



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



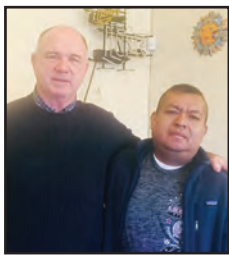
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To watch the videos from this week's issue, visit our YouTube channel or use the HP Reveal app on your phone or tablet and hover over the segments marked "AR."



Happy New Year

"PRAISE BE TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST! IN HIS GREAT MERCY HE HAS GIVEN US A NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD."

1 P E T E R 1 : 3

Unsplash.com, graphic by Lauren C. Grim

Jennifer Davis Rash takes helm as TAB's new editor Jan. 1

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Jennifer Davis Rash was getting ready to graduate from the University of Alabama (UA) in 1993, Jim Oakley had a plan for her life.

"She was an ideal student for me to recommend because I knew she would do well and make me and our program both look good," said Oakley,

then a career counselor and internship placement director for the College of Communication and Information Sciences at UA.

He had several publications ready to offer her jobs, including one prominent paper who wanted to hire her "very badly," Oakley said. "That group was also my selection."

But Rash felt God had something different in mind — something totally off Oakley's map. She felt like God was calling her to do media work through missions and ministry.

"The new direction surprised me as much as everyone else," she said. "But I absolutely knew it was from God.



RASH

"I had never considered serving on the missions field prior to my senior year in college, but a few months before graduation I encountered a Southern Baptist missionary home from the field

and my focus completely changed," Rash said. "It was as if she had been appointed to recruit me."

While the paperwork and

process for applying to serve with the International Mission Board (IMB) was daunting — especially on top of a rigid class, work and extracurricular activity schedule — Rash said she felt drawn to the opportunity.

So after graduating with a bachelor's degree in journalism she packed up her car and headed to join the IMB's partner ministry Caribbean Christian Publications based in Hollywood, Florida.

During that two years God solidified in her heart the call to leverage her career for the cause of Christ.

(See 'Epitomizes,' page 2)



'Epitomizes Christian professionalism'

Rash promoted to top leadership role after 23 years at TAB

(continued from page 1)

She also experienced a rich growth in her relationship with the Lord, made lifelong friends — one of whom would later become her husband, Jason — and discovered she had so much more to learn.

Oakley said he really couldn't understand her decision at first, but came to grasp it during her time on the missions field.

They stayed in touch during those two years, and by the time her term of service was up he understood. Oakley also knew exactly where she should land next.

It was late 1995 and Bob Terry, the new editor of *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB), was looking for strong new hires, Oakley said.

'Sense of peace'

Rash trusted Oakley's guidance, interviewed with Terry within a few days of returning from the missions field in December of that year and was shocked to discover how TAB immediately felt like home.

"I went into the interview think-

ing the position would be sort of a layover opportunity until I finished seminary," Rash said.

"But that same sense of belonging and peace surfaced again, one similar to what I experienced with the missions call," she said.

Immediate connection

Terry agreed. "The unusual part of the interview process was how Jennifer and I seemed to click as we talked about the role of Christian communications and the role of media in the church.

"Her talent was attested to by the awards listed on her biographical sketch," he said. "Her work with Caribbean Baptists demonstrated her willingness to work on a variety of different projects at the same time."

The two negotiated and Terry offered her the job. Her start date was Jan. 1, 1996.

"It was one of the best decisions I ever made because Jennifer has been a wonderful colleague and friend all of our time together," Terry said.

Now more than 23 years from that interview Rash has stepped into the role of TAB's president and editor-in-chief on the heels of Terry's retirement Dec. 31, 2018.

In those years in between she's served in roles from an entry-level news writer to the paper's executive editor, earned a master of theological studies from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham and served her church and community in a variety of ways.

"I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Terry for taking a chance on an eager, young journalist with so much to learn and investing in my growth and development," Rash said.

'High energy'

Arthur Williams, chairman of TAB's board of directors, said he's excited about TAB's future.

"She is very talented, hardworking, high energy, experienced and brings a wealth of knowledge to the paper," he said. "I believe the future is bright for *The Alabama Baptist*

under her direction and leadership."

Amelia Pearson, board chairman at the time Rash was tapped as editor elect, agreed.

"I believe Jennifer's appointment is a good example of preparation intersecting with opportunity," she said. "We are blessed that she has the experience in the business and that that experience has been with TAB. I know she has the support of Dr. Terry and the staff, which made her a very logical choice for the board of directors. Her dedication and vision should take the newspaper far."

'Well prepared'

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he's known Rash for more than 20 years and long felt she would be used by the Lord in a significant way.

"Approximately a decade ago I became convinced that Jennifer would serve well as an editor of a state paper. I was hopeful that her place of service would be *The Alabama Baptist*," he said.

"That time has come and Jennifer is well prepared to assume the role of leadership at *The Alabama Baptist*. She epitomizes Christian professionalism in her attitude and in her work. I am proud to have Jennifer in this most important role in Alabama Baptist life. She will represent us very well."

Terry agreed, saying Rash brings "a unique combination of gifts" to the role.

"She is winsome and outgoing, an inspiring leader and an award-winning journalist," he said. "Her years of service at TAB demonstrate her tireless energy and give her thorough grounding in the workings of this ministry, of Alabama Baptists and Southern Baptists.

"In addition to all of that she is creative and will lead the way to continue the heritage of leadership and service *The Alabama Baptist* has provided for the past 175 years. I wish her nothing but the best in the days ahead." ✚



"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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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Baptist Press (BP), Baptist News Global (BNG), Religion News Service (RNS), Forum 18 (F18), Morning Star News (MS).

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


'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017
as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



(augmented reality)

- 1** Download the HP Reveal app from your app store.
- 2** Tap the  icon at the bottom of the screen.
- 3** You will see pulsating dots, which indicate the app is searching for a target. Once it finds a target the dots will turn to a bull's-eye. The bull's-eye will remain until the augmented reality image loads.
- 4** Look for *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB) augmented reality logo (example shown above). Hold your device over the logo and watch the paper come to life.
- 5** Each week when TAB arrives, look for the AR logo to watch the video extras through the app.

MY RASHIONALE

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**
President and Editor-in-Chief

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



Sometimes you can't explain it but you just know

Hi friend, my name is Jennifer. I'm new here — not to Alabama Baptist life nor to the newspaper but to this historic page.

Traditionally referred to as Page 2, the editorial page in *The Alabama Baptist* has been the hangout spot for only 12 others in the nearly 176 years of our paper's existence.

Yes, you guessed it, intimidated would be a good description about now, maybe even overwhelmed — but not anxious.

I'm not sure I can do justice in explaining the peace and confidence, but the assurance is undeniable. It's one of those "you just know" kind of things and every fiber of my being is certain God has put me here.

And what an incredible privilege to have this next opportunity to serve Him and you along our journey home.

Does that make the new role an easy task? Absolutely not. Does that mean I'm not scared? Goodness, no.

There have been some days I've had to pull back from thinking, dreaming, evaluating, problem-solving, etc., about the big picture of *TAB* and focus only on that day's specific needs in order to prevent a loss-of-control feeling.

But balanced with those jitters is a healthy dose of excitement and courage — both of which are nurtured and strengthened by you. Your confidence in me is what gives me the confidence to move forward.

The love, support and encouragement I've experienced

through the years — and especially in recent days — nourishes my soul, fills my heart and supplies a sense of security. We all need those things to be and do our best in the places God has called us to serve.

Our team at *TAB* is committed to maintaining the paper's legacy of integrity, goal of clear communication and truth-telling, and adherence to the highest of journalistic standards.

Those parts will not change but you will notice differences in the look of the paper. For instance, that traditional Page 2 editorial I referenced is now on

Page 3. There will be other layout tweaks coming soon and I'll work hard to explain the various areas being adapted as we go along. We also will be developing other ways to share content and communicate especially on digital platforms.

Along with explaining where we are headed with the content of *TAB*, I'll also catch you up on me soon. If you know me already, you know I like to talk so we should be set for words on this page for a while. Ha!

Thank you for being my friend. I look forward to catching up with you each week and

maybe even in person from time to time. We plan to be out and about across the state a good bit, so I might even steal a hug if we end up in the same place.

Come by to see us, call, email, text or write a letter. However we do it, let's plan to stay in touch.

If there's one thing I know for sure, it is that I still have so much to learn in so many areas. I'm excited about getting to share what I'm learning and how I'm growing. And I'm hoping you will be willing to come along with me so I can learn from you as we go. 🌈

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Taking time to think through main priorities; implementing a few basic systems saves time, energy

Cracking open a crisp new calendar with 12 months worth of life yet to discover is always one of my favorite moments of the new year.

Smartphones and digital calendaring options don't provide the same satisfaction as pen in hand filling in schedules, appointments and plans.

While I do use a hybrid organizational system between the two worlds of digital and paper, it is still the hardcopy calendar and my endless lists that clear space in my mind to be able to think, dream and rest.

The chaos surrounding all that we attempt to pack into the Christmas season only serves to magnify the calmness that comes on New Year's Day.

I've lost count of the number

of years my goals going into a new year included simplifying life, creating more margin and decluttering at home and work.

But this year I've decided to surround myself with a team of friends and co-workers who have similar goals. We are working together to manage the chaos.

At the office and at home we are determining bite-size steps to declutter one drawer, one closet and one room at a time.

We also are streamlining systems in a way to avoid recreating daily, weekly and monthly routines multiple times.

By slowing down one time to think through exactly what needs to be done on what schedule and then creating a checklist with a timeline, there's no more wasted energy.

One of the hardest areas to tame



is always the pull and demands from others on our time. No matter how organized we may be, we can't control every life moment. We can continue working to create enough margin, however, that when those moments surprise us we have room to adjust. 🌈

Meet your 2019



Jennifer Davis Rash

President and Editor-in-Chief

Jennifer has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Jan. 1, 1996, and is a member of North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville.



Cynthia Watts

Executive Assistant to President/Editor-in-Chief

Cynthia has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Jan. 1, 2019, and is a member of First Baptist Church, Birmingham.



Janet Erwin

Executive Editor

Janet has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Jan. 1, 2019, and is a member of Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover.



Carrie Brown McWhorter

Content Editor

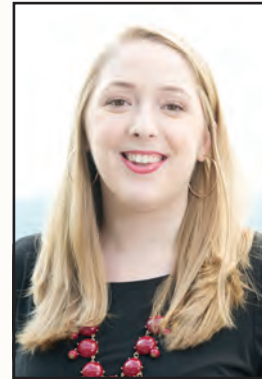
Carrie has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Oct. 1, 1995, and is a member of Beulah Baptist Church, Muscadine.



Lauren C. Grim

Creative Services Manager

Lauren has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Aug. 10, 2004, and is a member of Hernando Baptist Church in Mississippi.



Jessica Ingram

Production Manager

Jessica has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Sept. 16, 2017, and is a member of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.



James Hammack

Digital Services Manager

James has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Nov. 16, 2016, and is a member of HisWay Community Church, Prattville.



Haley Piersol

Digital Services Associate

Haley has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since April 25, 2005, and attends Faith Community Fellowship, Trussville.



Richard Maddox

Computer Services

Richard has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Nov. 18, 2002, and is a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.



Melanie McKinney

Advertising Manager

Melanie has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Feb. 26, 2001, and is a member of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham.



Pam Holt

Advertising Contractor

Pam has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since July 1, 2008, and is a member of Riverchase United Methodist Church, Hoover.



Susan Stevens

Advertising Contractor

Susan has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Oct. 29, 2010, and is a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.

TAB team



Debbie Campbell

Director of Communications

Debbie has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Jan. 3, 1998, and is a member of The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla.



Bill Gilmore

Director of Sales

Bill has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Feb. 1, 2012, and is a member of Highland Baptist Church, Florence.



Hannah Muñoz

Digital Editor

Hannah has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since March 20, 2014, and is a member of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.



Grace Thornton

Special Assignments Editor

Grace has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since June 16, 2003, and is a member of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.



Linda Harrison

Financial Administrator

Linda has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Nov. 12, 2010, and is a member of Church of the Highlands, Fultondale.



Deb Lowery

Financial Assistant

Deb has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Aug. 19, 2009, and is a member of Bethel Baptist Church, Dora.



Sarah Gill

Customer Relations Representative

Sarah has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since April 12, 2017, and is a member of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.



Amy Hacker

Customer Relations Representative

Amy has been with *The Alabama Baptist* since Aug. 24, 2016, and attends Church of the Highlands, Grants Mill.

Regular TAB contributors include Joanne Sloan with Heroes of the Faith, Jerry Batson with Theology 101 and our Sunday School commentary writers from Samford University and University of Mobile.

Michael Foust, Martine Bates Fairbanks and Jeremy Henderson help provide media reviews each week.

Leigh Pritchett shares the stories of those featured in Someone You Should Know, and Bill Sorrell covers sports personalities.

Margaret Colson and Martha Simmons assist with in-depth reporting.

The Alabama Baptist Historical Commission team assists with church anniversary coverage, and Pathways Professional Counseling provides sources and writers for the monthly Faith & Family section.

TAB's social media is managed by Dogwood Media Solutions, and the weekly TAB News podcast and audio digest is produced by Square Core Media.

A Strickland Youth Center inmate reads a Bible in his cell. The facility can house up to 119 juveniles who are detained for court proceedings, evaluation or awaiting placement in a treatment facility.

'Soul fight'

Youth in the correctional system are sign of family, community problems

By Martha Simmons
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Still wearing his black robe, weary Circuit Court Judge Edmond Naman sits at a massive desk piled high with files and paperwork associated with the largest and busiest juvenile court district in Alabama.

It's early but Naman's already been on the bench for several hours, and a long day of hearings and meetings and phone calls stretches before him.

While the uninitiated might think of a juvenile detention facility as something of a kiddie jail, the James T. Strickland Youth Center — known simply as "Strickland" to Mobile residents — is much more than that. It is the place where splintered families, society's neglect and institutional failures intersect on the daily docket.

In many ways Strickland represents ground zero of the life-and-death struggle for the soul of the community, Naman said. "It's a soul fight, is what it is."

Strickland has three facilities located on a 15-acre campus: the juvenile court; a juvenile detention center equipped to house

71 boys and 24 girls ages 12 through 17; and a 12-bed crisis center for children in need of supervision (known as CHINS).

Juveniles are defined as children up to age 17 and are generally covered under laws that take their ages and stages of development under consideration.

Under Alabama law children age 16 and above who are charged with a violent crime are automatically transferred to the adult jail and tried as adults.

Variety of complaints

As the juvenile court's presiding judge, Naman is assisted by two court referees and a district judge. Together they handle more than 8,900 complaints each year relating to juvenile delinquency, truancy, children in need of supervision, child custody, child support, involuntary commitments and contributing to the delinquency of minors.

A somber parade passes through Strickland's metal detectors each day. Panicked or drug-addicted parents, violent or neglected children, uniformed law enforcement and detention officers, sparring prosecutors and attorneys and harried social



Photo by Martha Simmons



Photo by Martha Simmons

Juvenile Court Judge Edmond Naman daily sees the impact of splintered families, substance abuse, physical abuse and neglect, educational failure, abject poverty and hopelessness on children and youth in Alabama's penal system.

workers fill the waiting area and courtrooms. Counselors and other social service providers meet with families in an effort to address the circumstances contributing to children's involvement with the justice system. Juvenile probation officers in the circuit's jurisdiction monitor the progress of an average 1,700 youth.

For all the government resources that are thrown at the issue of juvenile delinquency through Strickland's \$6.5 million per year operation and all its partner agencies, it simply isn't enough. The problem is too systemic, rooted deeply in splintered families, substance abuse, physical abuse and neglect, educational failure, abject poverty and, above all, hopelessness. "I see the bravery of these children," he said. "I would wilt after one day of living the way that they do, day in and day out."

A look at the numbers

The judge sifts through the stacks of paper and rifles through file drawers until he comes up with two sets of statistics. They are the numbers behind the faces he sees coming through his court each day.

One set of stapled charts outlines the

juvenile crimes that have churned through the Mobile County court system for the past decade — felonies such as burglary and murder, weapons charges and drug dealing as well as status offenses such as truancy and under-age drinking.

Such crime statistics are the predictable outcome of the data reflected in the second set of charts, the annual Kids Count report on the well-being of the nation's children, Naman indicated. That report traces the markers for children's health, safety, economic security and educational attainment.

The numbers are discouraging. In 2017, Alabama ranked 44th among 50 states in overall child well-being. And in Naman's jurisdiction Mobile County ranked 39th of the state's 60 counties. (For the most updated information about your county's children, access the 2018 Alabama Kids Count report here: https://alavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018_Data-bookComp_web_FNL.pdf.)

Being on the bottom rung of such statistics plays out every day in the court, Naman said, noting the overwhelming majority of the children he deals with live in poverty and are being raised by a single



A look at

**MASS
INCARCERATION
in Alabama**

Fourth in a series

parent or grandparent. There's also significant homelessness.

"These families are living in crisis," he said. "There's so much brokenness in these families — hopelessness, violence, drugs, abuse, neglect. There's so much we're battling. DHR is doing a good job but they're overwhelmed. The Mobile County Public School System's failing schools correspond exactly to where these kids are living. We're just not set up to deal with the social issues we're dealing with," Naman said.

"We can only do so much and then at some point we can't do anymore. We're failing these kids. We're failing them because we don't have the resources. And when we fail you see it in the headlines."

The help must come from outside the taxpayer-funded agencies groaning under an ever-increasing caseload, many experienced in the work contend. And the faith community is a critical component in addressing unmet needs for children and families at the bottom of the social food chain.

Important interventions

For instance, Naman said, faith-based efforts like the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries (ABCH), with locations throughout the state, provide important interventions for broken families. In Mobile the ABCH Family Care ministry provides struggling mothers and their children with transitional housing while the mothers gain employment, save money, receive counseling and learn life skills such as budgeting and parenting.

The need for such resources far outpaces their availability. People of faith can make the difference, Naman said. "We can't fight this war alone.

"The statistics are horrible," he noted as he sets the charts and graphs down on his cluttered desk. "But they don't show the eyes behind the numbers, do they? They don't show the hopelessness and fear and poverty. We need to look into the eyes of these children and see their souls.

"We've got to take care of the least among us in this community," said the judge. "If not for God, then for our own self-preservation." ✠

"The statistics are horrible. But they don't show the eyes behind the numbers, do they? They don't show the hopelessness and fear and poverty. We need to look into the eyes of these children and see their souls."

Circuit Court Judge Edmond Naman

'That one important person'

NEST of Mobile partners with court to mentor families

By **Martha Simmons**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

One caring adult can change the whole trajectory of a child's life, asserts Edmond Naman, Mobile County's juvenile court judge.

"In a lot of cases there's not one real responsible person in these kids' lives," Naman said of the children he sees each day at James T. Strickland Youth Center. "There's nobody who's inspiring them or fighting for them. They need that one important person who says, 'I'm not going to let you fail.' A kid can walk around trouble if he has someplace to walk to and someone to walk with."

To connect these kids with adults who can be that "one important person," Naman joined forces with other faith and community leaders in the summer of 2012 to co-found the NEST of Mobile mentoring program. NEST takes its name from their effort to "nurture children, equip parents, strengthen families and transform communities."

NEST matches teams of two or more court-approved volunteers with at-risk youth and families, working with the Mobile County Juvenile Court, the Department of Human Resources and other partnering agencies to match teams with youth referrals. NEST volunteers help kids and families address basic needs ranging from employment to school supplies. The volunteers also mentor them on life skills such as budgeting and meal planning. While each team signs up to work with the family during the court probationary period of up to six months, the overarching goal is for the team and family to develop a lifetime relationship.

Although a relatively young organization NEST is delivering some good statistics of its own. A

University of South Alabama study found that only 26 percent of probationary youth served by the NEST program re-offended. That's a significant accomplishment when compared with the statewide juvenile recidivism rate of 66 percent, and the national rate of 50-68 percent.

Ambitious goal

Currently NEST is fielding about 27 teams who are serving more than 30 youth and family members, but Naman hopes that number reaches at least 100. It's an ambitious goal but one that Na-



Photo by Martha Simmons

NEST volunteer Mike O'Neill (left) and Thomas Haney credit God's wisdom for getting Haney out of harm's way and on track through NEST intervention. The program helps at-risk kids address basic needs and life skills.

man insists must be achieved if Mobile County is ever going to rise above its poor ranking in child well-being and crime statistics.

And even more important, the judge said, is each individual reflected in those numbers.

Thomas Haney is one of those individuals.

The 18-year-old Haney showed up at Strickland Youth Center last spring, hoping to help his mother maintain custody

of his siblings. Haney, whose biological father was in prison, lived in a bus with his drug-addicted mother, her boyfriend and one of his siblings.

At age 18, Haney had aged out of the services that could be provided through the juvenile court or social services,

and Naman, who still had a couple dozen cases to hear that day, almost sent him away.

"I just didn't know what to do. He was 18," Naman said. "I felt I had failed God in letting him leave. There was nothing I could do ... except call him back."

After talking more with Haney and learning of his dire home situation, Naman connected the young man with Mike O'Neill, a NEST of Mobile contributor who owns an industrial supply business in Pensacola. O'Neill looked past Haney's dire family situation and into the young man's eyes. He offered Haney a full-time

job at the warehouse and a studio apartment at the work site to live in.

"Not a week later," Naman recalled, "Thomas's mother and her boyfriend were arrested for drugs." Had the young man still lived there, Naman said, he probably would have been swept up in the arrest too, "but God in His wisdom had already set things in motion." As a result of the NEST intervention Haney was already out of harm's way and looking toward a future that seemed unattainable only a few weeks earlier.

Giving God credit


He's back on track to obtain his high school diploma in May, after which he hopes to join the U.S. Marine Corps and become a registered nurse. As for his family situation, Haney said he does not maintain any contact with his father but that his mother is "clean and working full time with benefits." His 15-year-old sibling is now in foster care and the youngest, a five-year-old, is being cared for by his grandmother.

Like Naman, Haney gives God the credit for his life's dramatic turnaround.

"God has given me the ability to put down any outside influences, to think like an adult and to look to the future," Haney said.

As for Naman, O'Neill and the other NEST of Mobile volunteers, Haney said, "From the time I met them, all they've ever done is care. They are truly angels sent from God." ✠

To find out more about how to volunteer or support NEST, go to <http://www.nestofmobile.org>.



Across ALABAMA'S ASSOCIATIONS

AUTAUGA

► **First Church, Prattville**, will host an Acts 1:8 Impact Celebration on Jan. 26–27. Saturday will include a children's missions adventure, and Sunday will include a missions fair. For more information call 334-365-0606 or email larry@fbcprattville.com.

BALDWIN

► **Baldwin Association** will hold a World Missions Conference at The Wharf Event Center, Orange Beach, on Jan. 12, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. For more information or to register visit www.baldwinbaptist.org/world-missions-conference-2019. Rick Ellison is associational mission strategist.

BIGBEE

► **First Church, Livingston**, will hold a Baptist men's breakfast Jan. 27, 7:30 a.m. Thomas Fletcher is pastor.

CALHOUN

► **Calhoun Association** will hold its 2019 January Bible Conference on Jan. 20–22. Jeff Laborg will speak Jan. 20, 5 p.m. at Mount Zion Church, Alexandria; Ted Traylor will speak Jan. 21, 6:30 p.m. at Leatherwood Church, Anniston; and Kevin Hamm will speak Jan. 22, 6:30 p.m. at Antioch Church, Oxford. Gary Ragsdale is pastor of Mount Zion, Mike Owens is pastor of Leatherwood Church and Scott Smith is pastor of Antioch Church. Roger Willmore is associational mission strategist for Calhoun Association.

MARSHALL

► **First Church, Albertville**, will host

a retirement reception for Charles and Jo Ann Woods, founder and director of Great Physician's Clinic, after 16 years of service, and 48 years ministering in Marshall County. The reception will be held Jan. 13, 2–3:30 p.m. Chris Johnson is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Enon Church, Morris**, will hold Disciple Now for sixth–twelfth grade, Jan. 18–20. For more information call 205-647-9614. The church also will host Secret Keeper Girl on Jan. 31, 6:30 p.m. For ticket information visit www.secretkeepergirl.com/events. Russ Quinn is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Teddy Gandy** is the new pastor of **Pike Road Church**. He previously served as an elder and minister for the church. He and his wife, Juanda, have two children and one grandchild.

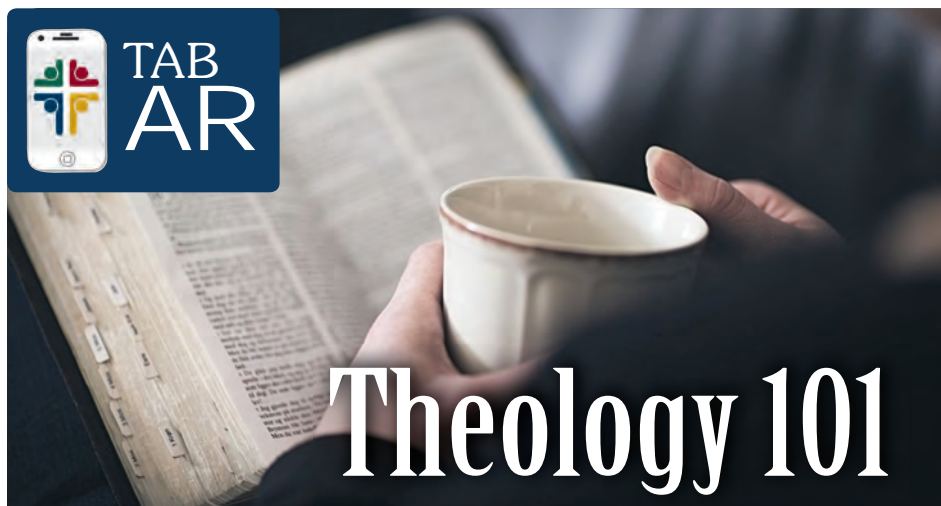


GANDY

MUD CREEK

► **Scott Nichols** is the new pastor of **Oak Grove Community Church, Bessemer**. He previously served as pastor of Ezra Church, Bessemer. ► **Smithville Church, Bessemer**, will hold a fish fry Jan. 12, 2 p.m. The event will be hosted by the men's Bible study group. Worship will be led by the Adger Baptist Boys and Smithville's Todd Garrison. Rick Cato will be the guest preacher. Mike Simpson is pastor. ☞

REFLECTIONS



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Biblical Imagery

The Bible as a Fire

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

In the course of last year's Theology 101, we used the idea of common images applied to Christ and to the Church as ways to discern theological truths about each. At the beginning of this year, the intent is to explore common images used to refer to the Bible as God's revealed word.

In this first installment we take note of a question put to the prophet Jeremiah by the Lord of hosts: "Is not My word like a fire, says the Lord" (23:29). Earlier the Lord had said to Jeremiah, "Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them" (Jer. 5:14).

A common purpose in using fire was often to purge or purify a substance. The heat of fire often purified precious metals by melting away impurities. Like with fire God's word has purifying capabilities. God's word applied to tainted hearts results in the spiritual cleansing of divine forgiveness.

In Isaiah's vision that called him to be God's prophet he saw one of the seraphim "having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said: Behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged" (Isa. 6:6–7).

Precious promises

Such was the idea behind the psalmist's question: "How can a young man cleanse his way?" His experience gave him the needed answer: "By taking heed according to Your word" (Ps. 119:9). The Bible identifies attitudes and actions that are sinful, but it also points us to precious promises of divine cleansing when we confess our sins. In so doing we find that God "is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Another physical aspect of fire is its illumining capability. Fire burning on a torch illumines a traveler's pathway amid darkness. A flame in an oil lamp

illumines a room. In a spiritual sense such was the experience of the psalmist that caused him to confess, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).

With poetical parallelism notwithstanding, in the psalmist's words we might understand divine revelation through God's word to cast light upon life's general direction or pathway, as well as often impressing us where the next step is to be placed.

Another aspect of fire is its warming capability. Cold hands are extended toward a campfire. A fire in a fireplace warms a room. In a spiritual sense God's word often warms our hearts.

Such was the experience of the two travelers from Emmaus when the risen Christ walked with them and talked to them from the Scriptures about things concerning Himself.

When Christ had departed from them, "They said to one another, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32).

A burning fire

Fire can go beyond merely warming; it can burn. Such was God's message to Jeremiah at a time when he was greatly discouraged over how people reacted to his message: "I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:9).

How often is God's word in us as a burning message to be shared? ☞

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.



Making and keeping New Year's goals

SMART goal setting provides a framework for staying on track with resolutions

By Anne Lawton, MA, LPC
Special to The Alabama Baptist

When counselors talk with clients about setting and meeting their goals, a helpful acronym we use is SMART.

SMART goal setting provides a simple and easy-to-remember framework for defining and managing goals.

As you consider your New Year's goals take a minute to write down not only your objective but how you will reach it using the five points of the SMART method.

Specific

Having specific goals helps a person feel more confident about what they are setting out to do, as much of the ambiguity is taken away. The more specific your goals are, the more likely you are to achieve them. Ask yourself: What exactly do I want to achieve? Why do I want to reach this goal?

Measurable

After setting a specific goal write down measurable steps you can take toward

reaching the goal. For example, if your goal is to exercise and get in shape, then come up with a number of days a week that you will work out and the amount of time you will work out each day. You might say that you will work out three days a week for 30 minutes each day. Consider enlisting an accountability partner or using some kind of tool (calendar, apps or journal) to add these measurable steps to your daily schedule and track your progress.

Attainable

Set goals small enough that you will be able to reach them. There's nothing wrong with setting high goals, but often it's easier to reach a very challenging goal in incremental, achievable steps. When you set smaller goals

for yourself that are attainable you will be able to accomplish each goal and then you can set a new one. As you attain one of your goals you will develop more confidence to accomplish your next goal. Therefore you will be less likely to become discouraged.

Realistic

Your goals should not take up too much time to fit into your schedule on a regular basis or be ones you would quickly become tired of doing. They should be goals that you have the means and ability to achieve. For example, if your goal is to get in shape and you are on a tight budget this year, then your goal would likely not include a personal trainer but might include going to the park three days a week for a walk or run. Furthermore your goals should be realistic so that you are able to maintain them. Consider any conditions or limitations (health conditions, work schedules, family responsibilities) that might interfere and how you will compensate within those boundaries.

Time-bound

Life is filled with appointments and deadlines. Apply that strategy to your goals. For example, if you want to be able to run a half marathon one day, you are more likely to achieve that goal if you set a time limit for yourself and say that you want to be able to run a half-marathon one year from now. If you simply say that you



Unsplash.com

will do it "one day," when will you begin to start training and taking steps toward reaching your goal? Set a timeline for your goals and stay on track. If you get behind give yourself a little grace, refocus and get headed back in the right direction.

Setting goals gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation. When you set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound you are more likely to achieve them.

As we begin the New Year let's not forget about our resolutions. Let's make SMART plans now and set out to achieve our goals.

If your New Year's goals are not

SMART and you are having a hard time keeping up, consider developing a SMART plan and starting over instead of throwing in the towel. You can do this!

EDITOR'S NOTE — Faith & Family is a monthly look at important spiritual, cultural and relational issues facing today's families. For more articles on contemporary topics like these, go to PathwaysProfessional.org/blog. Anne Lawton served as a counselor with Pathways Professional Counseling for more than 10 years and currently volunteers with both Pathways and Alabama Baptist Children's Homes. ✝

Goal setting

- S** Specific
- M** Measurable
- A** Attainable
- R** Realistic
- T** Time-bound

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Photo courtesy of FBC Vincent

(L to r) John Lee; his wife, Dolores; Karen and Ann Joines. Lee was interim pastor when the Joines purchased the carillon bell system for the church. He and his wife came back for the dedication of the bells.

Couple donates carillon system to FBC Vincent

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In the little Tennessee town where Karen Joines and his wife, Ann, lived for decades they enjoyed hearing the nearby Methodist church's carillon ring out hymns every day.

"We just always loved that," he said.

So they decided they wanted to give that kind of gift to their church, something that would "be a beacon to the community in terms of the Christian faith and also inviting others to come," Joines said.

And on Dec. 9, First Baptist Church, Vincent, dedicated the couple's gift — a carillon system that can play more than 2,000 preprogrammed songs.

Fills the streets

Played from a computer through speakers rather than with actual bells, it fills the streets of Vincent with the sounds of hymns.

"We live a distance away and we can hear it from our front porch," said Joines, who served as interim

pastor for First, Vincent, in the early 1970s while teaching at Samford University in Birmingham. "It's loud and clear and a testimony to our community."

The carillon's sound carries about a mile, and it plays the first verse of two hymns every morning at 9 and at 12, 3 and 6 in the afternoon. The schedule changes on Sundays for worship, with the carillon ringing out five minutes before the worship service starts.

They also have special music for holidays and for events like weddings and funerals.

Judy Aycock Henderson, media director for First, Vincent, said the church has already gotten phone calls from people in town saying they're thankful for the sound of church bells.

"It's a gift for the whole town, to bless people," she said. "It can be such a lift when you're going somewhere and suddenly hear 'Amazing Grace' and think, 'God is here, He hasn't left me.' We are ecstatic to have it." (Grace Thornton)

"It's a gift for the whole town, to bless people."

**Judy Aycock Henderson
media director,
FBC Vincent**

First North Alabama Quartet Convention to be held in Cullman

The first North Alabama Quartet Convention will be held Jan. 18-19 at Temple Baptist Church, Cullman.

The event is hosted by Living Faith Ministries of Cullman and will feature 20 southern gospel groups, including Answered Prayer, Day Three, The Shireys, The Connells and many more.

New Journey Radio will broadcast the event, which begins at 5 p.m. Friday and concludes Saturday evening at 9 p.m. Admission is free. For more information visit North Alabama Quartet Convention on Facebook, or contact Mark Byrd at 256-303-0983 or at LivingFaithCullman@gmail.com. (TAB)

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Westview Baptist Church, 809 Damascus Hwy, Enterprise, AL 36330, is prayerfully seeking resumes for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumes to church address, marked ATTN: Search Committee. For additional inquiries, call 334-797-0798.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Ruhama Baptist Church is looking for a bivocational pastor. Resumes can be mailed to: Ruhama Baptist Church, 3310 County Road 81, Fort Payne, AL 35967, ATTN: Pulpit Committee.

WORSHIP/ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Prattmont Baptist Church is conducting a search for a worship pastor/associate pastor. We are a medium-sized church, and this will be a full-time position. Please email resumes to: lori.love@prattmont.org. Mail resumes to: Prattmont Baptist Church, 814 Smith Avenue, Prattville, AL 36067.

WORSHIP LEADER

Bethel Baptist Church, Dora, Alabama, is searching for either a full-time or part-time worship leader to lead blended worship services. Please email resumes to: secretary@bbc.dora.com, or mail resumes to: Music Search Committee, Bethel Baptist Church, 7000 Bethel Road, Dora, AL 35062.

WORSHIP LEADER

First Baptist Church in Oxford, Alabama, is seeking a full-time worship pastor to lead dynamic, blended worship. This person must be a self-starter, have strong organizational/administrative skills and able to give leadership to a complete music and media ministry. Please send resumes to: stan@firstbaptistoxford.org, or mail to: First Baptist Church, ATTN: Worship Search Team, 95 E. Oak Street, Oxford, AL 36203.

MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Sisters Baptist Church is searching for a minister of worship. Sisters is a conservative Southern Baptist church in central Georgia. The position involves planning and leading worship services, as well as the other music ministries of the church. He will work closely with the pastor and other staff members. Resumes along with a cover letter may be sent to: SBC Search Committee, 1807 E. McCarty

St., Sandersville, GA 31082 or office@sistersbaptist.org.

BIVOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church of Anderson seeking bivocational music minister. Please contact: Lindsey Dabbs, secretary, at 256-247-3871. Send resumes to: Anderson FBC, P.O. Box 67, Anderson, AL 35610, or email: fbcanderson@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF OUTREACH & MISSIONS

FBC Vincent, Alabama, seeking part-time minister of outreach and missions. Will work with the pastor giving coordinating leadership to current mission endeavors. Design/organize/facilitate an outreach ministry to Vincent/Harpersville area. Minimum 20 hours/week. Send resume to: admin@fbcvincent.org.

FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR TO STUDENTS/MISSIONS

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, is seeking an individual with experience to provide full-time leadership and ministry to students and student families, as well as leading and working with the membership of Southside Baptist for providing local, state, national and international missions opportunities. Send resumes to: ATTN: Southside Baptist Church Search Committee, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420 or sbcandalusia.com.

YOUTH PASTOR

Mays Memorial Baptist Church located in Toney, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational youth pastor for grades 6 through 12. Please mail your resume and cover letter to: Youth Pastor Committee at 23636 AL Hwy. 251, Toney, AL 35773, or email your resume and cover letter to: Broshanereyer@yahoo.com.

BUSINESS

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MINISTRIES

TAB PODCAST

The TAB News podcast provides content from *The Alabama Baptist* each week in a radio-show-style format for listeners to download and listen to at their convenience. A host will guide the show, along with several readers and guests who will be invited in to talk about some of the story topics in depth. Listen to the TAB News podcast anywhere you get your podcasts such as iTunes, Stitcher, etc., or visit www.thealabamabaptist.org/explore/podcasts/. New episodes are released weekly.

TAB PREVIEW

TAB Preview provides a sneak preview of the weekly stories featured in *The Alabama Baptist* to the church leadership of 2,000 churches across the state. The weekly newsletter is distributed by email. It is interactive with links to stories and easy access to *The Alabama Baptist's* social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. It also features ads that are clickable and link directly to websites. To sign up email news@thealabamabaptist.org. For ad information, email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Muslim mob provokes arrest of six Christian pastors

SIRONKO, Uganda — Officers arrested six pastors in eastern Uganda on Nov. 24 after hundreds of Muslims, furious over a public talk comparing Christianity with Islam, descended on the local police station.

Following a series of public events in December at which mosque leaders criticized Christianity, the local pastors' fellowship had invited Moses Wangaia, a popular Christian apologist based in Mbale, to speak at a series of open-air talks defending the faith.



MS photo

After a week of peaceful debate Wangaia, an ex-Muslim sheikh, arrived for the series of talks designed to refute three weeks of Muslim speakers' arguments against the designation of Jesus as the Son of God. Tensions began as Wangaia gave his testimony of how he converted to Christianity and used the Koran, Bible and Hadith to make his case. Police permitted the 70 pastors and 30 churches that organized the talks to stage them during a three-week period in the predominantly Muslim area, sources said.

Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another. Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population. (MS)

Religious affiliation to remain on Egypt's identification cards

CAIRO — A bill calling for the elimination of the religious designation on Egyptian government identification cards quickly died in committee Nov. 14, according to Sherif Azer, head of policy for the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms.

Azer said the effort's failure reflects the enormity of the discrimination Christians face in a country regarded as a leader of Middle Eastern Islam. He said the main reason the bill died was that doing away with the religious designation could allow a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman. That is illegal in Egypt, as children follow the religion of the father.

ID cards are required for almost every aspect of public life in Egypt, and a Christian designation can cause problems for the approximately 10 percent of the population at police stops, checkpoints, hospitals and workplaces. Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the only three religion options on the ID cards.

The Coptic Church itself advocates, to some extent, for identification by religion, said Timothy Kaldas, nonresident fellow at the Tahir Institute for Middle East Policy. Churches use ID as a safety measure, particularly after attacks, when a church might check the ID of those entering the building to make sure they are Christian.

Egypt ranked No. 17 on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the most persecution. (MS)

Christians arrested after attack on Christmas meeting

AGRA, India — Police arrested several Christians on Oct. 30 after an attack on a Christmas planning meeting in northern India, in what sources call a Hindu extremist strategy for stopping the spread of Christianity.

Pastors from 12 churches in Agra, Uttar Pradesh state and from 10 churches in nearby Mathura were meeting along with their families in the Hotel Samover in Agra to plan a Christmas program. Hindu extremists arrived and began terrorizing and beating them using baseball bats and hockey sticks, sources said.

Police arrested 13 of the badly beaten Christians and charged them with causing religious enmity.

The assailants also damaged worship instruments, including a keyboard and guitar, and they seized a bag of Bibles and two mobile phones, sources said.

The attack has instilled fear not only in the Christians who attended the gathering but also in other church members, sources said. One church leader said that since the attack, the number of people attending Sunday worship service has dwindled from 70 to fewer than 20.

India ranked 11th on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)

Decline in abortions call for continued pro-life effort

The continued drop in the number, rate and ratio of abortions in the United States is a cause for celebration, but also a call for further efforts to protect children and assist women in need, Southern Baptist pro-life advocates say.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported Nov. 23 the total, rate and ratio of abortions in 2015 — the latest year for which statistics are available — all declined by 2 percent from 2014. The ratio and rate reached their lowest points since the Roe v. Wade ruling legalized abortion in 1973, while that year was the only one since the Supreme Court decision with fewer abortions than in 2015, according to numbers attributed to the CDC.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, described the lower abortion rate as "good news. No doubt, the heroic advocacy of the pro-life community contributes to this lower rate."

In 2015, 638,169 abortions were reported to the CDC, while the rate was 11.8

abortions per 1,000 women who were 15 to 44 years of age. The ratio was 188 abortions per 1,000 live births.

The decline in all three measurements was especially dramatic from 2006 to 2015, the period analyzed by the CDC in its latest report. The number of abortions fell by 24 percent during that span, while the rate and ratio decreased 26 and 19 percent, respectively.

Abortion-rights advocates credit better contraceptive use and fewer abortion clinics for the decline.

Seven states have only one abortion clinic in operation, according to an ABC News report in June.

Meanwhile pro-lifers point to such factors as the growth and ministry of pregnancy care centers, the advent of ultrasound technology, more state laws restricting abortion and requiring health and safety standards and efforts to educate the public on the humanity of the unborn child.

Surveys also have shown the millennial generation is more pro-life than older Americans. (BP)

"No doubt, the heroic advocacy of the pro-life community contributes to this lower rate."

**Russell Moore
president, Ethics & Religious
Liberty Commission**



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Dadeville sisters sew dresses for children around the world



Photo courtesy of Glenda Eubanks

'I am too old, I can't do that, I don't know how.' These are things you will never hear from Anna Adcox (right) and her sister Frances Trimble. At 95 and 87 years old, respectively, Adcox and Trimble spend most of their days sewing pillowcase dresses for Lake Pointe Baptist Church, Dadeville, in Tallapoosa Baptist Association, where some of their family attends. They have sewn more than 4,200 dresses and shorts to be given to children around the world.

Terry Long (left) used tortilla shells to draw out the 'three circles' gospel presentation to Shorty, owner of Kain's Mexican Restaurant in Butler. Shorty and Long then entered into one-on-one discipleship so Shorty can learn more about what it means to follow Christ.

A God thing



Photo courtesy of Terry Long

Choctaw's Long surprised to find out man he'd won to faith was from unreached people group

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lisa Rose said she wishes she had snapped a photo of Terry Long's face when he realized what had happened that day.

"The look on his face was just incredible," she said.

The day had seemed pretty standard. She and John Halbrook — both of whom serve in ministry to the Mixtec people of Montgomery — had traveled over to Butler to lead a workshop for Choctaw Baptist Association to educate them about the Mixtec people group.

'Real love'

"Choctaw Baptists have had a partnership with us for several years and have been doing some construction on the Mixtec church in Montgomery," said Rose, compassion ministries director for Montgomery Baptist Association.

Long, associational missions director for Choctaw Baptist Association, has a "real love for the Mixtec," Rose said.

The Mixtec — one of Mexico's indigenous people groups — has its own language, Mixteco.

Roughly 726,000 Mixtec people live in Mexico, with another 100,000 or so living in the United States, most of them in California.

They were the most unengaged unreached people group in the Americas a decade ago, but thanks to the work of Montgomery Baptists and others, there's active evangelism happening among them now. They're seeing churches planted here and there in the United States.

But if there were any Mixtec people in west Alabama, Long hadn't found them yet.

That day after the workshop as they all went to Long's favorite

Mexican restaurant, he had someone he wanted them to meet — the owner, who went by Shorty.

Long had recently led him to Christ. He had spent months praying for Shorty before he ever invited him to sit down with him as he drew out the "three circles" gospel presentation on three tortillas — a circle representing God's love, a circle representing our sin and brokenness and a circle representing salvation in Jesus.

"He had a wonderful salvation experience, and he's excited about it and going to church," Long said.

And in the months since Shorty decided to follow Christ, Long

has been continuing to eat Mexican food there and talk to him about his faith.

"So I wanted to introduce him to Lisa and John, and when they told him they were involved in Mixtec ministry over in Montgomery, he got excited and said, 'I'm Mixtec!' Here we had just had a two-hour meeting about Mixtec ministry, and I had no idea that the one man from Mexico that I had led to the Lord was Mixtec," Long said.

That revelation opened up a

flood of dialogue, and Rose came up with some ideas for how they could connect Shorty to the Mixtec ministry in Montgomery.

Not a coincidence

"It was just one of those God things," Rose said. "Terry's face was incredible when he realized that he had led a Mixtec man to the Lord without knowing it."

Both of them agree — God's up to something there.

"That's too unusual to be a coincidence," Long said. ✝

[The Mixtec] were the most unengaged unreached people group in the Americas a decade ago, but ... there's active evangelism happening among them now.

VOICE YOUR OPINION

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Memory

of Alabama Baptist leaders, friends

Charles Gregory 'Greg' Stone
Parker Memorial minister Stone dies

Charles Gregory "Greg" Stone, minister to senior adults and director of operations for Parker Memorial Baptist Church, Anniston, died Dec. 12. He was 55.



STONE

Before joining the staff of Parker Memorial in 2013, he served as minister of music/church administrator at Valley View Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa.

While studying at Auburn University, Stone played Aubie the Tiger, the school's mascot, in 1983.

Mack Amis, pastor of Parker Memorial, said Stone was "one of God's choicest servants."

"He gave of himself and shared his gifts tirelessly," Amis said. "Greg never settled for mediocre but pursued excellence in everything because his God was worth it. His ability to minister to all ages was a unique gift and assures that everyone will miss him."

Roger Willmore, director of missions for Calhoun Baptist Association, said that until the end of his life, Stone was doing what he felt called to do.

"Greg Stone loved people and he loved serving people," Willmore said.

He is survived by his wife, Deana; daughters, Sydni, Kendall and Chloe; son, Drew; and three grandchildren. (Grace Thornton)

Samford University accepting applications for Beeson dean

Samford University is accepting applications for the position of dean of Beeson Divinity School.

The dean provides theological, academic and administrative leadership for Beeson Divinity School, an interdenominational divinity school embedded within Samford University in Birmingham. The mission of Beeson Divinity School is to prepare God-called people to serve as ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ by providing quality theological education from an explicitly evangelical perspective. Beeson's faculty includes representatives of diverse denominational commitments, including chairs dedicated to the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian traditions.

Responsibilities

The dean of Beeson Divinity School oversees and assesses all aspects of academic programming, the divinity school faculty,

selected divinity school officers and the directors of internal programs of the divinity school. The dean also represents the divinity school to its key constituents — churches, alumni, friends, donors and guests.



Samford University

Candidates for the position of dean must hold a doctorate in a classical theological field such as theology, church history or biblical studies; sincerely embrace evangelical Protestant Christianity; be devoted to the tradition of orthodox theological reflection; and be committed to ecumenical relations with other orthodox Christian traditions.

Requirements also include relevant teaching and pastoral experience, superlative oral and written communications skills, publication in relevant fields and a record of demonstrated effectiveness in theological administration. Specific duties include hiring, budgeting, curriculum development, preparing and deliv-

ering annual reports, serving on university committees and other duties as outlined by the university. The dean of Beeson Divinity School reports to the provost of Samford University.

Applicants should submit a letter of application, curriculum vita with names and contact information of five references, a description of teaching and leadership experience, as well as research interests and activities.

Review of applications

Review of applications will begin Jan. 15 and will continue until the position is filled. The new dean will begin in August 2019.

To be considered for this position candidates must submit a complete application with all materials in PDF format to FACAPP@samford.edu. Please put in the subject line, "Attn: Co-chairs of the Beeson Dean Search Committee at Samford University."

For more information visit www.samford.edu/employee/faculty-employment-opportunities/Dean-Beeson-Divinity-School-October-20181.pdf. (Samford)

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2019 marks 1676th anniversary of death of Saint Nicholas

Our 21st century Santa Claus can be traced back to a Greek Orthodox bishop in the third century.

This year marks the 1676th anniversary of his death.

Saint Nicholas of Myra (270–343) was born to Theophanes and Nonna on March 15, 270, in the village of Patara, Greece. Today Patara, near Myra, is on the southern coast of Turkey.

Serving others

Nicholas dedicated his life to serving others. His uncle, who was a bishop, ordained him a priest. Around 317, Nicholas was made Bishop of Myra.

Saint Nicholas practiced many virtues such as prayer and fasting. Giving alms may have been his greatest morality. Feeling a call to obey Jesus' words to

"sell what you own and give the money to the poor" (Matt. 19:21), he used his entire inheritance to give to the poor and the sick. He tried to keep his generosity secret, but word spread of his kindness.

He became known as the protector of children and sailors. He is the subject of many stories and legends. One famous story is that he saved three poor sisters from a life of slavery or prostitution when he gave them each a dowry, consisting of a purse of gold coins, so they could marry. Another story tells how he became the patron saint of sailors. He was on a ship nearly destroyed by a terrific storm, but he rebuked the waves, causing the storm to calm. He is the patron saint of many cities that have harbors.



NICHOLAS

During Roman Emperor Diocletian's reign Bishop Nicholas was exiled and imprisoned for his faith. Emperor Constantine, the Roman emperor who established

Christianity as the legal religion, released him. Afterwards Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in 325.

He died Dec. 6, 343, in Myra, and was buried in his cathedral church. A liquid substance, called manna, formed in his grave. It was claimed to have healing powers, fostering the growth of devotion to him.

Less than 200 years after his death the Eastern Emperor Theodosius II ordered the building of the Church of Saint Nicholas in Myra.

Saint Nicholas was the most popular

saint in Europe during the Renaissance (1300–1600). After the Protestant Reformation he maintained a positive reputation, especially in Holland.

Connection to Christianity

As immigrants from the countries of Scandinavia, Finland and Iceland settled in the United States, the image of Saint Nicholas, or "Sinterklaas," as he is referred to among the Dutch, slowly changed to that of "Santa Claus" — without the strong connection to Christianity.

The anniversary of Saint Nicholas' death, Dec. 6th, became a day of celebration. In several Western European and Central European countries Saint Nicholas is celebrated as a great gift giver, and he is revered by several denominations in the United States.✝

By Joanne Sloan

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



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 6

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

TRANSFORMED
Genesis 32:24-32

Jacob is returning home after a 20-year sojourn in Mesopotamia. He encountered the angels of God when he left Canaan, and now he is encouraged by the angels of God on his return to Canaan. His angelic-induced encouragement quickly fades as he contemplates making things right with his older brother Esau.

He sent word to Esau he was returning, and he learned Esau and 400 men were coming to meet him. With Esau and his small army approaching, Jacob was not thinking about angels. All that was on his mind was survival. Jacob's mounting fear prompted him to pray his first recorded prayer in Scripture (Gen. 32:9-12).

In this prayer we can see God is at work transforming Jacob. He prayed for God to protect him from his brother Esau. He then organized more than 550 animals to be presented to Esau, a gift fit for a king. Jacob sent his wives and children across the fast-flowing stream Jabbok to provide them additional protection.

The Match (24-26)

It was the darkest night of Jacob's life as he set alone reflecting on the past and wondering what the next day might bring. A powerful hand grabbed Jacob and began to wrestle him. He could not see anything in the darkness, and his attacker was silent and nameless. Jacob wrestled the unidentified man until the breaking of the day.

Jacob did not know through most of that night he was wrestling with God. In that moment he could not see that the wrestling match was a parable of his entire life. Jacob's life has been one wrestling match after another: with his brother, his father, his father-in-law and now with God.

When the unidentified man saw he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his

hip socket and knocked it out of joint. A touch that dislocates suggests an opponent with superhuman power. Jacob's leg was left dangling after that mere touch. This was a crippling grace from the hand of God. God accommodated His omnipotent strength to that of Jacob as He wrestled with him in human form.

Clinging to his assailant Jacob would not let go without a blessing. Obviously Jacob perceived his attacker was no ordinary man. Jacob sensed the divine.

The Title (27-29)

The assailant asked, "What is your name?" When he replied, "Jacob," it was a confession of guilt. He was a deceiver, a fraud. This confession resulted in amazing grace that led to further transformation within Jacob. Instead of merely blessing him, the assailant changed Jacob's name to Israel to indicate his new character.

In the context Israel means "he strives with God." The renaming of Jacob brings to a climax a lifetime of struggling with others. Jacob has finally come to realize the importance of being blessed by God. The events of the preceding years have changed Jacob. The God of his father has now become his God. For Jacob the day of failure through power was over. For Israel the day of success through weakness had begun. Encouraged by his new name Israel was emboldened to ask: "Please tell me Your name." The assailant responded: "Why is it that you ask My name?" Then He blessed Israel.

The Venue (30-32)

At last Israel realized that he had been wrestling with God. Israel named the place "Peniel," which means the face of God. Jacob (now Israel) prevailed when he came to the end of himself. His defeat wrought victory. His end was actually his beginning. ✠

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

THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP
Matthew 2:1-11

Jesus is the supreme ruler. (1-6)

We often speak of these men as "kings." Matthew, however, does not identify them as "kings" but as "magi" — where we get our word "magician." These were not magicians as we understand them, but rather priests who studied the stars and who believed that positions of the stars were signs of future events. They were followers of Zoroaster, the latter part of whose name means "star." Put in our terminology the magi were a combination of astrologers, astronomers and philosophers.

The magi were likely from Persia (modern-day Iran), and their journey to the Holy Land had to have been demanding and difficult. They traveled some 1,000 miles to honor the newborn King. These sojourners would have begun their quest on horseback to cross the mountains and rocky terrain, traveling the main trade route of their era. They followed the Euphrates River up through what is now Iraq. They crossed the harsh and desolate Syrian desert. They would then pass through the lush Jordan Valley.

After three or four months of a long, hard journey they reached the gates of Jerusalem. One might speculate as to whether these men ever wondered if the long journey to find the King would be worthwhile. But their marvelous quest reminds us that God will bless the seeker.

As the Lord assures us in Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."

Some oppose Jesus' rule. (7-8)

Herod was not a Jew but an Idumean who had been appointed king of the Jews by Rome. But the magi were seeking a "child born to be King of the Jews." Herod's paranoia is well-documented. At

different points during his cruel reign he had his mother, his favorite wife and three of his sons put to death, each time because of his perception that they were conspiring to overthrow him.

When the magi arrived and told Herod of this newborn King, Herod responded with the same fear of a coup. The murder of the male infants in Bethlehem is consistent with the paranoia that he showed, even against his own family.

Herod sought the location of this child's birth, claiming that he desired to pay homage to the new King. His own leaders informed him the child would be born in Bethlehem based on Micah 5:2. Upon hearing this Herod sent the magi to Bethlehem with instructions to return and report to him. The magi were unaware of Herod's intention to kill the child.

Jesus' rule should lead us to worship Him. (9-11)

At the climax of their journey the magi arrived in Bethlehem and found "the place where the child was" and they were "overwhelmed with joy." After worshipping Him, they gave the King three gifts. The symbolic meaning of these gifts tells us they were not so much the magi's gifts to Jesus but Jesus' gifts to us. Gold represented the royalty of our Sovereign Lord. Frankincense was used by the priests in worship, and now it is presented to the great High Priest who mediates between ourselves and God the Father. This High Priest sacrificed His life for the sake of our deliverance, and the myrrh used for burials reminds us of this ultimate sacrifice.

The account of the magi reminds us how God meets us where we are. In His revelation of Christ's birth God gives these astronomers a sign they can understand and follow. That sign — the star — would lead them faithfully to the newborn King. ✠

Christian Crossword

By Glenn G. Luscher Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. A cake. (Ex. 16:31)
3. Mountain sheep. (Deut. 14:5)
8. A skiff.
9. A snake. (Ps. 140:3)
13. Trinitrotoluene. (abbr.)
14. Portable steps.
16. An evening meal.
17. Perpetual. (Rom. 1:20)
19. Son of Zebulun. (Gen. 46:14)
20. Greek word signifying "the last." (Rev. 1:8)
22. Son of Appaim. (1 Chron. 2:31)
24. New Testament. (abbr.)
26. Feminine case pronoun.
29. Grandson of Noah. (Gen. 10:11)
31. Of the flesh. (Rom. 8:7)
32. Another name for father.
33. Truck driver's vehicle.

34. Not heavy.
35. Alternating current. (abbr.)
36. Mexican painter Jose Clemente ____.
39. A promise. (Luke 1:73)
40. Same as tea cart.
44. Masculine pronoun.
45. Northwest Territory. (abbr.)
46. Small ones.
47. Secret Service. (abbr.)

Down

1. Sea monsters. (Gen. 1:21)
2. Food for animals.
3. Collapsible bed.
4. Used for gripping.
5. What you put on. (Prov. 7:10)
6. A furnace. (Ps. 21:9)
7. A net. (2 Tim. 2:26)
10. Fruit of the palm.
11. Where Og fought a battle. (Num. 21:33)
12. Cuts out. (Hosea 13:8)
15. Symbol for radium.
18. The grandmother of Timothy. (2 Tim. 1:5)
21. Those who are greedy eaters.
23. To set apart. (Ex. 40:9)
25. Gives instruction.
26. A book or roll. (Rev. 6:14)
27. John was clothed with camel's _____. (Mark 1:6)
28. Used to make alkaloids.
30. To hang loosely.
32. All her ____ are peace. (Prov. 3:17)
37. Buddhist sect developed in India.
38. A feline.
41. A preposition.



MOVIES



Media reviews

A look at the 9 best family-friendly film releases of 2018

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

Let's face it: It can be difficult to find a movie that the whole family can watch. Thankfully there were quite a few family-friendly films released in theaters in 2018. Here are my favorites:

► **"Paddington 2" (PG)** — Everyone's favorite Peruvian bear gets framed for something he didn't do — stealing a book — and gets sentenced to 10 years in prison. He then warms the hearts of the prisoners with kindness. "Paddington 2" is as good (if not better) than its predecessor. It also is nearly the perfect family film with great messages for kids such as treat others the way you want to be treated. Rated PG for some action and mild rude humor.

► **"Peter Rabbit" (PG)** — Thomas McGregor, the nephew of the infamous Mr. McGregor, tries to keep pesky (and lovable) rabbits out of his garden. This film is not as innocent as the children's books — there's too much Looney Tunes-type violence — but it's OK for most children and includes solid lessons on forgiveness and reconciliation. (The movie sparked

a controversy with a scene showing the rabbits intentionally shooting a blackberry into the mouth of an allergic Thomas McGregor. He then uses an EpiPen.) Rated PG for some rude humor and action.

► **"Paul, Apostle of Christ" (PG-13)** — Luke works with an aging and imprisoned Apostle Paul to write the Book of Acts. The film is part biblical fact and part biblical fiction and takes place in A.D. 67 under the reign of the cruel Roman emperor Nero. James Faulkner ("Downton Abbey") plays Paul and Jim Caviezel ("The Passion of the Christ") stars as Luke. Rated PG-13 for some violent content and disturbing images.

► **"I Can Only Imagine" (PG)** — A boy grows up in an abusive home and later writes the hit Christian contemporary song "I Can Only Imagine," which was inspired by his father's salvation experience. The film is based on the true story of MercyMe singer Bart Millard, who went from hating his father to being his best friend. It's one of my favorite faith films of all time. Rated PG for thematic elements, including some violence.

► **"Sgt. Stubby: An American Hero" (PG)** — A dog finds his way onto the battlefields of World



Photo courtesy of Pure Flix

'Little Women'

War I and helps save American lives. Incredibly it is based on a true story: Stubby was the official mascot of the U.S. 102nd Infantry Regiment. The film was released during the centennial commemoration of the end of World War I. Rated PG for war action and some thematic elements.

► **Disney's "Christopher Robin" (PG)** — A stressed-out British man rediscovers the simple things in life when his childhood imaginary friends — Winnie, Tigger, Piglet and Roo — visit him. It was the second movie in as many years about Winnie. That first one —

"Goodbye Christopher Robin" (2017) — told the story of author A.A. Milne and his son, Christopher Robin. In the newer movie Robin is all grown up. It's one of the best family-friendly films you'll ever watch. It also includes a great message about, well, fam-

ily. Rated PG for some action.

► **"Little Women" (PG-13)** — The lives of four sisters — Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy — are retold in this contemporary reimagining of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel of the same name. Just like the book and the 1994 movie we

watch the girls mature during a 16-year period. The result is a moving and hilarious remake that is mostly family-friendly. It includes great role models for teens and tons of great messages too. Because of thematic elements this one may be best for tweens and teens. Rated PG-13 for some thematic elements

and teen drinking.

► **"Nutcracker and the Four Realms" (PG)** — A teenage girl goes searching for clues to a mysterious gift her deceased mother left her. She then enters another realm and finds not only the answers but her identity in life



'Paddington 2'

Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers

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.

too. It's an entertaining film with positive messages on courage, selflessness and discovering your talents. Rated PG for some mild peril.

► **"Mary Poppins Returns" (PG)** — It's not as good as the original but it's toe-tapping, kid-friendly fun nonetheless. The movie follows Mary Poppins as she returns to Cherry Tree Lane, where Michael and Jane are now adults and facing repossession of the family home. The film celebrates childhood and imagination and perfectly mirrors the look and feel of the 1964 film. Rated PG for some mild thematic elements and brief action.✝

Losing yourself for the **lost**

Doctor's dream of space travel replaced by call to minister in Africa

Larry Pepper thought he had been open handed. He had been praying through the missions book "Operation World," and he had been thinking more and more about his impact on eternity as he sat in church every Sunday.

But one day the words came clear as a bell right where he sat in Houston, Texas — "You've committed everything to me except your job."

Pepper knew the thought had come from God. He took a deep breath, and he told God to put him and his family wherever He wanted them to be.

"I was beginning to see the world through God's eyes in terms of lostness," he relayed. "For me that meant seeing if I could use my medical skills in a way that had more Kingdom impact."

Dream job

Pepper's work was his dream job. He was a flight surgeon for NASA, providing medical care for pilots and crewmembers. But it soon became evident that God was drawing him to walk away and move his family to serve with the International Mission Board (IMB) in Africa.

To step out in obedience he had to stomach some major sacrifices — for one he was selected as a finalist for astronaut duty



IMB photos

Larry Pepper (left) was a NASA flight surgeon before God put him on a different trajectory — working with the IMB at hospitals in Africa. He's now spent more than two decades offering hope at the bedside of the hurting there.

in space. That opportunity was hard to give up. His wife, Sally, had some reservations too.

"For me the hardest part was just wrestling with the fears that kept creeping back in — mostly the fear of homeschooling my kids in Africa," she said. "But in a moment God changed those fears, and I had a complete peace that Africa was where we were supposed to be."

That peace followed her as she, Pepper and their three children moved to Uganda for 12 years, then Lesotho for two and then Tanzania for eight more.

Over the years they have spent countless hours at the bedsides of the hurting, leading them to the pages of the Bible and bringing them to lasting hope in Christ.

They have disciplined university students. They have helped brand new mothers get

on their feet and find faith. They have started AIDS clinics and planted churches. They have seen people find life, and they have buried the ones whom death has overcome.

'Kingdom work'

And through it all they have seen God move in amazing ways, Pepper said. The sense of the Father's loving sovereignty has never left them, from the early 1990s in Texas all the way to today.

"It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to use weak, sinful human beings in Kingdom work, but that's what God does in our lives," Pepper explained. "We have seen His faithfulness throughout all of these years as we've worked here. It has been humbling and incredible to watch." (*Missions Mosaic*, IMB)

How to pray:

► For Larry and Sally Pepper to maintain endurance in their medical ministry and have open doors to disciple the people they meet.

► For God to call out more workers to leave the United States and serve among the unreached overseas. Pray for them to be sensitive to His leading and obedient to the call.

(Source: IMB, *Missions Mosaic*)



Kigoma, Tanzania