World Changers from 2007 to 2013. Snow and his wife, Allison, have one child.



SNOW

of missionaries he grew up on the missions field in the Philippines. Owings often served as a guest preacher at Grimes Chapel and several other churches in the association. He and his wife, Brandie, have five children.

FRIENDSHIP

▶ **Union Hill Church, Oneonta**, will hold Christmas in the Country on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 at 5:30 each night. The Christmas musical "The Light Still Shines" will be at 7 each night. Bill Barnett is pastor.

MUD CREEK

▶ **Sparks Gap Church, Bessemer**, will hold a Thanksgiving service Nov. 18, 1:30 p.m. Special music will be brought by The Reno Quartet. Everyone is invited. Marvin Terry is pastor.

CENTRAL

▶ **Jonathan Owings** is the new interim pastor of **Grimes Chapel Church, Sylacauga**. As the son

TUSCALOOSA

▶ **Mount Olive Church, Coker**, will host a concert featuring pianist Alex-Zsolt on Dec. 2, 6 p.m. Nursery care will be provided. Tim Tindle is pastor. ▶ **Randy Pate** is the new pastor of **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**. Pate currently serves as pastor of First Church, Milan, Tennessee. He also has served as pastor of Grants Creek Church, Fosters; and Cottdale Church; and minister of music and youth at Carrolls Creek Church, Northport. Pate and his wife, Penny, have two children. ✝



PATE

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Across Alabama's Associations will not run in the Nov. 22 issue because of state convention coverage.



Congratulations

to Dr. Bobby Terry for 50 years of ministry and service.

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Ernest Edward (Ed) Onley Jr.

Retired pastor and career missionary dies at 86

Ernest Edward (Ed) Onley Jr., retired Alabama Baptist pastor and career missionary with the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), died Oct. 23. He was 86.

During his 52-year ministry Onley established the nation's longest continual-operating free-to-patient medical and dental clinic in Oklahoma City.



ONLEY

He was a well-known church and conference speaker, and he was an instructor in the Theological Education Extension Program of the Georgia Baptist Convention at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, for eight years.

Onley served in community ministries in Oklahoma City and Little Rock, Arkansas; and served as director of Christian social ministries for the Georgia Baptist Convention. He also served as a pastor in Mississippi, Oklahoma and Georgia. He retired to Dothan in 1997. He served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Dothan, from 1998 to 2002 and as interim pastor and pastor of several churches before he retired again in August 2015. He was an active member of First Baptist Church, Dothan.

Onley earned degrees from William Carey University in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Onley was preceded in death by his first wife June. He is survived by his wife Elaine, who he married in 1984, sons Ed, Kenneth and Steve; daughters Elaine, Edith and Karen; three stepsons; 19 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. (Jessica Ingram)

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200th anniversary

Cahaba Baptist Association celebrates bicentennial

Church members and leaders of Cahaba Baptist Association (CBA) gathered for a “Fellowship of Kindred Minds” on Oct. 28 at Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, to celebrate the association’s 200th anniversary.

The afternoon celebration began with an old-timey themed social time in the fellowship hall, complete with tea cakes and sassafras tea. Past and present Cahaba Association churches set up displays along with various entities and other groups related to Alabama Baptist life.

A special service in the historic sanctuary followed the fellowship time. Included in the program were presentations from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper.

Tom Stacey, director of missions for Cahaba Association, shared his vision for the future of

associational missions across the state.

Eleanor Drake, chairperson of the CBA 200th Committee, walked the group through highlights of CBA, the second oldest Baptist association in Alabama.

Originally the association’s membership spanned an area from Monroe County, Mississippi, over to Marion County, Alabama, on across to Blount County and as far east as

Montgomery County and south as Mobile County, Drake explained.

“During the past 200 years some 113 churches have been members of Cahaba Association.” (TAB)



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Cahaba (originally Cahawba) Baptist Association, the second oldest of its kind in Alabama, celebrated its 200th anniversary Oct. 28. Organized Oct. 3, 1818, Cahawba was paramount in the birth of many parts of Alabama Baptist and Southern Baptist life.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash



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Director of the office of evangelism, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

It is my pleasure to present to you the following evangelists as members of Alabama Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists. These men and women are called by God to spread the gospel of Christ to a dying world, spreading the news of hope and eternal life. Pray for these full-time evangelists and contact them to be used in your church, association or communities whenever there is opportunity. Remember, it is only good news if they hear it in time! Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." ✠



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Voters approve amendments on Ten Commandments, rights of the unborn

Alabama voters showed their support for the unborn and the Ten Commandments when they went to the polls Nov. 6.

State Amendment No. 1 authorizing the display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings in compliance with federal constitutional requirements passed by a nearly three quarters majority. The amendment prohibits the use of public funding to support legal challenges to the amendment and includes language affirming the right of each person to freely worship God as he or she chooses with no effect on his or her civil or political rights.

Importance of life

State Amendment No. 2 also passed, with approximately 60 percent voting in favor of adding language to the Alabama State Constitution to recognize the importance of unborn life. The amendment makes clear that unborn children have the right to life and makes it public policy to support the sanctity of the unborn. The amendment also includes language clarifying that the state

constitution does not include a right to abortion or require the funding of an abortion using public funds.

The amendment does not ban abortion in Alabama but could have significance if the U.S. Supreme Court were to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Actions Program.

"If *Roe v. Wade* is ever overturned or if the Supreme Court sends it back to the states to decide, the state Legislature will know the people of Alabama want restrictions on abortion," Godfrey said.

State Amendment No. 3 passed with approximately 60 percent of the vote. The amendment addresses the appointment of members to the University of Alabama board of trustees.

State Amendment No. 4 passed with support from 66 percent of voters. The amendment prevents special elections for any statewide political office vacancies occurring within approximately a year of a general election.

Nationally voters responded to measures on abortion, marijuana

and gambling with mixed results.

West Virginia also amended its constitution to prohibit the use of public funds to pay for abortions and to include language that the state does not recognize a woman's right to abortion. Voters in Oregon rejected a state constitutional amendment that would limit abortion funding to mothers whose lives are in danger or who have suffered rape or incest.

Marijuana, gambling

Michigan became the 10th state to legalize recreational marijuana use, but North Dakota voters rejected recreational marijuana use.

Florida, which has 11 of the nation's 17 active dog tracks, voted to phase out gambling on greyhound races by 2020.

Missouri voters lessened restrictions on charitable bingo games, and Maryland secured certain gambling revenues for education. Arkansas voters gave their approval to allow casinos in four counties.

Louisiana approved a fantasy sports measure that will be enforceable only in parishes where the measure passed. (TAB, BP)

We Are All Leaving a *Legacy* . . . What is Yours?



What does Legacy mean to you? One dictionary defines it as something handed down from one generation to another. Said in another way, our Legacy is something of our lives that remains once we have left this world. Some might think of Legacy only as material possessions left to one's heirs, but Christ tells us it means much more than that. Could our Legacy be all of the ways we affected others with our relationships, expertise, and resources during our lifetime?

Every day, we are each crafting our legacy. Whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not, the way we live our lives and the choices that we make **will** impact others. **So, what will your Legacy be?**

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 18

Explore the Bible By Kyle Beshears
Associate Dean and Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

WITH SUBMISSION
James 4:6-17

Through Humility (6-10)

The churches to whom James wrote were facing internal turmoil. Bickering, anger and fights erupted, causing division between communities who were called to unity by the love of Christ (James 4:1). James diagnoses the problem as pride and prescribes the antidote as humility. This is because grace is found wherever humility abounds, for God “gives grace to the humble” (v. 6). This prescription is not without its challenges. How often have you attempted to be humble only to find yourself floundering in stubbornness, jealousy, anger or, ironically, pride in your own humility? How then ought we pursue humility? Through the power of God by prayer. Early church father Augustine once prayed for this very thing: “There can be no hope for me except in Your great mercy. Give me the grace to do as You command and command me to do what You will.” Only by the power of God can we seek humility, resist the enemy and be cleansed in heart and mind.

Through Grace (11-12)

James is not advocating a laissez-faire approach to Christian community. Certainly, after all he has said thus far, he is not suddenly turning to an apathetic disregard for the behavior of fellow believers. He is, however, warning us that our judgment of others comes with a price. As the Lord Jesus taught, “you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others” (Matt. 7:2). Christ alone is the judge, the only one to whom the Father has given the right to judge (John 5:22). Instead it is our place to discern sin in ourselves and others, and to extend grace to fellow believers who are struggling in their obedience. Rather than judging one another,

which causes division and grieves the Father’s heart, we should humbly and graciously “[bear] with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2) and “forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone” (Col. 3:13). The Lord Jesus has forgiven us; shouldn’t we forgive others in return?

Through Submission (13-16)

James now addresses people who plan for tomorrow without considering God. Admittedly we have all had these kinds of conversations with spouses, families and business partners. We make plans without acknowledging the sovereign role that God plays in our whole life. Yet the question ought to be asked: Will God bless our plans for the future if we cannot steward His plans for us today? And can He bless plans from which He has been excluded? To be clear James is not advocating that we walk through life without planning. However, when we make plans without considering God or without submitting our plans to His will, then we only set ourselves up for disappointment and failure. After all, “a person’s heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9). James echoes this proverbial reminder that God, who is sovereign over all, ought to be sought in every decision and plan.

Through Obedience (17)

Earlier James challenged believers to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). Here James reiterates that message in a different way — sin is knowing what is good but not acting on that knowledge. In this way James broadens how we understand sin. So often we think of sin as doing what God has commanded us not to do. However, sin is also dismissing what God has commanded us to do. Sin is not merely withdrawing from evil; it is also abstaining from good.✠

Bible Studies for Life By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Religion, Samford University

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION
Matthew 6:12-13;
Psalms 51:1-7, 10-12

As we continue our study of the Lord’s Prayer we arrive this week at two verses that revolve around the issues of forgiveness and temptation.

Ask for forgiveness and protection from future temptation. (Matt. 6:12-13)

Jesus first instructs the disciples to appeal to God, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (v. 12). That we should ask God to forgive us for the sins we have committed seems obvious enough. What is somewhat jarring is the fact that Jesus links God’s forgiveness of our sins to the manner in which we have forgiven other people’s sins against us.

It is easy for us to slip into a highly individualized expression of our faith. We often think of our faith as a relationship that exists solely between ourselves and God, something that we practice privately and keep separate from our public lives. The authors of Scripture would find such a version of faith incomprehensible. For them faith was something that was meant to be lived out in community. Their emphasis lay in assembling together, sharing meals with one another, bearing one another’s burdens and holding one another accountable.

Jesus instructs the disciples that their relationship with God is integrally linked to their relationship with other people. Maintaining a right relationship with God is tied to maintaining right relationships with others.

Jesus emphasized this point in places other than just the Lord’s Prayer. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus urges His disciples that if they are preparing to offer a sacrifice and remember that a brother or sister has a grievance against them, then they should

set aside their sacrifice, go and be reconciled to that person. Only then should they approach God again with their sacrifice.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant, the one whose forgiveness was thrown into jeopardy because he would not forgive one who owed him in turn.

Confess sin and ask God’s forgiveness. (Ps. 51:1-7)

When we have followed Jesus’ instruction and forgiven those who have sinned against us, we can find in Psalm 51 a wonderful example of how we can approach God asking Him to forgive us. The psalmist reminds us to approach God with an attitude of brokenness and repentance. “Have mercy on me, O God,” the psalmist exclaims. God’s forgiveness is a gift not a right; it is an act of kindness on God’s part as He gives us what we do not deserve.

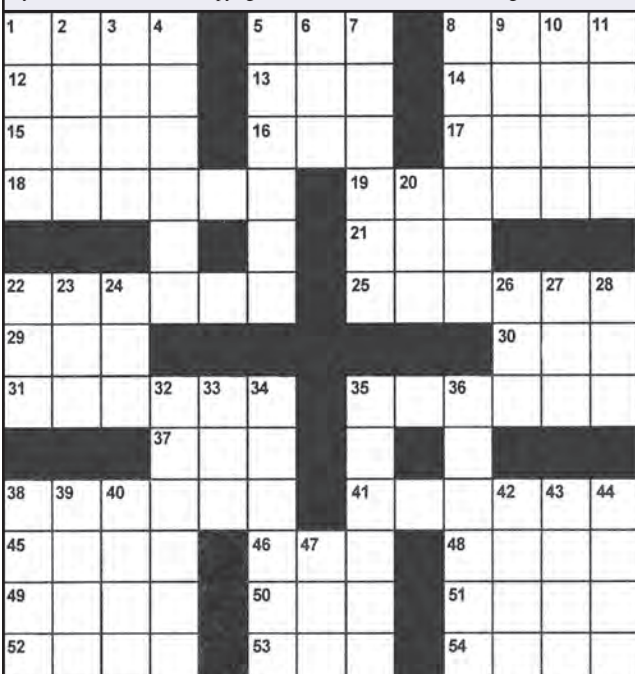
Seek restoration and renewal. (Ps. 51:10-12)

The second unexpected turn in Jesus’ teaching is found in His words, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” What Jesus is expressing is not so much a statement that God might actually lead us into temptation as it is a recognition of our own human weakness. Knowing the frailty that comes with being human, Jesus urges the disciples to ask God to act as their shield, to protect them from the kinds of traps that they could but ultimately may not successfully avoid.

These are the same sentiments expressed again in Psalm 51. The psalmist asks God, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Knowing his own innate sinfulness, the psalmist asks God to change him from the inside, to create an inner defense that can match God’s outer defense against falling once again into temptation.✠

Christian Crossword

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Across

- God is ___ to graft them in again. (Rom. 11:23)
- Arrest.
- A light that shineth in a ___ place. (2 Pet. 1:19)
- First king of Israel.
- The self.
- Great lake.
- The sons of Appaim; ___. (1 Chron. 2:31)
- Cat’s hand.
- Aromatic spice.
- And ___, Hanan, Anan. (Neh. 10:26)
- Tooth covering.
- Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of ___ tiles. (Gen. 25:34)
- Let him ___ evil. (1 Pet. 3:11)
- Become downcast.
- Like the roaring of the ___. (Isa. 5:30)
- “Much ___ About Nothing.”
- Better ... a man who controls his ___ than one who takes a city.

- (Prov. 16:32)
- And I will give you ___s according to mine heart. (Jer. 3:15)
- As the loving hind and the pleasant ___. (Prov. 5:19)
- That we may ___ mercy, and find grace. (Heb. 4:16)
- But I say unto you that ye ___ not evil. (Matt. 5:39)
- ___ without ceasing. (1 Thess. 5:17)
- Belonging to the King of Bashan. (Num. 21:33)
- ___ was ___ son of Gad. (Gen. 46:16)
- Ireland.
- Court, pursue.
- Military standing.
- Thou art ___, O Lord. (Ps. 119:151)
- Negative prefix.
- Angel. (French)
- For by the mounting up of ___th with weeping. (Isa. 15:5)
- Tishbite prophet. (1 Kings 17:1)
- Relation of Lot to Abraham.
- Turkish ruler.
- Put on ... ___ of mercies. (Col. 3:12)
- For I will ___ of thee. (Job 38:3)
- Esrom begat ___. (Matt. 1:3)
- Chinese staple.
- Main stem of a ship.
- Teacher’s organization.
- Superlative ending.
- We shall ___ him as he is. (1 John 3:2)
- Machine part.
- Dative. (abbr.)
- Former name of Tokyo.
- The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, ___ sinners in the congregation. (Ps. 1:5)
- And the ___ of faith shall save the sick. (James 5:15)

33. Not “a” or “u.”

34. Fame.

35. Who being ... the express image of his ___. (Heb. 1:3)

36. ___ fled away ... to the tent of Jael. (Judg. 4:17)

38. Put him to an ___ shame. (Heb. 6:6)

39. Type of cheese.

40. Fictional plantation.

42. Neighbor of Iraq.

43. Is any merry? Let him ___ psalms. (James 5:13)

44. Arise, and ___ up thy bed and walk. (Mark 2:9)

47. Sticky substance.



Media reviews

TV/MOVIES

Gospel-centered Bible films top November's family-friendly spotlight

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

Bible movies are a favorite in my household, but even the best ones leave me asking a series of critical questions such as: Is that really in the Bible? Did they make that up? Why did they put that in there?

Thankfully there are Bible movies that stick to the text and four of the best ones are now on Netflix. They have simple titles — “The Gospel of Matthew,” “The Gospel of Mark,” “The Gospel of Luke” and “The Gospel of John” — and use only the text of Scripture as their script.

This means you can pull your Bible off the shelf (filmmakers used the New International Version) and follow along as the movie progresses. It also means you won't be shutting it off in frustration, wondering why the text was changed.

They are among the most inspiring and skillfully made movies I've ever watched.

Documentarian David Batty directed them.

“It's the greatest story ever told,” Batty told me. “I wanted to try and be as authentic as possible.”

The movies were filmed in Morocco — which looks a lot like biblical Israel — and used actors and actresses from the region. Thus the characters look like the people of the New Testament.

You don't hear the characters speak though. Instead you see their lips move and hear a narrator read the biblical text. It's a unique filmmaking technique that works wonderfully.

The movies aren't short. Matthew and Luke span more than three hours, John about two and a half hours and Mark right at two hours flat.

These four movies share the top spot on this month's list of family-friendly spotlight.

Also worth watching this month:

► **“Charlie Brown: The Mayflower Voyagers”** — If you're searching for an easy and histori-



TAB AR

‘The Gospel of Luke’

Photo courtesy of Lionsgate

cally accurate way to teach your children about Thanksgiving then look no further. In “The Mayflower Voyagers” — which is free on Amazon Prime — Charlie Brown and his companions board the Mayflower and make their way across the Atlantic with the Pilgrims. God is given credit for the safe journey and prayers are said. I show it to my children every year.

► **“Drive Thru History: Acts to Revelation”** — Documentarian and historian Dave Stotts travels across the Mediterranean region to explore the locations and cities in the New Testament. Stotts has filmed five “Drive Thru History” series — including ones based on the Gospels and American history — but his “Acts to Revelation” 18-episode series is streaming for free through TBN's website (TBN.org). Others can be purchased at DriveThruHistory.com. It will entertain you and encourage you in your faith.

► **“Christopher Robin”** — This 2018 Disney film released on DVD on Nov. 6 and tells the story of a stressed-out man — Christopher Robin — who has lost his joy in life. Thankfully his childhood friends Winnie the Pooh, Tigger and Piglet help him rediscover the simple pleasures. It is rated PG, contains no coarse language and is one of the cleanest movies you'll ever find. It has lots of great lessons too.

► **“If I Were an Animal”** — In this cute, 13-episode Netflix series, two children teach other children about animals and insects, from birth to adulthood. The amazing cinematography

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.

will entertain adults, and the child-friendly narration will keep young viewers engrossed. It's appropriate for all ages. ✝



‘The Gospel of John’

Photo courtesy of Lionsgate

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BGEA photo

The 80-year ministry of the late Billy Graham is detailed anew in the documentary 'Billy Graham: An Extraordinary Journey' released on Nov. 6.

'Extraordinary Journey'

New documentary tells life story of Billy Graham

The late Billy Graham called himself an "ordinary messenger of the kingdom of God" but his legacy as "America's pastor" is unique.

Graham's ministry of nearly 80 years is chronicled in the new documentary "Billy Graham: An Extraordinary Journey," which released Nov. 6 on DVD and digital HD.

The release came a day before what would have been the 100th birthday of the beloved evangelist who died in February.

His son Franklin, who follows in his father's footsteps as CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), said the film tells his father's story as never before.

"You'll see things that you haven't seen before. We go back to the archives," Franklin Graham said in a BGEA press release. "We've dug deep to pull this material together which gives God the glory but shows how God used one man."

Film critic Phil Boatwright praised the film.

"For me what truly stands out in this documentary is Billy Graham's love for the lost," Boatwright said. "What's more, his example can uplift our own daily walk or ministry. A viewing of the production reminds us of what God can do with a life completely surrendered to Him."

Among details chronicled in the 72-minute film are Billy Graham's staunch support of civil rights and the harassment he suffered for supporting Martin Luther King Jr., according to a film clip BGEA released.

"There is no excuse ever for hatred," Graham says in the clip on the day of King's assassination. "There is no excuse ever for bigotry and intolerance and prejudice. We are to love as God loved us."

"Now today," the film quotes Graham as saying years after King's death, "it's almost impossible for the present generation to understand what things

were in those days and what it took to [support civil rights], how many threatening letters we got and how many threats against my family as a result of the stand that we took at that time."

The power of the Holy Spirit remained a mystery to Graham, who personally preached to 215 million people over the course of more than 400 crusades, Franklin Graham said.

"There's Holy Spirit-filled power in the gospel and my father preached the gospel," he said. "Now my father would tell you, 'I don't understand how it works but I know it works,' and God uses the fact that Jesus

Christ is God's Son, that He came to this earth to take our sins, that He died on a cross.

"He shed His blood for our sins," Franklin Graham said of Jesus. "He was buried for our sins and God raised Him to life. There's Holy Spirit-filled power right there in that message and that's what my father preached and God used that in a mighty way to bring many people to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ."

Major retailers will carry the film, BGEA said, and it will be available at BillyGrahamFilm.com. (BP)

"For me what truly stands out in this documentary is Billy Graham's love for the lost."

**Phil Boatwright
film critic**

For more information about 'Billy Graham: An Extraordinary Journey,' visit BillyGrahamFilm.com.



Churches examine security after attacks

PITTSBURGH — The frequency of attacks on U.S. houses of worship has many "hardening" against the possibility of the arrival of a gun-toting intruder in the middle of worship.

The shooting deaths of 11 people at Tree of Life Synagogue on Oct. 27 happened days before the one-year anniversary of the mass shooting at First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, Texas, where 26 were killed.

On Oct. 24 a white man who killed two black people at a Kentucky grocery store first tried to enter First Baptist Church, Jeffersonton, a predominantly African-American congregation, but the doors were locked and most congregants had already left.

Some houses of worship have added locks to doors or cut windows in them to provide better visibility. Some have armed their leadership or congregants. Others have sought out security consultants to advise them on how to at least look prepared to ward off an attack.

Some see enhanced security, including armed congregants, as a deterrent to being a welcoming congregation. Others see it as a health and safety issue. (TAB)

African Catholic Church 'tax' draws objections

KAMPALA, Uganda — Thousands of Catholics in one of the world's poorest nations are objecting after the Church asked the government to collect a 10 percent tithe from worshippers on its behalf.

A similar "church tax" in Germany has generated record revenue for the Catholic Church there, according to *The Handelsblatt*, a German newspaper — but the policy is also blamed for driving millions of people to leave the faith.

Several other European nations also collect religious taxes, which are sometimes voluntary, according to the Pew Research Center.

Archbishop Cyprian Kizito Lwanga urged the Ugandan government to begin deducting a 10 percent tithe from the monthly salaries of all Catholic believers. Lwanga said many do not voluntarily give the church 10 percent of their incomes.

More than a third of Uganda's nearly 43 million people live on less than \$1.90 per day, the international marker of extreme poverty, according to World Bank. (RNS)

Bishops call for more female voices in church

VATICAN CITY — A report approved Oct. 27 at the Catholic Church's Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment had strong language on women in the church, citing the need to increase their decision-making "at all levels" and speaking of "the urgency of an inescapable change."

The bishops acknowledged that the church's teaching on the inherent differences between men and women can lead to "forms of domination, exclusion and discrimination from which society and the church alike must free themselves."

The bishops avoided using the word "complementarity," a John Paul II term that feminists see as demeaning, instead referring only to "reciprocity between man and woman."

The document does not open the way for women's ordination to the priesthood or the diaconate. Nor does it call for allowing women to vote in the synod. (RNS)

Thousands attend world religions gathering

TORONTO — With its theme of "The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love" and its focus on global understanding, the seventh Parliament of the World's Religions held Nov. 1-7 brought together more than 8,000 people from 80 countries.

Karen Hamilton, co-chair of the Parliament's Toronto hosting committee and former General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, said the conference addressed climate change, attitudes toward women and the ways religion "has been used to support genocide, wars, persecution and injustice." (RNS)