



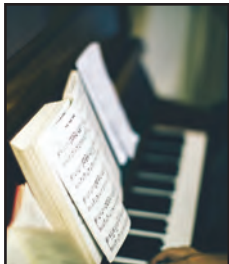
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Vol. 185, No. 42
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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Youth for Christ partners with churches to reach communities

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Praying for UNITY

Montgomery pastors build on relationships to expand reach

By Jay Wolf and Kyle Searcy
Special to The Alabama Baptist

If you travel west from the Alabama State Capitol down Dexter Avenue, you will encounter the Court Square Fountain. This fountain was erected in 1885, and its centerpiece is a cast iron statue dedicated to Hebe, a Greek goddess of youth and daughter of Zeus.

It isn't unusual to find evi-

dence of Greek thought prevalent in the United States. It gave us great government and splendid architecture, but it also sowed hierarchical thinking that became a seed for slavery.

Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts senator, argued that classical Greco-Roman philosophy was adopted by Southerners because of Greek views on

slavery as a "positive good."

Interestingly enough, the Court Square Fountain marks the spot of one of the largest slave markets in the nation.

This fountain has been in the vicinity of many events that have given Montgomery an infamous (See 'Pastors,' page 9)

Court Square Fountain was built in 1885 in downtown Montgomery. Atop the cast iron statue sits Hebe, a Greek goddess of youth and daughter of Zeus. This fountain marks the spot of what was once one of the largest slave markets in the nation.

Photo by Sam Evans



Boy Scouts, bankruptcy and churches

Churches with a past or current affiliation with Boy Scouts of America may need to consider their next steps related to the national organization's plan to deal with future allegations of child sexual abuse.

"The Boy Scouts of America organization is presently involved in a bankruptcy reorganization under Chapter 11. The goal is to work with their insurance carriers to develop a plan for handling claims against the BSA, including claims related to sexual assault," said James "Jaime" Jordan, an attorney with Guenther, Jordan and Price. The Tennessee legal firm advises the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Jordan has also served as the state convention parliamentarian for many years.

Protections in place

"Chapter 11 is a form of bankruptcy that involves reorganizing a debtor's business affairs, debts and assets so that the business can continue to operate.

"We think the plan will involve the creation of a trust funded by the BSA and its insurers. Any claims against the BSA will be paid from this trust, if at all. Under such an arrangement, the BSA and insurance companies would be protected against future claims, (See 'Placeholder,' page 8)



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Photo courtesy of June Whitlow

The decision June Whitlow (center) made to become a Christian Women's Job Corps mentor to Janet Gillispie (right) turned into a 19-year friendship with Gillispie and her daughter, Brittany (left).

CWJC mentor nurtures long-lasting relationships

Back in 2008, we told the story of Janet Gillispie, a woman who had no qualms about sharing where God had brought her and what He'd brought her out of.

For years, she had lived in addiction, selling herself to buy drugs or in exchange for a place to sleep. Sometimes she had prayed — but only for God to give her another hit of crack cocaine.

It wasn't until she was in the middle of giving birth to her daughter, Brittany, that she heard the voice of God telling her He loved her and wanted her. So she kept the baby — she had given up others over the years —

and found a rehab program. After that, she got connected with Christian Women's Job Corps, a ministry of national Woman's Missionary Union that equips women with life and job skills.

That's where she met June Whitlow, a mentor who modeled what it looked like to love Jesus.

And because of what happened in that season of Gillispie's life, we were able to print a photo of her

smiling and standing in scrubs at her job as an X-ray technician at UAB Hospital.

Whitlow, a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, said that in the years since that picture, Gillispie's photo has been "all over UAB Hospital" as she's earned various awards and honors.

And Brittany is following in her footsteps — she's in her second year of nursing school at UAB and is also working in a full-time role at UAB Highlands.

"They've both done well," said Whitlow, who has remained a big part of their lives. Over the years, Brittany has spent a lot of time at her house and even stayed

with her in the summers while Gillispie worked.

Whitlow says she "could not have imagined" that signing up to be a CWJC mentor would end up creating relationships that would last for years, but that's exactly what's happened.

"It's been a blessing," she said. (Grace Thornton)



markdavisphoto.com

Photo of Janet Gillispie at her job as an X-ray technician at UAB Hospital that appeared in TAB in 2008.

TAB Media

"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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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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Daddies and their daughters — Carrie's precious memories

EDITOR'S NOTE — Our content editor Carrie Brown McWhorter works hard for you each week determining which articles should go when and where. She manages the team of writers and keeps up with all that needs to be covered by TAB. As our production team wrapped last week's issue of The Alabama Baptist, Carrie and her family were preparing to say goodbye (for now) to her sweet daddy, Gene Autry Brown. He died the next morning, Oct. 10, from complications related to dementia. Her tribute to him touched our hearts. I wanted to share it with you.

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
Content Editor, The Alabama Baptist

My daddy was one of the best — not only a great dad, but a truly devoted and loving husband, son, brother, uncle and neighbor.

I remember Mrs. Alma Bentley, our elderly neighbor, telling me about daddy coming by to tell her I had been born — the first granddaughter in the Brown family in 13 years.

He was so proud, especially that I was a girl, she said. I don't remember my brothers being born, but I remember sitting around Granny Brown's kitchen table when daddy came in, whispered in her ear and then told us that we had a baby sister. He was proud of each of us from the day we were born.

How busy those days must have been. On most of them, he was awake by 4 a.m. to head to Atlanta to work. Mom was already up too — cooking breakfast for him and catching up on housework before getting all us kids up and out the door to school, where she was headed as well.



Photo by Anna Bennett

Carrie Brown McWhorter pins a flower on her dad's shirt at her parents' 50th wedding anniversary celebration in August 2019.

Many afternoons, they barely walked in the door before we were all headed to whatever game the boys were involved in that season.

Another late night, and he and mom were up again the next morning to do it all over. Honestly, I don't know how they did it, but they rarely missed a ballgame, band show or school event.

Kids, especially at the ballfield, were drawn to him. He knew all their names and always made

them laugh. The same was true at church, family gatherings, holiday parties, weddings, funerals or wherever. My dad made everyone feel special with a funny comment, a kind word or simply a smile.

There are stories — so many stories. I wish I could remember them all. But he and his siblings couldn't tell them without getting so tickled they could hardly finish a sentence.

He taught me a sense of responsibility and love for others, not just in words, but in true practice. One of his greatest frustrations, at least it seemed to me, was doing something for someone who then felt they had to repay him. Giving was supposed to be its own reward, and it bugged him that the other person thought they owed him. He was generous — with his time, his money and his kindness.

The son of a Baptist preacher, sometimes I think he waited so long to profess his faith and join the Church not because he didn't believe in Jesus but because he saw too many people who talked a good talk but didn't walk the walk. Walking the walk was what really mattered.

He paraphrased James 1:27 to me more than once: It was our

duty to help widows and orphans, he said. And when he waved goodbye to my husband, Owen, and me as we headed to the terminal to fly to Kazakhstan to adopt our son Avery, I wonder if he thought about that verse.

In John 13, as Jesus nears the end of His earthly life, He gives His followers a simple command: "Love one another. ... By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

Loving others unselfishly seemed to come naturally to my dad, though no doubt he often had to work at it — to intentionally choose the loving words or actions even when the other person wasn't very lovable.

We grieve — Owen, Avery, our daughter Stella and I — along with my mother, siblings and the rest of our family. But we also celebrate a life well lived.

I pray that I am passing down my dad's legacy of kindness, generosity, responsibility, laughter and love, especially of love, not only to my children but to all those I encounter.

The love of an earthly father who models the love of our heavenly Father is truly a precious gift. 🙏

JESUS SAID, ... "NOW I SAY TO YOU: A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER; AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, THAT YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. BY THIS ALL WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER."

J O H N 1 3 : 3 3 B - 3 5

Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

Could Enterprise's boll weevil help the Church?

By Paul Fries

DOM, Salem Baptist Association, Liberty, Tenn.

In Enterprise, at the corner of College and Main Streets, stands a 13-foot tall monument to the boll weevil. The inscription reads:

"In profound appreciation of the boll weevil and what it has done as the herald of prosperity. This monument was erected by the citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama."

The back story to this monument is the arrival of the boll weevil from Mexico (to Texas in 1892, entering Alabama in 1910 and infesting the entire state by 1916). In a few short years, farmers were losing their entire crop of cotton to the boll weevil.

An area businessman saw this as an opportunity and convinced a local farmer to convert his farm to peanut farming. The first year, this change paid off the farmer's debts and ultimately led to great prosperity for Enterprise-area farmers.

Today, if you travel to the Enterprise area you will see large fields of both cotton and peanuts. It took a disaster to cause the farmers to change and to diversify.

This begs the question: Is it possible that God is attempting to get His people and His church to make some changes through our current COVID-19 pandemic?

Most of us don't like change. In my opinion, the single most promi-

nent reason we see so many churches having to close is the inability or unwillingness to change.

The Bible is replete with examples of God bringing pandemics, floods and other natural disasters upon His people to change their direction.

I believe we would do well to quit looking at media, politicians and others to place blame and instead let us begin to look to God and ask, "How do You want me/us to change?"

Had the good people of Enterprise rejected a businessman's suggestion to diversify, they might not exist today or they could be another small town that is slowly drying up.

If we, the people of God, are not willing to look inward and seek the face of God asking how we might change, we too could see churches closing and our effectiveness continue to diminish.

I have been a Christ follower for over 40 years now, and I have often heard the statement, "The message never changes, but the methods must change." We are in a crisis in our country and we, the people of God, have the only hope for a nation. We have the gospel — the good news of Jesus Christ!

The question is, are our current methods getting the gospel to the people that need it the most?

EDITOR'S NOTE — This opinion piece first appeared in Tennessee's Baptist & Reflector. It is reprinted with permission.

Several days ago, while teasing me about how old I am, one of my less than noble friends sarcastically asked me, "Preacher, now that you are so old, how does it feel to be a 'has been'?"

While I did not respond to his strange analogy, I was thinking, "Well, I imagine I am a 'has been,' but it sure is better than being a 'never been'!"

What an older servant of God can no longer do today must never be allowed to demean or discredit what he did yesterday.

Evangelist Junior Hill

The battle is upon us now in America. Bayonet close. It is a titanic struggle for Life and Liberty. It is more. It is War between Good and Evil, begun in the shrouded past of Eternal mystery, being played out in the Here and Now on the stage of history. ...

Casualties are high. And getting higher. See the mounting murdered millions piled high in Plutus' silver-plated wagons; innocent babies slaughtered at the altar of Aphrodite, sacrifices that forever scar the psyche of Eve's daughters, that disgrace the name of Hippocrates and grieve the heart of God. ...

Wake up! Wake up! For God's sake, don't sleep now.

The hour is late America. Death is fast approaching! ...

Will you join God's militia for Truth and Freedom? For Justice and Righteousness?

Written in 2004 by pastor and ministry leader Robert H. "Bob" Jackson (1936–2012)

Letter to the editor

After your usual words of wisdom in the editorial on page 3 of the Sept. 10 issue, the layout of comments from the grandchildren of TAB team members represents a refreshing portrait which could not have been achieved otherwise.

The additional follow-up (of sorts), regarding the Nigerian persecution and violence by Martha Simmons, was another twist of spectacular thinking.

TAB is somewhat like a figurative buffet at a cafeteria: so many good choices by which the mind is fed, the emotions are stirred and optional considerations are evalu-

ated in ways perhaps not previously imagined.

Refreshing, informative, diversified and always on point with regard to challenges and inspiring stories, some of which bring both sadness and gladness.

Just knowing your openness and willingness to do more than mere commonplace reporting brings gladness to many. Your objective to meet needs and bring healing is transparent.

Fortunate indeed are the readers of this resourceful paper.

**Morris Murray
Jasper, Ala.**

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“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

I'm really grateful to belong to an SBC full of people who disagree with me. A convention where everyone agreed with me would be very small and ineffective. I don't want to draw lines in the sand that are really just a circle around me and everyone who agrees with me.

Cooperation presumes disagreement. The miracle of Baptist work is that people who disagree on countless things have agreed to rally around the essential things for the advance of the gospel. Sign me up for that and count me out for any new inquisitions of nonessentials.

Griffin Gullede
via Twitter

As vital as the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is, so is the demonstration

of personal integrity. It is not enough to affirm that the Bible is true if one does not actually do what the Bible requires.

That is to say, claiming to believe in inerrancy does not have true meaning in mere affirmation; it must be backed up with a life of integrity lived out in humble submission and surrender to all that the inerrant Scriptures call me to be and to do as a disciple of Jesus and minister of the gospel.

What is needed is not just our verbal allegiance to an inerrant Bible, but a vivid and visceral commitment to a life of integrity, lived out in keeping with the ethical and moral teachings of our Lord. To that end, I challenge all of us to consider these questions:

▶ By our actions, is it evident that we love one another?

▶ Do we treat one another with Christian dignity and respect?

▶ Do we seek to believe the best about each other, rather than assume the worst?

▶ Do we truly work to find ways to come together rather than to tear each other apart?

False and inaccurate claims about fellow Southern Baptists, sister churches or our Southern Baptist entities are far too often made by those who have never asked the brother, pastor or leader about the matter in question.

Adam Greenway
President, Southwestern Seminary
(Read Greenway's full first-person article at baptistpress.com)

From the *Twitterverse*

@garyfenton07

To love is to desire God's best for people and then work to make that happen.

@timkellernyc

Unless the world sees people getting along inside the churches and between the churches, who out in the world don't get along, why won't they just think we're just like any other cultural or political group?

@DannyAkin

People may not always like what the Bible says but the Bible always tells the truth! No other book does that!

@richardblackaby

Warning! You'll never have the mind of Christ if you only fill it with the thoughts of people.
(1 Cor. 2:16)

@ricklance

Guiding leadership is directional leadership. Not only pointing people in a direction but leading people through the transformation by making the transformation yourself. You cannot lead people to a place you are not willing to go personally.

@JackieHillPerry

You weren't there
the night He found me
You did not feel what I felt
When He wrapped
His loving arms around me
And you don't know the cost
Of the oil in my Alabaster box...

@bigvox (Rick Burgess)

If we want revival in this country, we must understand that it will never come through the government. Revival only comes through the Church. As followers of Christ

we must be careful of being more concerned with the issues of government than apostasy in the Church.

@ThomasSKidd

Beware the cultural commentator whose livelihood depends on things never getting better.

@jjdison

"When God is about to do something, He always reveals it to His people." Lord, show me what You are doing in our community.

@CSLewisDaily

"Each day we are becoming a creature of splendid glory or one of unthinkable horror."

— C.S. Lewis

@TimTebow

Trust God. Trust His character. Trust that He loves you. Trust that He has a plan for your life.

Disasters and blessings

God has many attributes, which He employs at His pleasure from His eternal perspective for our best good.

He incorporates both good and evil in His perfect plans for us.

With His omniscience and omnipotence, not a blade of grass moves without His sovereign knowledge, permission and control.

It's easy for us to selfishly accept His blessings as being good but find it a challenge to accept His disciplines and disasters as also being good.

Why allow pain?

You might ask, "If God is good, loves us and is in full control of everything, why doesn't He remove all the terrible evils from the world and spare us all this horrible pain and sorrow?"

The answer is that He allows evil to remain on earth for the present because of His patience and love for us.

If God removed all sin and evil from the earth, He would have to begin by removing you and me, great sinners that we are.

God patiently delays removing all evil and sinners from the earth to give people more time to process the truth about Him and reverently respond to it.

Understanding Truth

Truth is being displayed before us all, day after day, on a huge worldwide screen.

Truth is given to lead us to humble ourselves before Him, to pray, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.

Time is given to beg for His forgiveness through accepting the death of His only Son Jesus Christ on the cross as the only possible acceptable payment for all our sins.

Bob Cosby
Birmingham, Ala.

CHOIR AMID COVID:

Insights & opinions

There is 'no new normal,' says worship pastor during recent webinar

By Michael J. Brooks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Churches face a lot of “unknowns” in reopening and must exercise caution, according to Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Hibbs noted one church that faced an issue recently with its worship team.

“This group left services, had lunch together and went to someone’s home for more fellowship,” he said. “One person tested positive for the virus and two more of them were infected, so this is a time demanding precaution.”

Hibbs hosted a webinar Sept. 8 called, “Choir After Covid.”

Panelist Tom Smith, music minister at Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, said his church resumed in-person worship June 7 for its members 50 years old and older.

“We thought our younger adults were out-and-about more with possible exposure, plus the younger group is probably more familiar with live-streaming,” he said. “We’ve had temperature checks and only had to turn one person away since this reopen. Our worshippers do wear masks.”

Smith said he has recruited smaller choirs of 12–14 members.

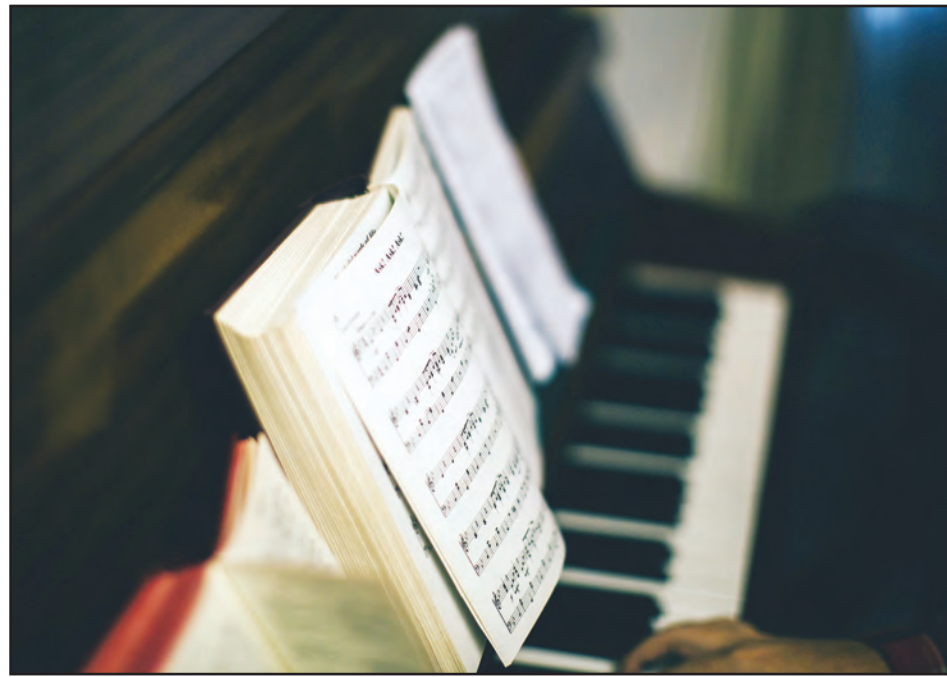
“We’ve brought out some anthems from the past that we know, so our choral preparation hasn’t been as demanding,” he said.

Zoom choir rehearsals

Worship pastor Ryan Leffel of Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence, said his church hasn’t had choir in morning worship yet.

“We’re watching the progress of our public schools and hope this will inform us about our progress,” he explained.

“We’ve had Zoom choir rehearsals since April. This has provided



pixabay.com

communication, though not the best music preparation. We also had a drive-thru with choir members picking up music. I made some CDs for those not as familiar with Zoom.”

Private Facebook page

Leffel also began a private Facebook page for worship participants and has recorded a number of personal videos to stay in touch and provide encouragement.

Frank Jones, worship arts associate at Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, said he’s had no live choral rehearsals yet. Hunter Street reopened June 21 with a single service, and added a second service Sept. 13 with provisions for children through sixth grade.

“We use one praise team for both services,” Jones noted. “This should prevent a lot of people being in the same space.”

All panelists agreed they’ve spent time ensuring their sanctuary platforms are not crowded.

“We’ve put some smaller instrumental ensembles outside to play as people enter and exit, and we’ve had a pianist in the foyer,” Jones said. “This way we’re able to use

our instrumentalists without crowding our platform.”

Smith said temporary platforms might be a possibility for some churches.

Regardless of how churches are handling music during worship, church staff need “backup” from others about reopening plans, Hibbs said, and church worship leaders agreed.

Jones said, “We have an executive team that meets weekly and helps us chart our course.”

Leffel said leaders at Woodmont “submit proposals to our team, and they help us chart our course,” noting the church has included physicians in their planning.

And at Providence, health experts also are involved.

Decision team

“We have a doctor, our parish nurse and a retired forensic scientist on our decision team,” Smith said.

Regarding Christmas plans, Leffel said that, regrettably, he scrapped Christmas plans in June.

“I’m still thinking about what we can do,” he said. “We’ve made no Christmas decisions yet. Perhaps we can do a simple ‘lessons and carols’ service multiple times to accommodate smaller groups.”

Jones said their Christmas music also will be smaller, and perhaps virtual, rather than the three large events the congregation normally does.

Appropriate protocols

Smith said Providence is discussing a live nativity walk-through on church property with prerecorded choral music at several Christmas scenes.

“I know we can’t do Christmas choral music inside our building,” he said.

Panelists also agreed the way forward would be informed by appropriate protocols, including CDC guidelines and vaccine availability.

Leffel said there is no “new normal.”

“Certainly we can worship alone or online, but I do think worship is sweeter together.”

**Ryan Leffel
worship pastor, Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence**

“Certainly we can worship alone or online, but I do think worship is sweeter together,” he said. “I hope our people will not neglect the assembling of themselves together when it’s safer.”

Smith, who has been at Providence for more than 40 years and is a retired music professor from

Auburn University, said the trend he saw even before COVID-19 was that choirs were getting smaller.

“But the people I’ve seen coming back to sing and lead worship have genuine excitement,” he said. “This gives me renewed hope for the future.” ✝



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HOPE

of Christmas is a 'balm'

Churches can foster renewal of hope, anticipation as Christmas approaches

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As 2020 draws to a close, the world seems to await the renewal and hope of a new beginning.

People frankly are tired of hearing about COVID-19 and are in great need of a symbolic turning of the page, said Michael Lukaszewski, founder and CEO of Church Fuel, in a recent webinar about planning for Christmas during a pandemic.

Churches can foster a renewal of hope, Lukaszewski said, by communicating a specific, positive Christmas message, beginning as early

as October. And it means keeping the focus of Christmas the same as it's always been, Alabama worship leaders agree.

"Christmas is an important season in the life of the church," said Brett Fuller, worship pastor at First Baptist Church, Pelham. "We are moving toward the Christmas season with a great sense of anticipation and excitement."

Global impact

Throughout the pandemic, Fuller said First, Pelham, focused on their mission statement, "Making Disciples for a Global Impact," and will continue the emphasis during the Christmas season.

"Everything we will do during December will be focused on discipleship, evangelism and emphasizing the hope of Christ," he said.

At First Baptist Church, Montgomery, the annual Living Christmas Tree production could look different this year, according to minister of music Ed Cleveland.

The church is going ahead with the presentation but will follow current state guidelines for gathering in December, both for the choir and orchestra and for attendees. That will probably mean using the choir loft, platform and side ramps instead of the signature tree apparatus if safety protocol prohibits use of the close-contact tree design, Cleveland said.

Visit churchfuel.com for more information about planning resources for churches.

Keith Hibbs, director of the office of worship leadership and church music for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said some churches are hesitant to bring back choirs, so worship leaders need to

develop alternative plans.

An online candlelight service, a Lord's Supper celebration or a church-designed presentation with soloists, small groups and drama are good alternatives to big choir productions, Hibbs said.

Respect for choir members is key, Cleveland said.

"Be kind to your choir members and encourage them to participate as they feel led," Cleveland recommended. "If a choir member doesn't feel good about participating, then we, as music ministers, should respect that."

With some congregants also afraid to return for in-person worship, church consultant Stephen Brewster suggested giving members the freedom to connect virtually. Holding out hope for members to come back, he said, can cause churches to miss the opportunity to engage people inside the building and out.

Brewster also suggested offering two distinct broadcast and live Christmas experiences and perhaps

creating personal moments using a smartphone and tripod for close-up conversation-style elements to draw in at-home worshippers.

That's the approach Fuller is taking at First, Pelham. The church's "A Night of Hope" will combine an in-person choir and musicians with a virtual choir in live and broadcast events. Two socially distanced Christmas Eve services will also offer in-person and livestreaming options.

Isolation fatigue

As worshippers cope with isolation fatigue, replacing traditional Christmas themes like "coming home" with an emphasis on the nostalgic moments of Christmas might be better this year, Brewster recommended.

Music publishers are adapting this year as well. LifeWay Worship offers "A Weary World Rejoices: Jazz Worship for Christmas," a five-song project that was designed for the unique circumstances of this Christmas season.

Scheduled for release in October, the project can be performed in under 30 minutes by smaller teams of musicians: three singers, a small rhythm section and the congregation.

"The prevailing jazz overtones [of the title song] are synonymous with the Christmas season and provide an infusion of refreshing joy and hope as we close out such a challenging year," said Craig Adams, LifeWay Worship director of creative development and publishing.

Outdoor spaces will be utilized

perhaps more than ever this Christmas, too.

'Walk Through Christmas'

Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, will use the church's outdoor walking track to stage seven scenes of Christmas in their production, "Walk Through Christmas." Guests will experience scenes with live actors, Scripture presentations and a song at each station, ending with a live nativity scene.

"We are hoping that [the production] will be a way to present the Christmas message safely to our church and community," said Tom Smith, music minister at Providence.

Brewster encouraged churches to share how they have cared for their community this year and to connect

with church members and even other pastors through phone calls and outreach activities. He suggested "Christmas in a box," where holiday items like a wreath, CDs of sermons or the choir or soloists singing Christmas music, ornaments or advent

calendars are packaged for delivery — anything that would help to foster the Christmas spirit.

"The Hope of Christmas is needed," Fuller said. "The good news of Christmas is a balm during this time."

"Make plans with great intention to meet your congregation at their point of need. Offer what you can and utilize technology as much as possible. Be creative in how you can best engage your people during the season." ❄️



Courtesy of Craig Adams/LifeWay

'Placeholder' claim could protect churches in future

(continued from page 1)
except for any obligations under this trust," Jordan said.

Thinking about 'what if'

Jordan discussed a scenario in which a church that currently sponsors or has sponsored a BSA troop in the past could find itself standing alone some day to face a claim from a former scout.

The BSA's obligation to defend the church or to provide insurance coverage will likely be extinguished by the bankruptcy proceeding. The church's only remedy may be to look to the trust for help, and Jordan is concerned about whether help will be available if the church did not file a claim with the bankruptcy court.

Nov. 16 is the filing deadline for abuse claims against BSA, and Jordan said churches may want to seek legal counsel to determine whether they need to file a timely claim, as a sort of "placeholder," Jordan said.

Legal advice may help

"Out of an abundance of caution, if a church chartered or sponsored a BSA organization, it may wish to seek legal counsel about filing a claim in the BSA proceeding, even if it does not presently know whether it will have any claims," Jordan said.

Boy Scouts of America filed for

Chapter 11 bankruptcy in February after paying more than \$150 million in settlements related to sexual abuse between 2017 and 2019.

More than 12,000 boys have alleged abuse by scoutmasters or other leaders since the 1920s, according to court testimony reported by several news outlets.

Previous claims

Most of the alleged abuse dates to the 1960s, '70s and '80s, prior to the BSA's implementation of youth protection plans that require mandatory criminal background checks for all leaders, mandatory reporting of abuse allegations and required training in youth protection.



For more information on the BSA proceedings, go to officialBSAclaims.com.

At the time of BSA's bankruptcy filing, the organization held more than \$1 billion in assets, according to a *New York Times* report. Much more is held by more than 250 local councils. Alabama troops are members of eight local councils, including the Greater Alabama Council, headquartered in Birmingham; the Black Warrior Council, headquartered in Tuscaloosa; the Mobile Area Council, headquartered in Montgomery; and several councils that serve troops in Alabama and neighboring states.

More information on the BSA proceedings is available at officialBSAclaims.com. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Biblical Mysteries

Kingdom of God Revisited

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

In the second week of this theme, Theology 101 looked at the mystery of God's kingdom. This is a broad and pervasive subject in the Bible, so we take a second look before leaving the theme of biblical mysteries.

The Gospel of Matthew devotes an entire chapter to Jesus' use of parables. When His disciples asked why He spoke to the crowds in parables, Jesus explained, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom but to them it has not been given" (13:11).

Jesus' use of the plural "mysteries" alerts us to the fact that there are multiple truths related to the Kingdom. Remembering that the term mystery as used in the New Testament refers not to truth that is mysterious, unfathomable or difficult to discover, biblical mysteries are divine truths that are secret or hidden until God chose to disclose them.

Spiritual Kingdom

Earthly kingdoms have counted populations and defined boundaries. God's kingdom is spiritual in nature. Thus, the Bible says of it, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Jesus expressed the spiritual nature of God's kingdom in Luke 17:20-21: "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed the kingdom of God is within you."

Being spiritual in nature, God's kingdom is wherever He is allowed to reign in one's heart, with the resulting evidences of righteousness, peace and joy.

As noted last week, in his vision of the future in Revelation, John saw 24 elders who sang a new song, the song of God's eternal kingdom, saying to Christ the Lamb, "[You] have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9).

Inclusive Kingdom

This heavenly song is a reminder that God's kingdom is inclusive. It is without restrictions about earthly nationality, racial difference, language variation or geographical location.

Not only is the kingdom of God spiritual and inclusive, it is also everlasting. Earthly kingdoms wax and wane, rise and fall, appear and disappear.

One need only to ask, "Where is the Roman Empire of Jesus' day or the Babylonian Empire of Old Testament times?"

In marked contrast, the Bible speaks of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11).✠

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.



Pastors pray unity will flow from Montgomery

(continued from page 1) name. Everyone who tours this city learns of the slave jails that lined Commerce Street. They learn about the telegram sent on April 11, 1861, from a building across the street from this fountain that started the Civil War.

They hear of Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a bus just across from that fountain. They hear the story of the Freedom Riders being viciously beaten at the bus station two blocks

south. They also learn of Bloody Sunday in 1965 in which state troopers beat peaceful protesters about 50 miles from the fountain.

Many stories

If that fountain had a voice, it could tell many good and bad stories.

Let's speak about another fountain that is bearing a different kind of fruit. When Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood, the fountain of His blood became the hope of all humanity.

It changes hearts and

minds. It fosters liberating forgiveness and redemptive perspectives. That fountain also produces a mindset. It was this mindset that Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist pastor and the leader of the civil rights movement, believed in. Propelled by this philosophy, he led a nonviolent movement that shifted America and the world.

It's this philosophy that also motivates many in

Montgomery to evoke change.



SEARCY

Attorney Bryan Stevenson, a believer in Christ, moved to Montgomery in 1989 and set up the Equal Justice Initiative on Commerce Street (the street where slave brokers and slave warehouses were located).

This philosophy also has resulted in Montgomeries electing the first African American mayor in the city's 201-year history, a Christ-follower named Steven Reed. Our chief of police, Ernest Finley, is another dedicated believer who is leading the Montgomery Police Department with great skill and grace. Sheriff Derrick Cunningham is another brother in Christ who is impacting our county with law enforcement principles based on Scripture and a Christian worldview.

John 17

Additionally, unity is increasing among believers in Montgomery. For years, a group of black and white pastors have been meeting together under the banner of John 17. Jesus prayed, "Father make my followers ONE so that the world might believe."

The group holds up the cross of Christ and proclaims that all people are made in God's image, and

we need to unite in the "beloved community" that Dr. King championed.

Model of unity

We want Montgomery to be a model of unity where everyone is valued and respected. We want our city to flourish because the life-giving wind of God's Spirit is blowing away ugly barriers of prejudice and building bridges that lead to equality, harmony, prosperity and productivity.

We celebrate the victories we have seen. We acknowledge there is so much more that must be done, and we are committed to doing our part to make it happen. But we celebrate the efforts of many who, under Christ's influence, have facilitated progress.

Now we want to help generate a beautiful new fountain of God's internal healing and external harmony. We are praying for God's redeeming waters of love, truth, forgiveness and unity to flow from this new fountain across Montgomery, spill over to Alabama and bring refreshment to our thirsty world.



WOLF

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jay Wolf is pastor emeritus of FBC Montgomery, and Kyle Searcy is senior pastor of Fresh Anointing House of Worship. Hear more from Wolf and Searcy on the next TAB Talks podcast. 🙏



Photo courtesy of Jay Wolf

The John 17 group of pastors meets with the goal of breaking down barriers, fostering unity and sharing the light of Christ with the world.

Group of pastors meets monthly since 1990s to pray, build bridges

When Jay Wolf became pastor of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, in 1991, he knew God had placed a desire in his heart to be "one of His agents of reconciliation."

He felt strongly that the sin of racism needed to be confronted and that the Church needed to work toward the type of unity Jesus described in John 17:21.

So in the early 1990s, a group of black and white pastors started meeting monthly with the name John 17. Their goal was prayer and worship and to break barriers and "build bridges of Chris-

tian friendship." They're still meeting today, and over the years their group has grown.

After George Floyd's death, Wolf along with Kyle Searcy, senior pastor of Fresh Anointing House of Worship; Ken Austin, pastor of New Walk of Life Church; and John Ed Mathison, former senior minister of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church; held a press conference at the Court Square Fountain on June 2.

"We displayed our unity in Christ and declared that reasoning is better than rioting," said Wolf, now pastor emeritus of First, Montgomery. "Praise God for the outcome that Montgomery did not

have rioting or racial unrest. I believe Montgomery stayed calm because of the long-term influence of John 17."

'Hope-filled'

The press conference has gotten more than 100,000 views.

In the same vein, Wolf and Searcy wrote a "positive and hope-filled piece" together to help frame "our ongoing discussion on racial relational restoration," Wolf said.

You can find that piece, which includes more of the story of the Court Square Fountain, beginning on page 1. (TAB)

"We want our city to flourish because the life-giving wind of God's Spirit is blowing away ugly barriers of prejudice and building bridges that lead to equality, harmony, prosperity and productivity."

Kyle Searcy, senior pastor, Fresh Anointing House of Worship, and Jay Wolf, pastor emeritus, FBC Montgomery

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Youth for Christ partners with churches, community

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Coronavirus-related lockdowns have limited personal contact for organizations that minister to students, but Dallas-Fort Worth Youth For Christ is finding creative ways to serve at-risk Texas teens.

Michael's mom contacted YFC just after the pandemic hit, seeking help for her son whom she felt was starting down a "wrong path."

"We immediately provided a mentor for him," said LaToyia Dean-Dennis, Dallas-Fort Worth YFC executive director. "They connected by phone, got him a mask and went to play basketball. Since then, Michael's demeanor has completely changed.

"We know that if we can connect kids with Christ, we can change the trajectory of their lives."

YFC Juvenile Justice Ministries serves teens living in and recently released from detention centers,

correctional facilities, residential treatment centers and emergency shelters by offering life-skills training that incorporates the word of God and the gospel message.

Open doors

In fact, Dean-Dennis said COVID-19 has opened doors to partner with local churches that now offer free space for the group's City Life program.

"We know that the 10,000 kids arrested in the Dallas area each year come from 10 zip codes, so we have identified two major (areas), and partnered with community churches and centers."

JJM after-care programs offer discipleship, mentoring and supportive relationships to recently released youth, but Dallas County limits access to inmate information and Dean-Dennis said volunteers often find they have no way to follow up with teens after their release.

When the pandemic

Tips and resources are available at yfc.net.



Photo courtesy of Hamilton Strategies

At-risk youth benefit from one-on-one mentoring by volunteers with Youth for Christ, an organization that works with teens recently released from jail and children of the incarcerated.

locked down facilities, the group partnered with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree program to launch an after-care ministry specifically targeting kids whose parents are incarcerated.

'Higher risk'

"They are at a higher risk of repeating the same behavior [as their parents] and of going into juvenile detention themselves," Dean-Davis explained. "We are beginning to disperse our volun-

teers to the Angel Tree kids in the same two zip codes as our City Life programs."

A new Parent Life program has paved the way to serve teen parents in the same area through online workshops designed to introduce them to Christ while teaching them to be successful parents.

Tabitha Vasilas, executive director for East Alabama YFC, said COVID-19 has changed the way her group serves at-risk youth, but her team has remained active, praying weekly for youth and staff at various facilities.

Prior to COVID-19, the East Alabama group had seen 21 students enter into a personal relationship with Christ through the support of local partner churches like First Baptist Church, Opelika.

"Since COVID-19 ... we have provided social-distancing, safe activities ... and an encouraging message from the word of

God," she said. "We will continue providing these types of Christ-sharing activities in the days to come. God is making all things work together for good."

In addition to prayer support, East Alabama YFC has provided care packages and meals for staff, and sent meals, handwritten letters and hygiene products to the students.

"We also started a 'Devos and Donuts' ministry where we prepare a week's worth of devotions for the youth at the detention center and drop them off on Monday mornings, along with donuts," Vasilas said.

Both groups plan to resume activities at some point and are prepared to offer even more services to reach youth for Christ.

"Our desire is to share the love of Christ by extending compassion in practical ways that help meet the needs of each individual exactly where they are," Vasilas said. "We love each one of them and do our best to demonstrate that through our acts of service, assistance and authentic relationships."

Share mistakes

Dean-Davis agreed, noting, "Youth For Christ is the largest provider of juvenile justice ministries in the world. Young people respond very well to authenticity. The greatest gift you can offer them is your true self. Don't hide your scars. It's important for us to share our mistakes so that they can see that God is greater than the sum of our mistakes." ✝

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Remember Pastor Appreciation Month

By Carolyn Tomlin
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

There are many ways I've been honored by Pastor Appreciation Month, but what really touches my heart is when someone shakes my hand as they leave the church and says, "What you said this morning really made me think — you have made a difference in my life," says Jesse Carr, pastor of Sharon Heights Church, Birmingham.

"Of course, I appreciate a congregation being kind and considerate to my family too," he said. Jerry Rea, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, said, "Today's pastors are under a lot of stress, especially due to the coronavirus in 2020 and the unrest in our nation. "For many, serving as pastor of a church can be a lonely occupation."

"And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

Jer. 3:15

"In a small church, a pastor has an opportunity to know the people and to offer spiritual love and growth. "Our church, not only

recognizes the pastor but the staff," Rea said. "I feel this is very important as there are people who work in our offices who keep the church operating. It takes everyone working together to have a God-loving church."

October was established as Pastor Appreciation Month (originally known as Clergy Appreciation Month) in 1992 by a group of pastors and church leaders to honor those who serve in ministry. Recognizing your pastor/

staff and family is a gift of love. This special acknowledgment should be above and beyond what a church is already doing for its leaders. Observing Pastor Appreciation Month is a way to say, "Our church loves and appreciates you." Most importantly, pray for your pastor and staff. Support them by your attendance and commitment. Tell others about the man God has chosen to lead your church. Honor God by honoring His servant.✝

October is Pastor Appreciation Month.

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South Side Baptist Church, Russellville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send letter of interest and resumés to: sb.church.russellville@gmail.com.

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Farley Community Church in Huntsville, Alabama, is currently seeking a full-time minister of youth and education. Please reply to: personnel@farleycc.org.

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a part-time worship leader. Please send resumés to: belindaksmith@bellsouth.net or mail to: Farmstead Baptist Church, 265 Curry Hwy, Jasper, AL 35503.

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10 ways to honor staff members

Are you looking for unique ways to say "thank you" to your church leaders? If so, these ideas will get you started:

- 1. Encourage** your pastor to enroll in a seminary course online or complete a degree. Pastors need to be prepared and equipped to serve God and His church.
- 2. Provide** a gift card for travel to visit adult children or family.
- 3. Present** a handmade friendship quilt from the women in the church or a fleece throw of the staff member's favorite sports team.
- 4. Plan** a Dessert-a-Month for the coming year and deliver to the pastor's family.
- 5. Write** a personal letter of appreciation to your pastor and staff. Enlist your children to write/draw thank you notes to accompany your letter.
- 6. Encourage** your pastor to take care of his health by gifting him with a gym membership.
- 7. Give** a gift card to your pastor or staff members to download books of their choice.
- 8. Offer** to watch your pastor's children while he and his wife have an outing.
- 9. Surprise** your pastor with tickets to a movie, concert, sporting event, etc.
- 10. Involve** the media by placing an ad in the local paper. Let your community know how much your church loves its leaders. (Carolyn Tomlin)

'Greater impact'

Entire Bible now translated into American Sign Language for deaf, hard of hearing

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As of October 2019, the entire Bible has been translated into 698 languages, with portions of it in nearly 2,700 other languages. However, currently 3,969 languages have no Scripture, according to Wycliffe Bible Translators.

But thanks to Deaf Missions, one other language now has a translation of the full Bible — The ASLV, translated into American Sign Language, the first language of many deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Many believe ASL is just a visual version of English. However, ASL has its own unique rules of grammar and syntax and is truly a different language. Those

who grow up in the deaf culture must formally learn English just like those who grow up in a home with a native language such as Spanish or French.

Reaching out

"[ASL] is the language we [deaf people] can best understand," said Chad Entinger, CEO of Deaf Missions. "We really believe

that having all God's word in American Sign Language will have greater impact and effectiveness as we reach out to deaf people. It's hard

for anybody to try to read and understand a Bible in their second language."

The ASLV project has been a long time in the making. Started in 1981 by Deaf Mission's previous CEO and founder, Duane King, it took 23 years for the New Testa-

ment to be translated. Some work was done on the Old Testament during that time but in 2004, the Old Testament became the focus. The goal was to finish sometime in the 2030s.

The majority of these years, one or two teams worked on different books. However, in the last three-and-a-half years, funding was provided for six teams, working on six books at the same time. With God's provision, the completion date was accelerated by more than 10 years, Entinger said.

All the translation for the ASLV was done from the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

Entinger was involved in some of the translation work and said he enjoyed overcoming the challenge of reading the Bible in English and in the original Hebrew. He then found a way to sign a verse or passage, so it was not only accurate but also

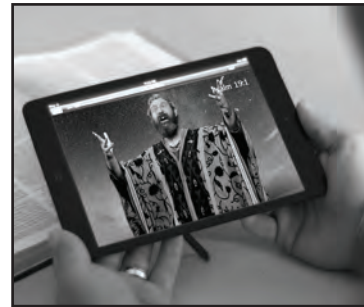


Photo courtesy of Deaf Missions

Deaf Missions created the ASLV translation of the Bible, which is comprised of entirely American Sign Language.

clearly understandable by the deaf.

'Daily challenge'

Each morning Entinger worked on the project, he said he prayed, "Okay God. I really need your help here to get started and to accept this daily challenge ... having the patience, taking the time to be diligent and do it well."

He said this project "sharpened his sword" and has changed and improved how he studies Scripture

and develops sermons.

The vision for Deaf Missions is "simply for every deaf person to see and know Jesus. The primary ways we reach [deaf] people are through sign language media or media in sign language. The ASLV has been one of our highest priorities," Entinger said.

Deaf Missions also has daily devotionals, sermons by deaf preachers and short videos, as well as children's videos.

"The Book of Job" is the first-ever book of the Bible to be released as a feature film in ASL.

Work also is progressing on "The Jesus Movie," which will use native signers for the deaf to share the gospel of Jesus.

Most of the resources have voiceovers and/or captions, with some including Spanish subtitles. Deaf Missions is trying to film "The Jesus Movie" in a way that can be "sign dubbed" and translated into some of the 350-400 other sign languages around the world, Entinger said.

Resources available

"All of the different resources and videos are available on the Deaf Missions (website) and the Deaf Missions app," he noted. "This day and age is becoming a golden era for reaching deaf people through current technology.

"Think about how much more effective and efficient we are becoming compared to 30 years ago when we were trying to get videos out on VHS tapes, and 15 years ago when we were trying to distribute DVDs. We are blessed to be able to reach so many through social media.

"I really feel that God is on the move," Entinger said. 🌈

For more information and to support these projects, go to DeafMissions.com.

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3 stories you should know



File photo

Ridgecrest Conference Center will be purchased by the Ridgecrest Foundation, a new independent nonprofit ministry formed by supporters of the facility and its programs. LifeWay Christian Resources announced in April its plans to sell the North Carolina property. The transfer is expected to take place by the end of 2020, LifeWay said in an Oct. 15 announcement, but terms of the agreement were not made public. Read more at tabonline.org/ridgecrest-sale. (BP)

ERLC ministry provides ultrasound machine

The Psalm 139 Project, a ministry of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, recently placed an ultrasound machine at Mosaic Sexual Health Clinic, a new facility opened by A Women's Pregnancy Center in Tallahassee, Florida, as a part of its pro-life mission to save the lives of preborn babies.

The Psalm 139 Project focuses on aiding pregnancy resource centers by securing ultrasound machines. Since its inception, the Psalm 139 Project has provided 24 ultrasound machines for pregnancy care centers around the nation.

Each placement allows women considering abortion to get a glimpse of the life inside their womb, the ERLC noted.

For more information, go to psalm139project.org. (ERLC)

SBTS trustees keep controversial names

Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, unanimously voted Oct. 12 not to remove the names of the school's founders from several campus buildings.

Trustees considered but declined calls to remove the names of founding president James P. Boyce and founding faculty members John Broadus, Basil Manly Jr. and William Williams, all of whom held slaves prior to emancipation. Several campus buildings bear their names.

Trustees instead embraced steps to lament the institution's historic ties to racists, vacating an endowed chair named after a controversial 19th-century benefactor and providing scholarships for African American students over the next few years.

Read more at tabonline.org/southern-trustees. (BP)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Georgia

At Georgia Baptists' inaugural Hispanic Leadership Summit, 115 participants adopted a five-year Hispanic ministry plan, *The Christian Index* reported. Goals include: 5,000 new converts and baptisms, 10% increase in Cooperative Program giving, planting more urban churches, generational change and empowerment of younger leaders and greater participation of Hispanic leaders in the Georgia Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention.

Florida

Soon after becoming bivocational pastor of First Baptist Church in Bonita Springs, Florida, Ernest Harvard learned that the church, with an annual budget of \$35,000, had a \$700,000 mortgage and numerous other debts, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. Within four years and with "one miracle after another," according to the pas-

tor, the church has erased all debt, including the large mortgage. "We have seen God's hand in one thing after another," Harvard said. "It has been ... awesome to watch unfold."

Louisiana

Louisiana received a "gut punch" Oct. 9 as the second hurricane in six weeks made landfall in the state. Hurricane Delta dumped close to 18 inches of rain in some areas. Disaster Relief teams have begun their response to Hurricane Delta, even as some teams are still in place following Hurricane Laura's landfall on Aug. 27, the *Baptist Message* reported.

Mississippi

The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board has committed \$1 million dollars to the 2020 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions. The MBCB underspent its budget this year,

primarily because of pandemic-induced cancellations and travel restrictions. In late August the MBCB's executive committee and board voted on the gift, and it was transferred electronically on Oct. 11 to the International Mission Board, *The Baptist Record* reported.

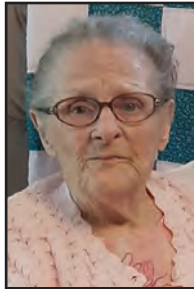
Tennessee

Oak Valley Baptist Church in Franklin, Tennessee, offers two weekly Sunday services — one mask-required and one mask-optional, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported. With social distancing observed in both services, the mask-required service currently attracts 50–60 people, mostly senior adults, while the mask-optional service attracts 70–80 people. Before COVID-19, the church averaged about 250 people in both services. As many as 100 people watch the church's live-streamed service. "Our people have been very receptive," said Pastor Jerry Winfield.

Alabama news

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Stockdale Baptist Church, Munford**, recently recognized 94-year-old **Kathryn Hardy** for more than 35 years of Christian service at the church. Hardy taught Sunday School for many years and has been involved in Women on Mission, as well as other ministries, and continued an outreach ministry from her home during the pandemic.



HARDY

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► Several years back, someone nominated **Larry Dover** for the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce's volunteer of the year award, but he told them he couldn't accept it.

It was back when a tornado hit the area, and Dover, director of missions for **Franklin Baptist Association**, was helping coordinate cleanup and rebuilding efforts in the community.



Franklin Free Press Facebook photo

But that, he said, was just his role in ministry — not something he deserved an honor for.

Recently they found a way to get him that award anyway — Dover and his wife, Janice, were named the chamber's 2020 Volunteers of the Year for their work with the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. Their family has felt the effects of cancer, and they serve as team leaders, holding meetings and events once every other month, if not more.

"We were honored; it was unexpected," Dover said.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

► The congregation of **Heritage Baptist Church, Montgomery**, definitely felt like 50 years was a big milestone. But it became an even bigger moment when they got to burn their mortgage note at their anniversary celebration Oct. 4.

During that part of the special service, **Pastor Teman Knight** read the same words that were spoken at the mortgage burning of their founding church, Clayton



Photo by Reid Foster

Street Baptist, in 1931. Clayton Street Baptist moved downtown and became Heritage Baptist in 1970 when I-65 was going to be built through the church's property.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebration, the church watched videos highlighting how God had used Heritage Baptist in the past.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission; Bobby DuBois, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions; and Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, also presented certificates to the church.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

► **Steve Williamson** says that 25 years ago, he didn't feel like the pastorate was for him.

"I was doing youth and music ministry in Columbus, Georgia, and I had been arguing with God about being a pastor," he said. "I couldn't picture myself as one."

And even if he was, he couldn't picture the church that would fit him.

But one night as he wrestled, he drove the 12 miles to **Crawford Baptist Church, Phenix City**, and as he sat in the church parking lot, he knew that's where God was calling him.

"I felt like this was my calling before I turned my resumé in," Williamson said. "It's been a blessing, it really has."

Over the past 25 years, he and his wife, Pam, have gotten to be a part of church members' lives, watch their families grow up and watch as the area changed from farmland to a bedroom community for surrounding cities. As a church family, they've been through ups and downs together over the years and grown stronger in their faith. "It's been an adventure," Williamson said. "God's done a good work here."



WILLIAMSON

(News compiled by TAB Media staff)

Johnson joins Beeson's Thriving Pastors effort

Stephen Johnson is the new associate director of the grant-funded Thriving Pastors Initiative of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School.

Founder of Good Steward Ministries, Johnson has spent more than a decade in ministry, having served as a pastor, church planter and chaplain. Johnson will serve with Beeson associate dean Thomas L. Fuller, who is the program director of Thriving Pastors.

"I am excited that Stephen Johnson is joining us to help implement the vision and plans for this important initiative," Fuller said. "Stephen brings a combination of experience, passion and gifts for this work that will be invaluable to our efforts to equip and encourage pastors on the front lines of gospel ministry."

The goal of Thriving Pastors is to connect congregational leaders with one another and with other sources of support and encouragement, both personally and pastorally. In addition to his role with Thriving Pastors, Johnson also will assist with ministry placement services for divinity students and alumni.

"I think the world of Rev. Johnson and am grateful to the Lord that he is joining the Beeson team," said Beeson Dean Douglas A. Sweeney. "Together with Dr. Fuller, he will lead us in a crucial new ministry to pastors, including our alumni, whose tireless Kingdom service deserves all the support and encouragement we can provide."

Johnson holds degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary and Auburn University. For more information about the Thriving Pastors Initiative, call 205-726-2991. (Samford)



JOHNSON

Persecuted church

China denounces any religion but Communist Party, calls others 'cults'

BEIJING, China — The Chinese Communist Party is offering rewards for information on house churches. The program begun in Heilongjiang has spread to additional cities.

Bitter Winter magazine reports that rewards for reporting suspected "illegal" religious activity are as high as 100,000 renminbi (U.S. \$14,000).

In July, the Public Security Department in Hainan province posted a notice of reward for "clues on Xie Jiao." The term "Xie Jiao" means "evil cult" but is used to refer to any religious activity

not sanctioned by the Chinese Communist Party.

Government propaganda such as "Don't believe in any religion other than the Communist Party" has also been posted throughout the country.

Catholic Bishop James Su Zhimin was arrested in 1996 and again in 1997 and has not been seen since 2003.

An estimated 900,000 to 1.8 million Uyghur Muslims currently are in 1,300 detention camps, where many forms of abuse have been reported.

China is No. 23 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (TAB)



CIA map

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

STATEWIDE DAY OF PRAYER FOR OUR NATION SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1

YOUR CHURCH IS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS VERY IMPORTANT TIME OF PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY. VISIT [ALSBOM.ORG/PRAYER](http://alsbom.org/prayer) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND HELPFUL RESOURCES.

Online State Missions *Celebration*

Tuesday, November 17

Although the 2020 Annual Meeting of the State Convention will not be held this year, please join us for an hour of inspiration and information at live.alsbom.org and the **SBOM Facebook** page, Tuesday, November 17, 2-3 p.m. Then, at 6:30 p.m. that same day, tune in for the International Mission Board Sending Celebration, also at live.alsbom.org or the **IMB Facebook** page.

The Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference has also moved completely online, all day **Monday, November 16**. Visit albaptistpc.com for details.



≡ October is *Cooperative Program Month!* ≡

BE A PART OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Visit alsbom.org/cp for ideas and resources to help your church learn more about the Cooperative Program. For more information, contact State Missionary Jim Swedenburg, jswedenburg@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2283.

 COOPERATIVE PROGRAM



Dadeville church renovated after damage from 'devil's wind'

For a lot of people, 2020 has been a challenge. At Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church, Dadeville, it's been a challenge times two.

Not long after the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to change the way they held services, an April 19 storm Pastor Carl Kelly called "the devil's wind" destroyed their sanctuary and the rooms behind the sanctuary.

"A straight-line wind caused several trees to fall around our church building, with one falling on the end of our church building," Kelly said. "This caused our metal roof to buckle and ripped much of our roof off. It exposed the inside to water damage with 100% loss in this part of the building."

The steeple also was blown off the building and the church sign blown away.

But many volunteers from the local, associational and state level came together



Photo by J. Carl Kelly

Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church, Dadeville, has the feel of a new facility after repairs and renovations following an April 19 storm that caused catastrophic damage to their building.

to clean up, repair and rebuild the church. It was a massive group effort, Kelly said. And when all was said and done, they ended up with a new roof, steeple, wiring, sign, audio and video; a replacement piano; refurbished pews; and a repaired day-care center.

Special service

The church recently held a special service they called "Back to Church Dedic-

tion Sunday" to celebrate God bringing them through both trials this year.

"We have held on to the message of Psalm 23," Kelly said. "We have prevailed in dealing with this 'devil's wind,' and we have put the building that Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church meets in back together even better than what we had. What the 'devil's wind' intended for evil, God turned into a blessing." (TAB)

ONE another

Join us online at albaptistpc.com
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16

The 2020 Pastors Conference will be completely virtual. Sermons will premiere online Nov. 16 at albaptistpc.com.

Subscribe to the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on YouTube to receive notifications when the sermons premiere.

Christian Crossword

By Keith Graham Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

- Special worship event. (1 Cor. 10:21)
- Number of Arabian nights. (Roman numerals)
- Whether therefore ye ____, or drink. (1 Cor. 10:31)
- To gorge with water or delete of money.
- Therefore.
- Nervous.
- The Lord make His face __ upon thee. (Num. 6:25)
- Condition of Jesus' steed in Mark 11:2.
- __ the hart panteth after the water brooks. (Ps. 42:1)
- Animal hide.
- Shade tree.
- Inclined territory.
- Speaker's interjection of hesitation.
- Mischievous one.
- What 41 down is to God and man.
- What shall be done

in the __? (Luke 23:31)

- Elements used in 57 across.
- That is. (Latin abbr.)
- __, topaz and the emerald. (Ezek. 28:13)
- Rebuker of Balaam (Num. 22:28)
- A bishop must be ... no __. (Titus 1:7)
- A portion of a circle.
- This comprises most of the Bible. (abbr.)
- A bishop must be __ to teach. (1 Tim. 3:2)
- Said by many to be an ex-Christian nation. (abbr.)
- Children of the mind.
- Gloves' companion.
- __ thou at my right hand. (Ps. 110:1)
- Symbol for a precious metal.
- Lawful.
- Usually follows "tra" in tandem.

57. Another name for 1 across.

Down

- When the ruler of the feast had __ the water (John 2:9)
- Printer's measure.
- What 41 down did in Eden.
- Kingly.
- Famine that was in the __. (Gen. 26:1)
- A thoroughfare of a holy one. (abbr.)
- They were to be poured out without the camp. (Lev. 4:12)
- Leviathan makes the deep do this. (Job 41:31)
- Judas' mob came with these to arrest Jesus. (John 18:3)
- __ out a living.
- See thou hurt not the __ and wine. (Rev. 6:6)
- Rate of travel.
- An Arabian ruler.
- Man is born unto trouble, as this flies

- Youthful equestrian's steed.
- A grain.
- Myself.
- Track and field projectile.
- Wager.
- In __ season we shall reap. (Gal. 6:9)
- Neither shall they learn __ any more. (Isa. 2:4)
- He saw the Lord, sitting up on a throne, high and lifted up. (Isa. 6:1)
- Fish eggs.
- The "boot" country.
- Modern communications giant.
- The adversary.
- Deborah's kind of tree. (Judg. 4:5)
- Farm structure.
- The Dynamic __.
- Describes some wines.
- __ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
- Atop.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 25

Explore the Bible

By Robert L. Olsen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



GOD RENEWS Isaiah 40:18–31

Isaiah Chapter 40 is a major turning point in the book as a whole. At the end of Chapter 39, God reveals through Isaiah that a time is coming when Israel will be taken captive by Babylon, which would eventually happen over a century later in 586 B.C.

The reason for Israel's captivity at the hands of the Babylonians was because of their sin. Chapter 40 of Isaiah turns from the present day with Hezekiah to the return from the Babylonian exile about 200 years in the future. In Isaiah 40:1, the prophet is given the task to bring words of comfort because of the hope of return to Israel from captivity.

Living (18–20)

Many of those who heard Isaiah probably wondered how God could rescue them from their enemies. By the 6th century B.C., Babylon was a major world power, and Israel was no match for their might. So how could they return from captivity? They will return from captivity because God will make it happen. Through Isaiah, God reminds Israel who He is and that nothing can compare to Him. To prove His point, God demonstrates the worthlessness of idols in comparison with Himself.

In a humorous way, Isaiah recounts how a craftsman makes the idol himself out of metal and overlays it with gold or silver. One who is poor makes his own idol out of wood to set up and worship. How foolish! The idea of making your own god only to worship it is ridiculous.

While it is easy to scoff at the futility of creating your own idols, we are often guilty of the same behavior. These idolaters trusted in gods they could see and often Christians do the same. We can trust in our job, our position, our health and our wealth and have a sense of confidence that we are OK because of these things.

In this way, we show a lack of trust in God since we too, like the

idolaters, trust in something we can see. The problem is that all of these things can be gone in an instant. The current pandemic reminds us of this. And if these things we trust in are gone, what are we to trust in now? This is why trusting in the Lord has to be our priority.

God can grant us wealth, health and all of these other things, but these are blessings that can depart in a minute. Our grounding has to be in God so that we can say with Paul in Philippians 4, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content — whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need."

Sovereign Creator (21–26)

In comparison to these idols, Isaiah reveals how God is the one who has created the very stars that others worship. He is the one who raises rulers up and wipes them away. Why trust in idols when you can trust in God, the creator of all? If the God of the universe says that He will bring His people out of captivity, then you can be sure it will happen.

This gives us great comfort today because we know that God is able to keep His promises. When we are faced with trials, we have a Savior who demonstrated His love for us by dying for us (Rom. 5:8). When we lose heart or become stressed and disappointed, we look to Christ and know that we can be confident of our eternal security.

Tireless Source (27–31)

In opposition to the worthless idols that are able to do nothing, God never tires or grows weary. Trusting in God provides strength and encourages us so that we can press on in the midst of whatever situation we face.

As Paul said, "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST Mark 10:13–22

Trust is not something that comes easily to most of us. Perhaps for good reason, we are born with a certain innate skepticism, and the people around us generally have to prove themselves trustworthy before we will entrust ourselves to them.

When we were kids, most of us looked at our parents with the jaundiced eye of a banker sizing up a loan applicant when they promised they would hold onto us for our first bike ride, catch us when we jumped into the deep end of the pool and buy us an ice cream if we didn't enjoy a roller coaster as much as they said we would.

Perhaps it is because it is so difficult for us that trust — which is really just another name for faith — lies at the very heart of the message of Scripture.

From the Garden of Eden to the General Epistles, the biblical authors constantly convey God's simple (and yet profound) message to His creatures: Will you trust Me?

There are some shining moments in Scripture when the answer to this question has been yes: Abraham at Moriah, Moses before Pharaoh, Mary at the annunciation. Sadly though, there are far too many moments when the answer has been no.

Few examples stand out so starkly as the Israelites' refusal to enter the promised land. Though they had seen the great miracles in Egypt, the Israelites just could not bring themselves to trust God to take care of them.

Total commitment is demonstrated in our childlike trust in Christ. (13–16)

Trust would not come easily for Jesus' disciples either. Jesus knew the disciples would one day face challenges far beyond their present imagination. Surely, this is the reason He spent so much time inculcating a new sense of trust in His followers.

The story of Jesus reaching out to the little children is one of these "training stories." When people brought their children to Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo them away.

When Jesus saw this, He angrily rebuked His disciples and told them to let the children come, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Children make a fitting image of God's kingdom because of their childlike trust.

While it is true that we are born with a certain skepticism that makes us wary of that parental encouragement to ride a bike, jump in a pool or ride a roller coaster, that same skepticism is mainly overcome by our willingness to finally trust our parents when they encourage us to do so.

We leap as children because we know that our parents will be the net for us when we need them. In this passage, Jesus urged His disciples to be like these trusting children.

Total commitment is demonstrated as we strive for obedience. (17–20)

At the other end of the spectrum from these trusting children stands the rich young ruler. Eager to inherit eternal life, this young man of means pleaded with Jesus, "What must I do?" Jesus' first response seems simple enough: "Obey the commandments." This, the young man insisted, he had done. Surely there must be something else.

Total commitment is demonstrated when we follow Jesus wholeheartedly. (21–22)

That "something else" proved to be the young man's weak spot. True commitment to God — true trust — would involve the young man's doing the one thing that would be too much for him: selling his many possessions and following Jesus. This, the young man was unwilling to do.

While he seemed willing to trust God in the "small" areas, when it came to the "big" matter of his great wealth, the young man was unwilling to commit. Complete commitment was a bridge too far for him. Yet, what Jesus asks and requires of us is just that sort of commitment. A life of faith is a life of trust, a life of complete commitment to God.✠



Media reviews

BOOK

Rosalie Hunt tells Kathleen Mallory's story in new book release

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The words weren't brand new to her — Kathleen Mallory had looked over the letter before she stepped into the pulpit to read it. It was from Anna Hartwell, a missionary to China.

Mallory's father — who was on the program of the Alabama Baptist State Convention that year — had asked her to read it aloud during the convention meeting.

And as Mallory did, the words leapt off the page.

"Something happened to her when she read that letter to the state convention," said Rosalie Hunt, an author and retired career missionary. "She said it was as if God spoke directly to her. It was a life-changing event."

That was in 1908. It

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

fanned the flame of her passion for missions, and the following year, she was asked to be the leader of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union.

'Opened her eyes'

"She felt that she had asked God what He wanted her to do," Hunt said. "That letter opened her eyes to the world, and she said yes."

It started a legacy that Alabama Baptists need to remember, Hunt said — that's why she wrote Mallory's story in the book, "Guided by Grace: The Kathleen Mallory Story."

"The new generation needs to know her as well because we are still being influenced by what she did years ago," Hunt said.

At age 33 — after three years at the helm of Alabama WMU — she was tapped to lead national WMU. She encouraged others to give sacrificially, but more than that, she led — she lived humbly so that she could give as much as she could to missions, Hunt said.

'We owe her'

"During her tenure, she saved the Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board) and the Home Mission Board from bankruptcy," Hunt said. "She kept WMU and basically the Southern Baptist Convention solvent

through the Great Depression, World War I and World War II.

"We owe her a great debt of gratitude, and so much of what we do now is on the foundation which she laid for us all those years ago."

The men in the SBC called Mallory the "tiny dynamo," Hunt said.

"I'm hoping people will get a glimpse of this woman and what kind of a legacy she left for all of Alabama," she said.

For years, Mallory was the namesake of the annual offering for Alabama WMU.

Then in 2016, Alabama started its first statewide missions offering and named it in Mallory's honor, along with Martha Myers, a missionary who lost her life to an extremist in Yemen in 2002.

Leaving her mark

Hunt said Mallory definitely left her mark.

"It requires a pantheon of adjectives to describe Kathleen Mallory, the gifted woman who led Woman's Missionary Union for a remarkable 36 years," she wrote in the preface of "Guided by Grace." "Lovely, graceful, charming, the epitome of Southern



ROSALIE HUNT

Photo courtesy of Rosalie Hunt

graciousness, yet it was the depth of her spiritual gifts that influenced a generation of women and indeed, the entire Southern Baptist Convention."

Mallory's story is not the first story of a female missionary or missions leader Hunt has penned. She also has written books on Ann Judson, Hephzibah Jenkins Townsend and Fan-

nie Heck, and in 2013, she published a book on national WMU's 125th anniversary, "We've a Story to Tell: 125 Years of WMU."

Order online

To learn more about Hunt's story or to order one of her books, visit rosaliehallhunt.com. All proceeds from book sales go to further missions endeavors. 🌿

The men in the SBC called Mallory the "tiny dynamo."

"I'm hoping people will get a glimpse of this woman and what kind of a legacy she left for all of Alabama."

Rosalie Hunt
author and retired career missionary

Doing God's work

New England WMU president reflects on spiritual journey from Ghana to US

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMU National Correspondent

When Doris Opoku and her family immigrated to the United States from Ghana in 2008, they had no idea what ministry opportunities God had in store.

Since that time, in addition to becoming U.S. citizens, Doris was elected Woman's Missionary Union president for the six-state Baptist Convention of New England and her husband, Seth Opoku, was named president of the North American Baptist Association of the Ghana Baptist Convention, one of several ethnic fellowships affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Doris balances her WMU leadership responsibilities, including serving on the national WMU executive board, with her roles as a pastor's wife, mother of five and a certified nursing assistant at a group home for the elderly.

Seth, a Baptist minister while in Ghana, was called as the first pastor of United Faith Baptist Church in Worcester, Massachusetts, after arriving in the U.S. He currently is the bivocational pastor of LifeWay Baptist Church International in Leominster, Massachusetts.

During a Sunday morning message at LifeWay International's small storefront sanctuary, Pastor Opoku reminded his congregation, "The choices you make today will determine your destiny tomorrow."

That is a truth that the Opokus have learned firsthand.

Affirming "your destiny is in your hands," he emphasized the most significant decision is to "al-

low Jesus to be ... Master and Savior for life."

More than a decade after immigrating, "the benefits are mostly for the kids," she said. "There are more opportunities here, especially since education here is more advanced and very good for them."

Of course, relocating to a new country halfway around the world wasn't without its challenges.

'Things work differently'

Describing her family's cultural transition as an enlightening experience, Doris said they quickly discovered that "things work differently in America — not like the way we were in Ghana."

She said it took several months to navigate such issues as renting an apartment, finding jobs, getting medical screenings and registering their children for school.

She said other adjustments ranged from coping with the frigid New England winters to building community with neighbors. "In Ghana, you can say hi to anybody and talk to anybody," she reflected. By contrast, she said they found that in New England culture "you have to know your boundaries when you are talking to people in the community."

"It's very difficult to go into the communities and talk to people when it comes to spiritual work," Doris added. "Most of the time what we do is use handouts. We go to apartments and put tracts in the people's doors."

As with most congregations, the coronavirus pandemic has made outreach efforts even more challenging.

On the WMU front, Doris also



WMU photo by Pam Henderson

New England WMU President Doris Opoku and her husband, Seth, pastor of LifeWay Baptist Church International in Leominster, Massachusetts, are the parents of five children: (back row, l to r) Emmanuel, Theophilus, (front row, l to r) Jessica, Danielle and Keziah.



WMU photo by Pam Henderson

Doris Opoku, who immigrated with her family to the United States from Ghana in 2008, now serves as president of New England Woman's Missionary Union.

discovered significant cultural differences between Ghana and New England. The most striking?

"In Ghana, we have WMU in every Baptist church," she explained. "Every married woman in the church becomes part of the WMU."

"We host quarterly and annual programs, including Bible studies, prayer and inviting resource persons to speak and educate the members on issues relevant to our walk with God and being useful to the community," she added. "All the women in the local churches are expected to be part of the WMU. ... It's a little bit different from how you do it here."

Spreading the WMU word

After accepting the New England WMU presidency in 2016, Doris said, "I realized that WMU is not that much known in the churches here in New England. Most of the churches don't have WMU."

During her four-year term as president, which will conclude this

fall, Doris said her primary goal has been to help change that reality one New England church at a time.

In addition to hosting an annual ethnic retreat for women throughout New England, she said her vision is to provide churches with "information about WMU ... and see the women get involved."

Training young leaders

Taking a page from her WMU experiences in Ghana, Doris said, "It is important to try to expand" WMU's missions and ministry presence in New England because WMU organizations such as Mission Friends, Girls in Action, Royal Ambassadors and Acteens are vital in helping "train the kids and train the young leaders as they are growing up."

By combining missions discipleship with Christian hospitality "you have some young women and men who might invite their friends over and they'll also listen to the Word of God and get their lives changed, accept Christ and go to church."✠