



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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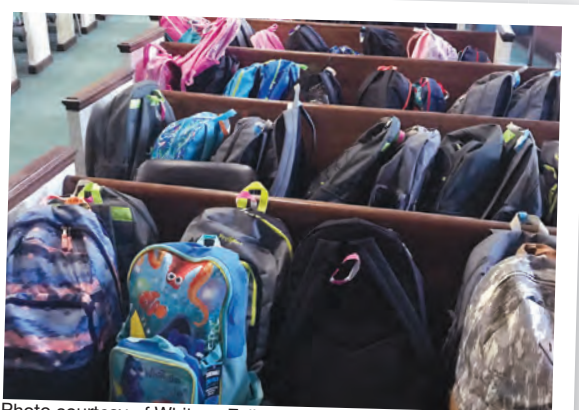


Photo courtesy of Whitney Exline



Photo courtesy of Chris Mills



Madison Baptist Association Facebook photo

'Gospel seeds'

Christmas Backpacks ministry partnerships continue despite pandemic

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama Baptists are on track to collect more than 9,000 backpacks

destined for holiday outreach efforts at ministry sites across the state and region.

Missions focus

Christmas Backpacks is a ministry partnership between

Alabama Woman's Missionary Union and the missions mobilization team of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. In the months approaching Christmas, Alabama Baptists collect Bibles, toys, shelf-stable food, toiletries,

clothing, school supplies and other items to fill new backpacks. Those backpacks are then distributed in the Mississippi River Delta and in Appalachia through church, association and state partnerships, like the
(See 'More,' page 9)



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Top photos: Backpacks collected by Alabama-Crenshaw Baptist Association (left), University of Alabama in Huntsville BCM (center) and Madison Baptist Association (right) are part of the nearly 9,000 backpacks expected to be collected in Alabama this year. **Bottom photo:** Volunteers collect backpacks at the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association regional collection site. The backpacks were donated by Birmingham Metro, St. Clair, Walker, North Jefferson and Friendship associations.

OUR EXTENDED ALABAMA BAPTIST FAMILY

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Photo by Jessica Ingram

Almost every day someone brings by a new bag or box filled with Bibles, books and study material. If you or your church has materials that fit the criteria, you're invited to participate in the collection by dropping them off at the TAB building.

'Tremendous response' for Love Packages

Lloyd Borden says he was glad to see the story on TAB's Nov. 12 front page about Love Packages, a ministry that ships Bibles and other Christian literature all over the world.

Lookout Mountain Baptist Association, where he serves as director of missions, has been collecting for Love Packages for several years now.

"I heard about it from my brother and his wife in Cullman," Borden said. "Now, every quarter we put out the call for churches to bring their used literature in. It's been very good."

Alongside the recent TAB article, TAB's editor, Jennifer Davis Rash, also put out the call for churches, associations or individuals to bring in donations to help Love Packages meet its goal to send 2,020 tons around the world in 2020.

And readers responded.

In the past month, a number of church groups and individuals have dropped off boxes of Bibles and literature at TAB Media's office in Homewood.

"I'm so excited to see the tremendous response from Alabama Baptists donating Bibles and Christian literature to Love Packages," Rash said. "We are honored to serve as a drop-off location for the current collection project. It's one more way we can serve as a ministry partner and help disciple believers worldwide in a practical way."

Drop-off locations

If you or your church has materials that fit the criteria (see lovepackages.org for a list of what to include and what not to include), you're invited to participate by dropping them off at the TAB office at 3310 Independence Drive in Homewood or at the Love Packages collection center in Decatur. (Grace Thornton)

"We are honored to serve as a drop-off location for the current collection project. It's one more way we can serve as a ministry partner and help disciple believers worldwide in a practical way."

Jennifer Davis Rash
TAB editor-in-chief

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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as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.

MY RASHIONALE

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

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Late-arriving surprise provides one of those God moments

Rod Marshall's emotional "oh my" response concerned me at first. He stared at the text message on his phone in disbelief for several seconds.

But the stunned look turned out to be because of something really good, actually great.

It came from a heart of awe in what the Lord had done and gratitude to the generosity of those supporting the work of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, where Rod serves as president and CEO.

Rod shared how the Children's Homes' 2020 Giving Tuesday goal looked beyond realistic when it was set — \$650,000. Still, they sensed a peace and confidence in the ambitious ask, he explained.

When midnight struck on Giving Tuesday (Dec. 1), the dollars donated came up a bit shy of the mark and confused the team, but they didn't let it discourage them.

And then two days later (mid-morning, Thursday, Dec. 3), Rod's phone started lighting up as he and I recorded an upcoming TAB Talks podcast on the topic of leadership.

The consistent buzzing and bursts of light caught my attention as we chatted about wisdom, integrity, compassion and other characteristics of a strong leader.

He never blinked nor felt the need to grab his phone. He stayed focused on our conversation, something I've been working on in recent months and was

able to watch modeled for me in that moment.

As we wrapped up in the studio, Rod flipped through the messages on his phone — and that's when he stopped and stared.

At 6:30 that morning, a donor contacted Children's Homes team member Steve Sellers to let him know he had intended to be part of the Giving Tuesday effort but failed to get his check in the mail in time.

He had a \$50,000 check in hand ready for Steve to run by and pick up.

With the surprise gift and a few other late-arriving donations, the new total landed at \$652,953.

"Our hearts are full" became the sentiment of everyone connected to the Children's Homes.

We could sense the cheering and high fives as an image of cute kids throwing confetti trickled out through the digital world in a celebratory social media post and email message:

"Thank you for helping us reach and exceed our goal. Every gift helps and every gift makes a difference in the life

of a child and family. THANK YOU for your support through Giving Tuesday and every day in-between!"

The generosity of church families and individual donors giving to the Children's Homes in this recent effort is a great example of how Alabama Baptists respond consistently to the work and ministries taking place across the state, nation and world to make a difference for Christ.

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for always being willing to dig deep and give with such a generous spirit. 🙏

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Think of a person, Sunday School class or church missing out on what TAB has to offer and invite them to join our family

We are down to three weeks and counting until we wrap up our 2020 Read TAB Day goal to double our reach.

We launched the effort in August with a goal of expanding our engagement in all areas of service by the end of the year.

So far, we have increased in every area except two. We've lost a few Twitter followers and print subscribers, but all other platforms have had healthy jumps.

For instance, our Monday-Wednesday-Friday complimentary email newsletter — TAB Highlights — grew from 365 subscribers on Aug. 1 to 760 subscribers on Dec. 1.

The number of people reading our blog for young adults — The Rope (theropetab.com) — has almost doubled in the same time-

frame, and we've gained more than 1,000 Facebook followers, getting us close to the 9,500 mark.

The monthly average of visitors to our website (tabonline.org) has steadily increased as well.

As we've analyzed the numbers and thought about the various audiences, we are realizing just how many Baptists are missing out on the expansive content, various resources and networking opportunities provided through TAB Media.

We are beyond grateful for the opportunity to continue printing a weekly newspaper when most other states have gone to biweekly, monthly or not at all.

It's also exciting to be able to provide all we offer in print through our digital platforms as well, so there really is something for everyone in whatever form you prefer.

Your subscription to TAB comes with an all-access pass that includes:

- Weekly print edition
- Emailed PDF edition
- TAB News app edition
- Member-only access to more than 45,000 archived articles, the latest news coverage and information about helpful resources for individuals and churches
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Let us know if we can help you take full advantage of the all-access pass by calling 800-803-5201 or emailing support@thealabamabaptist.org.

And help us double our reach by thinking of someone you can share TAB with today.

—Jennifer Davis Rash 🙏

Your Voice



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

Handle aggravations with humility, gratitude

By Darryl Wood
Retired pastor

In preparation for a recent trip, we loaded the SUV with stuff. I pushed the vehicle's start button. The control panel went bananas. Lights, messages and blaring sounds assaulted me.

The SUV did everything but start.

When a worker in the dealer's service department said, "I never heard of that before," my attitude worsened.

We finally abandoned the useless thing in the garage.

Next we unloaded everything and repacked it in the pick 'em up truck. Off we went.

About 100 miles down the road

my blood pressure leveled out.

You seldom prepare for unwelcome aggravations. But they come.

Paul's aggravation arrived in that old thorn.

He said, "... there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me — to keep me from exalting myself" (2 Cor. 12:7).

How do you handle thorny aggravations? Consider some suggestions.

1. Expect them. Whoever told you life is annoyance-free fibbed. Thorns happen.

2. Plod through them. At the time an aggravation can seem more like an ice pick in the heart than a thorn. A few miles down the road things get better.

3. Learn from them. Paul's thorn taught him humility. You might learn patience, endurance, hope.

4. Thank God for them. Frustrations often point you to a greater reliance on Him.

What will you do with unwelcome aggravations?

EDITOR'S NOTE — Retired pastor Darryl Wood posts his blog, "A Personal Word from a Retread Pastor," on Facebook each week. Wood retired in 2017 after 48 years of full-time ministry. He now serves churches in interim and supply capacities.

admiration for all of you. You have taken Matthew 28:18–20 very seriously, and presented accomplishments, tasks and deeds in a manner I am sure Jesus is giving His blessing and approval.

These days we hear so much in a negative vein about "the church" and no doubt some of it is accurate, but this magazine bolstered my spirit and helped me realize my prayers for God's movement in these troubled times are being honored.

I'm sure your job is difficult at times, but with Jesus at the helm where you and Alabama's spiritual leaders have placed Him, the gospel ship can weather the storms!

Keep up the good work and God bless you as He blesses Alabama.

**Charlotte A. Eiland
Opp, Ala.**

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for the *Fruitful* publication. I greatly enjoyed all the articles, stories and reports. TAB did a great job informing all of us about the ministry of Alabama Baptists. Keep up the good work!

**Jack W. Kinley
Phenix City, Ala.**

I received my copy of *Fruitful* today and was totally taken by the thoroughness of each report and the accompanying color photography.

To see so many faces of the servants who are the guiding forces behind this wonderful movement we call the Alabama Baptist State Convention helped me feel I was actually a part of it!

And after reading how each of these entities operate, especially throughout the cloud of COVID-19, I have great

TAB staff and friends help double our reach

I sent TAB to my aunt in Ohio and she is loving it and sharing it with her friends.

**Haley Piersol
Client coordinator**

I gave three one-year gift subscriptions to friends who had asked me about the paper and showed an interest in it.

**Debbie Campbell
Director of communications**

My friend Renee and I have been friends for more than 30 years. I save copies of *The Alabama Baptist* and give them to Renee as a treat when she comes to visit. This year, I'm giving Renee, who lives in Ellijay, Georgia, her very own subscription!

**Barbara Wiginton
Enon Baptist Church
Morris, Ala.**

An all-access subscription to TAB makes a great Christmas gift. To subscribe, go to tabonline.org and click the "Subscribe" option at the top. Each all-access subscription includes the print newspaper, TAB NEWS app, PDF digital edition and full web access. For info on special group pricing, call 800-803-5201.

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“Come adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.”

*From “Angels We Have Heard on High”
French hymn adapted by James Chadwick in 1862*

To prepare our hearts for Christmas, we must cultivate the spirit of expectancy.

Handel H. Brown
“When Jesus Came”

Conversion too often is seen as a simple confession of sin unrelated to daily lifestyle. Though we sometimes label some of our churches “holiness” churches, all churches and all Christians are called to be holy. The Bible declares, “Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Pastor Michael Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church
Alabaster

The proper meaning of the name Christian is to believe Jesus Christ

is the Son of God, the Anointed, the Messiah, the Savior sent of God.

A Christian is a follower of Christ — someone who, from serious thought, embraces the religion of Christ, believes His promises and by baptism surrenders his life in faith and obedience to God. A Christian accepts that God, by the merits of Christ’s blood, cleanses him from sin and truly changes the state of his life from an alien to a citizen of God’s kingdom.

He makes it his chief goal to live his life by Christ’s precepts and example. This is to believe the gospel, by faith in which men alone can be brought unto God.

Oh, if all mankind were true Christians, how cheerfully would we help one another! The whole

earth would be like one large family, every member of which would strive to be loving and kind.

Annette Brown
Via Facebook

We dare not think that Bible-based spiritual experiences are just for the sanctuary on Sundays with no actions on Mondays — and beyond. To do one apart from the other aborts the spiritual significance of both.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

Jesus is the answer to the problems placed on us and the problems found within us.

Lysa TerKeurst
Author

Thoughts on Advent

In our secret yearnings
we wait for your coming,
and in our grinding despair
we doubt that you will.

And in this privileged place
we are surrounded by witnesses
who yearn more than do we
and by those who despair
more deeply than do we.

Look upon your church and its
pastors in this season of hope
which runs so quickly to fatigue
and this season of yearning
which becomes so easily quarrelsome.

Give us the grace and the impatience
to wait for your coming
to the bottom of our toes,
to the edge of our finger tips.

We do not want our several
worlds to end.

Come in your power and come
in your weakness in any case
and make all things new.

Amen.

Walter Brueggemann
From “Awed to Heaven,
Rooted in Earth: Prayers
of Walter Brueggemann”

The Bible says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” He came to burn out of the hearts of men and out of society the lust, greed, selfishness and other evils rooted there. Yet He was despised and rejected — crucified! The blackest picture of the human heart portrays the cross, where evil Roman soldiers murdered Him.

But they could not destroy the flame of His love. The Bible teaches that He rose again; this Christ is in the world today with His sword and His fire, fighting against all forms of evil: lust, selfishness, jealousy, hate, oppression.

Billy Graham
From “A Light has
Dawned: Meditations on

From the *Twitterverse*

@pbethancourt

5 things everyone is looking for when they make a hire:

1. Character — Do you have integrity?
2. Competence — Do you have the skills?
3. Culture — Do you fit with us?
4. Chemistry — Do you make us better?
5. Coachability — Do you desire to grow?

@deaninserra

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If this is even slightly untrue, celebrating Christmas is really weird. Since it is true, start the party.

@vancepitman

The commands of God have unspeakable value, as marking out for

us the path of safety and of life, as guiding us to all that is lovely and of good report. — Andrew Murray

@MattMason3

John Newton: How unspeakably wonderful to know all our concerns are held in hands that bled for us.

@jdgrear

The dividing line is not between religious and irreligious; it is between those who realize how desperate they are apart from God’s grace and those who don’t. #InStep

@PaulTripp

What the gospel exposes the cross has covered. God never conquers and walks away.

@jaytysonstewart

I’ve seen a dramatic rise lately of people saying, “I’m proud of myself.” Am I the only one who’s noticed? James 4:6: “...God resists

the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Lord, forgive me where I fall to the temptation to think too highly of myself. #ResistPride

@MarkMittelberg

When a culture gets more worked up about Black Friday than Good Friday, it’s time for spiritual renewal in that culture. “Father ... begin with us.”

@ChrystalHurst

“Don’t believe the lie that you have to be busy to be spiritual.” — Lois Evans

@Blackwell_Kevin

Goal this week: Respond to the Holy Spirit as quickly as I do for social media notifications. #goals

@dailyspurgeon

God’s church has prospered most when her adversities have been most severe.

Life-changing

Two families bond over faith following horrific experience during Hurricane Katrina

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

As Darlene Carrigan watched hurricane after hurricane roll through this fall, each time, she had one thought: “I wonder whose life is going to change.”

Her own life changed 15 years ago when Hurricane Katrina hit, though she was nowhere near the path of the storm. God had something else headed her way, something that was going to shake up her life — a friendship God plucked from the hurricane floodwaters and brought right to her doorstep.

Surprise floodwaters

They were floodwaters Shirley Chin never saw coming.

Chin said that growing up in New Orleans, one hears all the time that a hurricane is on its way, but it never comes, or it’s never as bad as people think it will be,

“so you just get on with your life.” That’s just what she and her sister were doing in August 2005 as Katrina was barreling down on them — they were getting ready for a garage sale.

“My niece called and said, ‘Have you heard the news? Everybody’s been told to evacuate,’” Chin said.

They hadn’t heard, so they started moving everything inside, planning to come back after the storm and set it all back out. Chin went home from there and told her husband, Lionel, that they needed to leave, but he told her they weren’t going to be able to — they were just going to have to trust God to take care of them through the storm.

“So the hurricane came, and the hurricane left, and everything was fine,” Chin said. “We didn’t have too much damage other than a few shingles.”

But then all of a sudden,

water started pouring in under the door. She didn’t know why yet, but she’d later learn that the levees and flood walls protecting the city had failed.

“I looked down the street, and there was water everywhere,” she said.

Escape room

And as it rose in the house, she and her husband and their two youngest children — Lynella, 19, and Lionel Jr., 9 — grabbed some bread and peanut butter and moved into a room they’d built in the attic.

“Thank God for that room — it was a lifesaver,” Chin said.

As the hours passed, it was cold, dark and wet, and the phones weren’t working. After a couple of days, they ran out of food. Then, as Chin and her two children paced around the room on the third night, they heard someone outside yelling Lionel’s name.

He stuck his head out the window, and someone yelled for them to get ready — a boat was coming.

It was a godsend, Chin said — but it was just the beginning. The boat took them to the interstate, which had water lapping at the shoulders on both sides.

“We stayed on the interstate for three nights and three days,” Chin said. “We had no food, no water, nothing to eat, and we had to be careful not to fall in the water.”

At one point, she spotted one of her neighbors on the



Photo courtesy of Shirley Chin

Lionel Jr., Lionel and Shirley Chin outside their new house in Pelham a couple of years after Hurricane Katrina. The Chins lost their New Orleans home when the levees broke.

other side of the road who had brought a whole bag of food with her. Chin called out to her by name and asked if she would share some of it with her family.

The woman said no, but her husband gave them some anyway. Chin was grateful, but she realized then that they were part of a sea of people all fending for themselves.

It affirmed something she already knew — they would only make it with God’s provision.

And He would keep providing, though the journey would be long and difficult.

First, the Chins stopped a passing truck on its way to the Superdome with a load of people, and the driver let them squeeze in.

“We were like sardines,” Chin said.

The Superdome was full, and when they moved to the next place, they found they couldn’t stay there

either. They sat outside waiting for a long time until they could catch a bus that took them to Baton Rouge, and when they got there, those shelters were full too.

But someone mercifully let them stay a night on the floor, gave them some sandwiches and let them

use a phone to make a call to a toll-free number if they wanted.

“I told Lionel to call his company and let them know what happened,” Chin recalled. Her husband was a trucker, and his company



Photo courtesy of Darlene Carrigan

Shirley (left) and Lionel Chin (right) with Shelley Carrigan Garson at her wedding. Years ago, Garson’s step of obedience to reach out to the Chin family began a lasting friendship.

“God was telling me to step out of my comfort zone and that was going to be my new normal. I began to learn that God loves to teach us to love and to do good through obedience. It will draw us closer to Him.”

Darlene Carrigan

— which was based in Pelham — called back later that night and said they were sending another man through there on his route to pick them up.

Landed in Pelham

That’s how they ended up in a hotel in Pelham 10 days after Katrina. And the day after they arrived, they accepted an invitation from a co-worker to visit Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster.

Westwood is where they crossed paths with Carrigan. But before they met her, they met her teenage daughter, Shelley.

“We didn’t know anybody; we just came to church,” Chin said. “Shelley just came up to my daughter and started talking to her and said, ‘Here’s my number, call us if you need anything.’”

Carrigan added that when her daughter first told her she wanted to reach out to the family, she said no.

“I didn’t have a servant’s heart at that time, and I said absolutely not,” Carrigan admitted. “She begged

and pleaded, and my reply was still no. Then she said, ‘You’ll have to explain that to God because He is telling me to do this.’”

So with that, Carrigan relented.

That same morning, others in the church had also showered the Chins with help — money, gift cards, an offer of clothes or a trip to Walmart to buy what they needed.

Chin said they “had never had anything like that happen” to them.

But they still longed for two things and wondered if Carrigan’s family could help — the first was a home-cooked meal, something they hadn’t had in 10 days.

Bonded over faith

It was out of her comfort zone, but Carrigan and a couple of friends from church pulled together a meal for that night and invited the Chins over.

“I found out quickly that it wasn’t us who would bless them — they blessed us,” Carrigan remembered.



Photo courtesy of Shirley Chin

Lionel Chin and Lionel Jr. pose outside the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center on a trip back to visit their former city. The convention center was one of the places they stopped on their journey to Pelham after Hurricane Katrina.

They quickly bonded over their faith, and as the night went on, they prayed together, shared Scripture and even got out a keyboard and sang.

“The family told us of the horrific events that they had been through and how God pulled them through,” Carrigan said. “It was the toughest time of their life, but they were so thankful. They were praising God for going through the storm.

“If I just lost everything I had, I don’t know that I could be praising God. It would be hard to step out on faith like they did.”

But the more Carrigan stepped out on faith to serve the Chins, the more she found that muscle grew.

“God was telling me to step out of my comfort zone and that was going to be my new normal,” she explained. “I began to learn that God loves to teach us to love and to do good through obedience. It will draw us closer to Him.”

Carrigan began helping the Chins with the second thing they still needed — a home. She started giving Lynella and Lionel Jr. rides to school, then she and Chin would drive around looking at houses.

After awhile God provid-



Photo courtesy of Shirley Chin

Water rises in the Chins’ house in New Orleans after the levees and flood walls fail in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

ed the exact one Chin had hoped for. And along the way, she and Carrigan built a friendship that has lasted 15 years. The Chins were at the top of the invitation list to Shelley’s wedding.

“She knows she can call me any time, day or night,” Carrigan said. “I’m there for her, she’s there for me, and we celebrate the anniversary of Katrina every year because that’s when God changed both of our lives.”

New focus on kids

Once Carrigan was out of her comfort zone, she stayed there. One day when a speaker from the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries spoke at

Westwood Baptist, Carrigan found her heart was broken for struggling families and children who needed a stable home.

“There are over 6,000 foster children in the state of Alabama,” she lamented. “When I learned this, I had to get busy.”

So she started volunteering at the family care center in Alabaster and “fell in love with it.”

And a year ago, she got a job at the ABCH offices in Birmingham.

“My whole life has changed because of that hurricane, because the Chins came here and because my daughter challenged me to step out on faith,” Carrigan said.✝



Photo courtesy of Shirley Chin

Darlene Carrigan plays the keyboard at her house with Lionel Chin Jr. The first night the Chin family came over for a meal, the families enjoyed singing and worshipping God together.

20-year-old Horton working out call to preach, serve

Clint Horton knew he didn't have anything to offer in and of himself, but he knew God was calling him to offer himself anyway. So he told his pastor at Bethabara Baptist Church, Northport, that he felt called to preach, and the pastor gave him a date to do it — June 30.

His 13th birthday.

"I preached my first sermon that day — it was about three minutes long," Horton said with a laugh.

But in the time since, God has placed men around him to help him keep growing in that calling, he said. Around the time he obtained his driver's license, he got licensed to preach.

And then a little later, he got to be a part of something he never would've seen coming.

Power of prayer

Kevin Morrison, his pastor at the time, had been pouring into Horton and some other young men, and he asked them and other men in the

church to be praying for five people to come to faith.

"But God put on my mind six," Horton said, so he prayed for six.

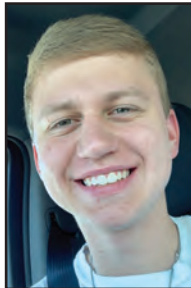
Revival in the family

And over the coming weeks, revival broke out at Bethabara. Horton saw his dad, his older brother, his two younger sisters, his brother's fiancé and Horton's girlfriend at the time all give their lives to Jesus. Horton was able to baptize all six of them.

"It's all because of Him," he said.

Now 20, Horton serves as the pastoral intern at nearby Arbor Springs Baptist Church, Northport, where he was baptized when he was 6. He's working on going to seminary and seeing what God has next.

"I'm glad He's got me where He does," Horton said. "I know even if I mess up, He's still got a plan. If you're alive and you're breathing, God's not done with you." (Grace Thornton)



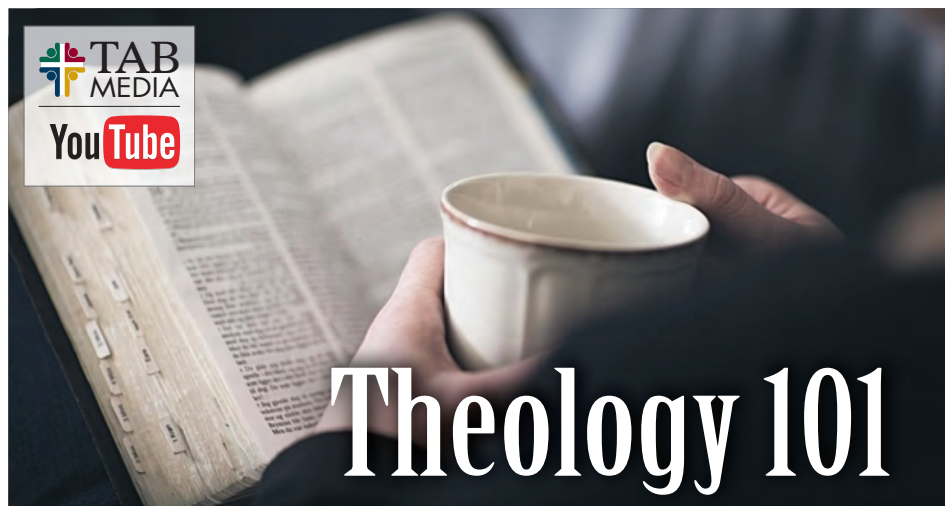
HORTON

Bethel East Baptist helps distribute food boxes



Photo courtesy of Suzanne Horton

The day Keith Runels found a box of food sitting on his front porch, he prayed God would open the door for his church to bless its community in a similar way. Soon after, Runels — pastor of Bethel East Baptist Church, Woodland — got a call from Stephanie Herren at Hold My Hand Rural Mental Health Advocacy Group asking if Bethel East Baptist would be interested in helping distribute a weekly shipment of food boxes she had been offered. In October, they gave out more than 1,200 food boxes each Wednesday at the church. 'God answered our prayers,' Runels said. 'It's a great way to minister to our community.'



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christmas

A Time for Godward Rejoicing

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

Several features of the Christmas story as recorded in the opening chapters of Luke are suggestive of practical Christian responses at this special season of the year.

Attention this week focuses on the song of Mary, which she voiced upon visiting her kinswoman, Elizabeth: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). These words of Mary call our attention to what was happening in her inner spirit. We might describe her words as godward rejoicing.

Discipline of praise

As we journey through the Christmas season, we will do well to find ourselves engaged intentionally in godward rejoicing. The discipline of praise will serve to lift our attention godward, thereby taking our eyes off the challenging experience brought on by the pandemic and all the life adjustments it has precipitated.

While we do not abandon petitioning and interceding prayer that should be part of our reaction to the spreading virus, we do need those times when the eyes of our souls are lifted above what is happening to us and around us. If we choose to focus on aspects of our lives that inspire praise and rejoicing, we will be able to bear the heavy burdens and challenges of this year's Christmas season.

The weeks leading up to Christmas are often a time for making lists. We may make lists for send-

ing Christmas card greetings and buying Christmas gifts. We may create lists of tasks for making our Christmas traditions come alive once again for our families. We may make grocery lists to ensure we have what we want for the holiday meal times.

Most important list

Perchance, one of the most important lists to construct this year is that of the many reasons we have for Christmas rejoicing. We might begin such a list with the event that put a song in Mary's heart, the coming of the Savior. We might enlarge this entry with some of the benefits that come to us because of having invited Christ into our lives. We would probably list not only present blessings but also future, eternal ones that await us.

Maybe list-making is not for you. Instead, rejoicing might attach to having familiar Christmas hymns playing in our homes. Simply recalling past occasions when we felt God's nearness during Christmas can trigger a fresh season of godward rejoicing.

Next week, Theology 101 will turn attention from godward rejoicing to inward pondering.

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.



More than a gift

Backpacks help local churches reach families, meet needs during holidays

(continued from page 1)
Mississippi River Ministry.

Alabama WMU and the SBOM offices of global missions, associational missions and church planting work together on the emphasis, using funds from the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering to provide age/gender identification bands and a copy of “The Christmas Story” for each backpack and to mail those supplies to participating churches.

Alabama WMU missions and ministry consultant

Pat Ingram said initial numbers suggested this year’s collection might fall short of the goal of 12,000 bags, but in spite of the pandemic, Ingram said MRM requests were met.

“God just worked things out,” Ingram said. “Every time I turned around, more bags came in. Every time the phone rings I’m thinking ‘Well, what are you going to do now God?’”

Gratitude in giving

Thirteen regional collection sites received backpacks during the general collection week of Oct. 24–30.

Backpacks were still coming in in late November, and Ingram anticipates more than 9,000 bags before the end of the year.

At churches and collection sites around the state, volunteers are expressing

gratitude for those who have continued to give.

“COVID-19 hit, and we were not certain that we would be able to do any of the backpacks,” said June Whitlow, WMU director for Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. “We are thrilled to see the number that has come in and to hear stories from the women about how much packing these backpacks has meant to them.”

BMBA missions involvement consultant Linda Peek said regional volunteers

received 852 backpacks from 17 churches in five associations over the course of five days.

And in West Cullman Baptist Association, churches prepared 280 Christmas backpacks.

WMU director Iva Rodgers said students from Calhoun Community

College helped volunteers with logistics like sorting the bags and preparing them for pickup by Alabama WMU.

Many churches and associations partner directly with distribution sites, delivering backpacks

and assisting with passing out the bags, praying with families and sharing the gospel.

Pandemic-related restrictions limited some part-



Photo courtesy of Paulette Wilcutt
Morgan Baptist Association drop-off operation coordinator Elizabeth Carter (right) and a West Cullman volunteer load backpacks.

nership efforts this year, however. Ingram said she facilitated 10 partnerships instead of the usual 30, but she noted that some churches and associations have continued working in partnerships they had previously established.

‘Missions every day’

One of those churches, Cave Spring Baptist Church, Decatur, collected items monthly for the past year and packed more than 300 backpacks this year.

Those backpacks will be distributed through their partnerships with two Louisiana churches: Gulf Coast Baptist Church in Golden Meadow and First Baptist Church of Grand Isle.

The rest will go to the Decatur office of the Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.

“We have grown as a church in the missions field,” said Cave Spring missions director Amelia Nelson.

“Missions does not mean you have to travel interna-

tionally; missions can be done every day just by obedience to the Spirit.”

Cave Spring volunteers also transport bags to distribution sites along the way to their church partners, and this year the church helped deliver some of the backpacks collected by students involved in Alabama Baptist Campus Ministries.

BCM groups across the state filled more than 160 backpacks and also received some from the general collection.

For example, in Madison County, 11 churches in Madison Baptist Association prepared 342 backpacks, 200 of which were added to BCM collections.

BCM partnered with Alabama WMU to adopt three distributing ministries: Calvary Chapel in Drew, Mississippi; Binghampton Community Church in

Memphis, Tennessee; and Community Impact/Bayou Baptist Association in Chauvin, Louisiana.

‘Celebrating’

“While COVID has made planning and executing our traditional methods of distribution difficult or impossible, we are celebrating the fact that these bags have been collected, prayed over and will be distributed to needy children,” said Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for the SBOM.

“I am praying that God use these bags as gospel seeds in the lives of these children and their families.”

Mills said involvement with the backpacks ministry helps to open students’ eyes, he said, not only to the physical needs of high poverty areas like the Mississippi River region but

also to the great opportunities that exist in their own communities and around the world.

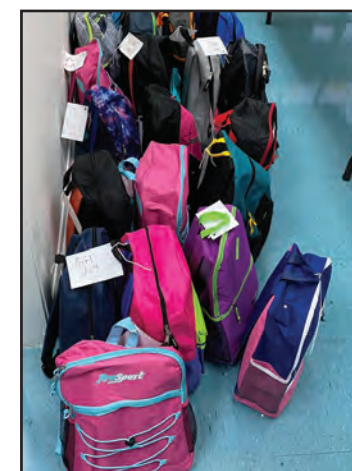
“BCM is about reaching students and seeing students reach their world. One tool in that process happens to be a backpack filled with

toys and school supplies and a Bible for a child in need,” Mills said.

“This backpack can not only be something that creates excitement and joy for that child, but it can also be a seed of faith planted in that child’s heart.”



Craig Carlisle Facebook photo
Churches in Etowah, Cherokee and DeKalb associations prepared 520 Christmas backpacks for distribution in the Mississippi River region.



Gullett’s Bluff Baptist Church, Camden, collected and packed 30 Christmas backpacks this year for children in the Mississippi River region.

For information about Christmas Backpacks, visit alabamawmu.org/christmasbackpacks.

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Lineman helps light physical, spiritual darkness

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When hurricanes and ice storms roll through, Bob Cox starts packing his truck. As a line worker for Pea River Electric Cooperative in Ozark,

he's often driving out into the dark pockets of Alabama and the surrounding states.

He says from a line-man's perspective, "the best thing is when you can work and see lights come on."

But as a pastor and follower of Jesus, he says the most rewarding moment is the one when spiritual light pierces the darkness.

"You never know what the Lord has for you when you go out to work," said Cox, who also serves as

pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church, Clio, in Barbour Baptist Association.

But he sees over and over that he's always got something — God puts people in his path who need the hope of Jesus.



Photo courtesy of Bob Cox
Bob Cox, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church, Clio, and a line worker for Pea River Electric Cooperative, Ozark, enjoys career day with his daughter, Shellie.

When hurricanes Sally and Zeta hit in recent months, Cox spent time in different parts of south Alabama helping restore electricity.

Over and over, he found lives that needed restoration even more desperately.

"We were in Baldwin County on

a Sunday morning hooking up some houses when a man came up and asked if we could hook him up," Cox said.

After he asked permission and was given the go-

ahead, Cox worked on the man's house and they got to talking.

"He mentioned that he was surprised we would be there on a Sunday," Cox said.

Cox then told the man that he felt it was like the story Jesus told in Luke 14:5 about rescuing an ox from a ditch on the Sabbath — when you see someone in need, you help them, regardless of the day.

It touched the man.

"He got to sharing with me and broke down," Cox said. "He had lost his wife, son, sister and brother all in one year."

Sharing hope

As they talked, Cox shared hope with him and prayed over him. And as he prayed, he began to hear "amens" around him.

"His neighbors had come out and gathered around and were listening," Cox said.

At another site, he felt compelled to pray with the woman who owned the home, and afterward the



Photo courtesy of Bob Cox
Lineman Bob Cox was among hundreds out working following Hurricane Zeta. At one point, some half a million Alabama customers were without power following the Oct. 28-29 storm system.

two were able to talk more about her life and faith.

"She looked at me and said, 'I really needed that; I lost my husband four years ago and my daughter's in jail,'" Cox said. "It was just amazing how the Lord worked. I missed preaching, but I know it was a divine moment. I got to pray with folks and talk to them and minister to them."

When he's on the job but not out working in a storm-damaged area, Cox is still

sharing the hope of Jesus.

For several years now, he's been gathering with a group of coworkers every Wednesday morning at 6:30 for a Bible study they call Co-Ops for Christ.

'Bold witness'

"Bob is one of those people who actually look for opportunities to share their faith," said Don Hatcher, director of missions for Barbour Association who sometimes fills the pulpit for Cox when he's away working after a storm. "When the opportunities arise, he is a bold witness for the Lord." ✝

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3 stories you should know



AP Photo/Majdi Mohammed

Christians take photos inside the Grotto of the Church of the Nativity, traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Nov. 23. Normally packed with tourists from around the world at this time of year, Bethlehem's hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops remain mostly shuttered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The church's Christmas tree lighting and Christmas Eve services will be limited to a small number of people this year. (AP)

Abortion ruling protests continue in Poland

Protesters in Poland continue to demonstrate following an Oct. 22 constitutional court ruling banning abortions because of congenital defects.

The demonstrations have brought thousands of people to the streets of hundreds of towns in recent weeks. They are part of what has evolved into Poland's largest protest movement since communism fell in the country 30 years ago.

Poland already had one of Europe's most restrictive laws, negotiated in the early 1990s between political and Catholic church leaders. That 27-year-old law allowed abortions only in the cases of fetal defects, risk to a woman's health and incest or rape.

Amid the protests, the government has not implemented the court ruling. (AP)

CDC data shows slight increase in abortions

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control found that the number of abortions performed in the U.S. rose slightly from 2017 to 2018.

The CDC's annual Abortion Surveillance Report was released Nov. 27 and includes data from 2018.

Among the 49 reporting areas that provided data, a total of 619,591 abortions were reported. Reporting abortion data to the CDC is not mandatory, so year-to-year totals are hard to compare. Among 48 reporting areas with data each year during 2009–2018, a total of 614,820 abortions were performed in 2018, according to the CDC.

Nationwide, the abortion ratio (the number of abortions per 1,000 live births) was 189 in 2018, a slight increase from the abortion ratio of 185 in 2017. (TAB)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Florida

For the past five years, chaplains Tommy and Sandy Simmons have served in prison ministry at Desoto County Jail in southwest Florida. In what has been described as the "forgotten ministry" of local churches, prison ministry, although demanding, brings many victories, said Tommy Simmons. The chaplains focus their efforts not only on the offenders but also the offenders' families, and they have seen many "incredible stories of life change," the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported.

Georgia

This past June, Jarrod Kinsey became the first full-time pastor in 15 years for Georgia's Cave Spring Baptist Church. Even amid the pandemic, the church is renewing its focus on outreach, including a fellowship outing at a local lake, and is continuing ministry to students at the Georgia School for the Deaf. Since Kinsey's arrival, the

congregation has recorded four salvations, *The Christian Index* reported. "We're doing whatever it takes to reach others with the good news," Kinsey said.

Louisiana

Citing a continued increase in COVID-19 cases, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards announced on Nov. 24 that his state would move back to a modified version of Phase 2 of reopening. Under the order that expires Dec. 23, attendance at churches will continue to be limited to 75% of a worship center's seating capacity, *The Baptist Message* reported. In making the announcement, Edwards said, "We don't have a moment to waste. Everybody has to do their part."

Mississippi

On Nov. 3, Mississippi voters approved Initiative 65 to legalize medical marijuana. "Initia-

tive 65 is another significant step in blurring the lines of morality in Mississippi. I'm prayerful, however, that it will serve as a clarion call for the church to be more effective as salt and light in the world," said Shawn Parker, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, the *Baptist Record* reported. Mississippi is the 35th state to legalize medical marijuana.

Tennessee

To enhance its special needs ministry in Middle Tennessee, Brentwood Baptist Church recently broke ground on the Rowen Glenn Center, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported. Upon completion of the 15,000-square-foot facility, care and services will be provided for preschoolers through adults. "Our continued prayer is that every single individual and family that comes our way will immediately know they are valued," said Tiffany McCullough, Brentwood's special needs minister.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ Christian singer/songwriter/comedian **Aaron Wilburn** died Nov. 27 following a weeks-long battle with COVID-19. He was 70.

Wilburn's musical talent paired with his good-natured humor made him a popular entertainer for decades. Wilburn became a special friend of TAB Media when he performed in a series of concerts sponsored by TAB in 2019.

The Alabama native first gained national attention as a band member of The Happy Goodman Family during the early 1970s. Later he was a frequent guest on Bill Gaither's Homecoming concerts and videos.

He shared his talents for more than 50 years. He wrote or co-wrote several beloved gospel songs, including "What A Beautiful Day (For The Lord To Come Again)" and "Four Days Late," which were voted as "Song Of The Year" by subscribers of *Singing News Magazine* in 1975 and 2001, respectively.

▶ **Betty Griffus** — wife of Loyd Griffus, pastor of West Highland Baptist Church, Russellville — died Oct. 31. She was 80.



GRIFFUS

She is survived by her husband; son, Randall; daughter, Stephanie; two grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

▶ Longtime Alabama Baptist pastor **W.D. Humphres** died Nov. 5. He was 87.

Humphres served as pastor of several churches, including Ebenezer Baptist, Vina, and New Harmony Baptist, Phil Campbell. He served for years in a number of roles in Franklin Baptist Association, including as camp director, a member of various committees and as a volunteer with builders teams.

At the time of his death, he was a member of First Baptist Church, Red Bay.

He is preceded in death by a daughter, Deborah, and one grandchild. He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Faye; daughters, Victoria and Teresa; five grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

▶ **Joseph Carlo "Carl" Kelly Sr.**, pastor of Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church, Dadeville, died Nov. 21. He was 69.

Kelly was a teacher and school counselor and later a driver for Tiger Transit at Auburn University, where he also served as a mentor in the athletic department.

He also performed "Music and Magic with a Message" in schools, churches and other venues.

Kelly is survived by his wife of 36 years, Deb-

bie; daughter Lindsey Johnson; son, Joseph Carlo "Jody" Kelly Jr.; and one grandchild.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Cham Sa Rang Baptist Church, Valley**, celebrated its 10th anniversary recently, along with **Pastor Chang Ook Moon**, who has been at the church since it began.

It's a church that has been an answer to prayer for East Liberty Baptist Association, said Dale Wood, director of missions for East Liberty Association.

The association's mission is the Great Commission — to reach all peoples. Several years back, they were trying to figure out how to best reach out to the Korean speakers in the area.

And in that search, Wood said God orchestrated a new partnership — the already-existing Cham Sa Rang Baptist needed a place of their own to meet, and they moved into the empty Grace Baptist Church building.

Moon "has been faithful to meet and teach and preach the Word in Korean," Wood said.

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

▶ With some people sitting in the church and others listening from their cars in the parking lot, **Haleburg Baptist Church, Columbia**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Oct. 18.

"We had a good turnout, even though COVID-19 is still going on," said Roger Money, church historian, adding that they took precautions to keep the day safe for participants.

During the service, Money shared about the



KELLY

history of the church, and Pastor Ray Cobb preached. Ellen Dewberry, a commissioner from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a certificate to the church, and a copy of a newly compiled church history book was given to each family.

A plaque was also presented posthumously to George M. Penuel, a former deacon and Sunday School director, for his years of service.

His son, Kenny, received the plaque.

A catered lunch was served following the celebration service.

▶ **Jim Cordes Sr.**, is the new pastor of **Union Springs Baptist Church, Newville**.

LAMAR ASSOCIATION

▶ **John Dickinson** is the new associational mission strategist for **Lamar Baptist Association**. He previously served as pastor of East

Gadsden Baptist Church and Duncanville Baptist Church. He is a graduate of Georgia College in Milledgeville and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He also served as minister of youth at Holt Baptist Church and Five Points Baptist Church, Northport. John and his wife, Donna, have been married 37 years.

They have five children and three grandchildren. (Alabama news compiled by TAB Media staff)



Photo by Lonette Berg



WILBURN



HUMPHRES

Persecuted church

Christian father in Pakistan acquitted of blasphemy charges

LAHORE, Pakistan — A Christian sentenced to death for a blasphemy conviction was acquitted Oct. 5 by a Pakistani high court.

Sawan Masih, a 40-year-old Catholic father of three, was sentenced in 2014 after a Muslim friend accused him in 2013 of blaspheming Islam's prophet Muhammad. Blasphemy is punishable by imprisonment or death.

The friend's initial report against Masih included no words of blasphemy, but a supplement filed eight days later did.

In 2013, after a mosque broadcasted the friend's accusation over a loudspeaker, more than 3,000 Muslims attacked Joseph Colony,

a predominately Christian area in Lahore. More than 150 shops, homes and church buildings were burned; Christians fled.

In Lahore High Court, Masih's defense presented concerns about the police investigation, initial report, supplement and Masih's death sentence on testimony of only one witness.

In the Oct. 5 acquittal, the court stated the prosecution failed to prove Masih blasphemed.

Pakistan is No. 5 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Morning Star News

FBC Glencoe helps host community Thanksgiving meal

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jann Yates still had three plates of Thanksgiving dinner left when she got done with her deliveries, and as she headed back to First Baptist Church, Glencoe, she asked God to show her who needed them.

After a few minutes as she was passing a laundromat, she saw a woman sitting inside and felt compelled to go talk with her. The minute Yates offered her the food, the woman burst into tears. She and her son and daughter hadn't been able to afford a Thanksgiving dinner this year.

It's for people like her that First, Glencoe, decided to attempt a God-sized project this year — to provide the community with a Thanksgiving dinner, said church member Beth Webster.

"Normally Gadsden has a community meal," she said. "But this year with COVID-19, they decided not to do it."

So missions volunteers at Webster's church started considering at least providing the Glencoe community with a meal.

'Take them Jesus'

"We thought, 'We have outside doors to our kitchen; we think we could have a drive-through and keep it safe,'" she said.

Then they added someone to their team who had previously worked on the Gadsden community meal committee, and the ball really started rolling. As word of the meal got out, they started adding other area churches and businesses as

partners, and the meal count started going up.

They had a list of recipients ranging from residents of low-income housing and senior living facilities to dialysis patients.

"Our church secretary took a lot of the calls of

people who wanted deliveries, and it was getting to her, hearing people's stories," Webster said.

Many who called said their children weren't going to be able to come this year because of COVID-19, and they were going to be all by themselves, so they

weren't cooking.

The church's plan had started at 250 plates, and by the time Thanksgiving rolled around, they had prepared for 1,500.

"Our motivation was that people are still so isolated and so depressed and discouraged by COVID-19, we need to take Jesus to them," Webster said. "We've got to do something to let them know He cares about them, that He sees their situation."

So volunteers from First, Glencoe — along with North Glencoe Baptist Church; College Heights Baptist Church; Cross Creek Baptist Church, Hokes Bluff; Faith Worship Center, a Church of God congregation; and East Gadsden Church of the Nazarene — were up at 4:30 a.m. on Thanksgiving Day smoking and frying turkeys and preparing all the side items.

'Plan of salvation'

They added a card to every meal with the message of Jesus, and they also had a team of volunteers talking with people as they waited in line and offering Bibles and prayer.

"We wanted to share the plan of salvation with some food and offer mental and

emotional support," Webster said. "We were looking for open doors and opportunities to share God's love."

Donny Yarbrough, pastor of First, Glencoe, said they wanted to "meet tangible needs and spiritual needs

and show love to our community."

"It was certainly a team effort," he said. "We set out from the beginning just to trust the Lord in that process, and we were very, very blessed."✝



Photo courtesy of FBC Glencoe
Barry and Cookie Baker of FBC Glencoe help things stay clean and safe during the Thanksgiving meal preparation.

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SBOM photo

Bobby DuBois (left) and Kenneth Hutto, then-pastor of Rabbittown Baptist Church, Piedmont, survey the church's damage after a tornado in March 2018. DuBois said one of the greatest blessings of his role at SBOM was to represent Alabama Baptists and take aid to hurting people.

'Effective ministry'

State Board's Bobby DuBois to retire Dec. 31, leaving behind a lasting legacy

Bobby DuBois says he was content as a pastor — he never thought he would be anywhere else.

But after he was contacted in 1990 by Harrell Cushing at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions about filling a position in his office, DuBois started praying. And it wasn't long before he and his wife, Connie, felt a "strong sense of God's call."

Variety of roles

The rest, he said, is history.

For the past 30 years, DuBois has served Ala-

bama Baptists in a variety of different roles — first as an associate in the office of Cooperative Program and stewardship development, then as associate business manager, business manager and associate executive director.

Statewide service

"I have been blessed to serve Christ among some of the most gifted and generous people in the world — Alabama Baptists," said DuBois, who is retiring Dec. 31.

In his early days at the SBOM, he traveled around the state leading conferences in helping families

develop a personal budget and get out of debt. As the years went on, he assisted church and SBOM employees with retirement, insurance and tax-related issues, and he worked on developing the SBOM's CP budget.

And when Rick Lance became SBOM executive director, he created the associate executive director position and named DuBois to it in May 1999.

"Bobby is one who has taken multitasking to an art form," Lance said. "He has balanced many respon-

sibilities in his leadership position and therefore provided so much for SBOM staff and ministries. His

role was wide and deep in our missions organization."

He said DuBois is a Christian who always goes the extra mile.

"Bobby's legacy is one of effective ministry among Alabama Baptists,"

Lance said. "We will still call upon him in retirement as a consultant to the executive office. We admire and we appreciate all he has done to help make the State Board of Missions what it is today."

DuBois said he's been blessed to see God at work, such as when the 2008 recession hit the SBOM's

finances hard and Alabama Baptists still showed up as pacesetters in missions giving.

He also got to celebrate milestones like helping the SBOM move into its new building debt free in 2017, and he was able to represent Alabama Baptists by taking aid to the victims of the 2011 tornadoes.

'Always a blessing'

State Baptists "have a heart for missions, and it is always a blessing when I get to speak to hurting people on their behalf," DuBois said. "It has been a blessing to serve with Dr. Lance, my fellow state missionaries and the larger family of Alabama Baptists for these past three decades." (Grace Thornton)



DUBOIS

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Offering holiday help



Fayette Baptist Association Facebook photo

The student ministry at Southside Baptist Church, Fayette, packs boxes to help families at Thanksgiving. They were one of many groups around the state who found ways to reach out and assist people who needed a little help around the holidays, as FBC Glencoe also did (see story, page 14).

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WATCH FOR DETAILS!

Interim pastor serves with 'heart for rural churches'

When Clay Davis retired after serving in active duty as an Army chaplain, he knew God was tugging on his heart to do something in particular.

"I had been away from home for 30 years," he said, noting that home for him was Sweet Water Baptist Church in Bethel Baptist Association.

A lot of things had changed in that time, but one thing hadn't — there

were a number of congregations in the area that struggled to find pastors.

"I really have a heart for rural churches, having grown up in a rural area and pastored in rural areas," Davis said. "These are faithful Southern Baptist churches that give faithfully and love their churches but often struggle to attract pastoral leadership to their rural area."

So after he got back to Alabama in early 2019, one of the first things he did was attend a transitional pastor training at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Then in August of 2019, he began serving as transitional pastor for Sweet Water Baptist.

Looking to future

Mike Snow, director of missions for Bethel Association, said the idea of a transitional pastor is to intentionally guide a church to prepare for the next season. Where some churches might choose to have different supply preachers fill the pulpit or a consistent



Friendship Baptist Church Facebook photo

As Clay Davis (left), interim pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Thomasville, shares Scripture, Tebow Stokes lights the first candle of Advent on Nov. 29.

interim pastor lead the church, a transitional pastor is trained to guide them on a journey to the next phase of church life.

Davis is doing "a really great job" where God has placed him, Snow said.

In July, Davis started a new role as interim pastor of nearby Friendship Baptist Church, Thomasville, and they're beginning their journey of learning what God has next.

"They were eager to have some leadership in reener-

gizing as far as a focus on missions," he said.

So far, part of that has been celebrating Christ through Advent, focusing on the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and international missions, and establishing a social media presence.

New opportunities

"It's been fun," Davis said. "It's a great group, and we've found some new outreach opportunities already." (Grace Thornton)

Thank you



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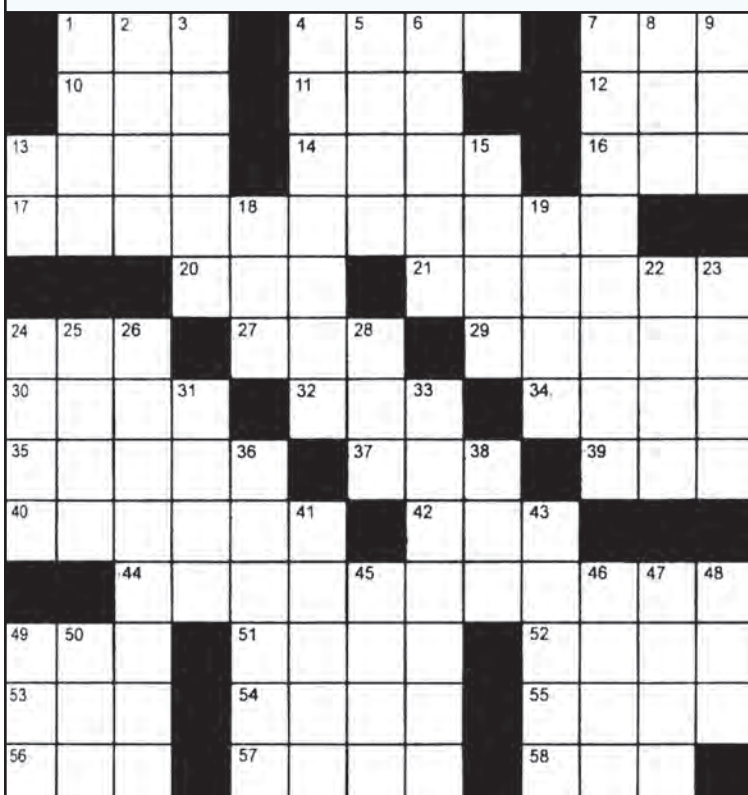
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Christian Crossword

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Across

1. Monthly literature.
4. Delicate network fabric.
7. Of ____, the family of the Punites.
10. Past.
11. Building wing.
12. __ your affection on things above. (Col. 3:2)
13. Molding.
14. Among.
16. Tavern brew.
17. ____ tells the story of King Saul.
20. A language of Southeast Asia.
21. That he may ____ upon you a blessing this day. (Ex. 32:29)
24. Radiation measure.
27. The sons of Elpaah ... who built _____. (1 Chron. 8:12)
29. Prefix meaning "solid."
30. City of Judah. (Josh. 15:29)

32. Ye have not gone up into the _____. (Ezek. 13:5)
34. Ireland.
35. ____ and Juliet.
37. Three.
39. Still.
40. Tie the score.
42. Now ____ was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto Israel. (1 Sam. 2:22)
44. A charmer ... a wizard ... a _____. All are an abomination. (Deut. 18:11-12)
49. And the stork ... the lapwing, and the _____. (Lev. 11:19)
51. Arizona Indian.
52. Therefore, hence.
53. Mother of all living.
54. Belonging to Mrs. Peron.
55. Stick for jumping.
56. Young man.
57. ____d died without children.

- (1 Chron. 2:30)
58. Troops. (abbr.)

Down

1. The Wise Men.
2. Golden ____.
3. Whither thou ____, I will go. (Ruth 1:16)
4. Thou shalt destroy them that speak _____. (Ps. 5:6)
5. Woman's name.
6. They shall ____ up upon the houses. (Joel 2:9)
7. Praise Him with the ____ and harp. (Ps. 150:3)
8. Sons of Bani. (Ezra 10:34)
9. Did eat.
13. About.
15. Render therefore to all their _____. (Rom. 13:7)
18. A Chinese religion.
19. Italian family; patrons of the Renaissance.
22. Nickname of Oriel.
23. Past tense of "go."
24. It is a ____ thing that the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
25. Black Sea arm.
26. Insane.
28. Grain.
31. Handwriting on the wall. (Dan. 5:25)
33. Basic proposition for an argument.
36. Settings of precious stones.
38. Longshoremen's union.
41. ____ me now ... if I will not open you the windows of heaven. (Mal. 3:10)
43. Clumsy, unskilled.
45. Iridescent stone.
46. Farmer's produce.
47. Ova.
48. Kanga's child.
49. ____ boweth down. (Isa. 46:1)
50. And the king of Assyria brought men ... from _____. (2 Kings 17:24)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 13

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



CONCEIVED Luke 1:26–38

The first lesson of this series contained a survey of Luke's prologue, Zechariah's temple encounter with Gabriel and the conception of Zechariah's son, John. The focal passage concluded with Elizabeth's five-month seclusion — quarantine, if you will — before making her pregnancy public. This week's study picks up where last week's left off.

Let's compare and contrast the two passages. Zechariah and Mary both received messages from God through Gabriel. Both were told sons would be born, and both were told the name to give their sons.

Zechariah was an aging married priest and Mary was a young betrothed virgin. He had been born to his role as a priest according to the law, while she had no idea she would become a fulfillment of prophecy. Both questioned the messenger, yet one received discipline while the other received details. This passage provides information about the conception revealed to Mary.

Bible students may note that Luke's infancy narrative includes unique details neither Matthew nor the other canonical gospel writers included in their accounts.

The Greeting (26–29)

"Ave Maria" — at six o'clock each evening, our Nicaraguan neighbor would play the melody. The lyrics are based on the Latin Vulgate of this passage from Luke. Mary is highly revered throughout Latin America, with many Catholic girls seeking to emulate her and Catholic boys wanting to marry a girl like her.

Our students at the Latin American campus were mostly Catholic and did not understand why Baptists do not esteem Mary as they do, with special prayers and parades. They believe Mary to be co-redemptrix with Christ, a secondary intermediary who demands Jesus' attention.

As Baptists, we see Mary as the highly favored, chosen vessel through whom the Messiah would be brought into this world to save sinners from every tribe, tongue and nation.

When Gabriel greeted Mary, his words were troubling to her. "Hail, Mary, you who are highly favored." What did he mean by this greeting? How was she favored by the Lord? How was she blessed among women?

The Declaration (30–33)

This was an amazing declaration. In one short announcement, Gabriel told Mary her son would be conceived without a human father, that He would be the Son of God and He would fulfill Messianic prophecies. Jesus will receive the throne of His father David (2 Sam. 7:16), and there will be no end to His kingdom (Isa. 9:7).

The Question (34–37)


Mary followed this earth-shattering announcement by asking a level-headed, practical question: How would she, as a virgin, conceive and bear a son? This question was not borne out of doubting the message, but with a desire to understand what would happen to her.

Zechariah asked a question of Gabriel, and six months later he was still unable to speak when Mary came to visit. He doubted God's ability. This priest should have known that nothing is too difficult for God. By contrast, Mary's experience was a one-time fulfillment, with one virgin in history who would conceive and give birth to the once-for-all-time Son of God Most High.

The Commitment (38)

Mary's circumstances were unique, but her response was not.

Upon her arrival to Shiloh for the annual sacrifice, Hannah prayed an agonizing prayer. When the high priest Eli foretold the Lord's answer, she referred to herself as "your servant" (1 Sam. 1:18). Mary responds to Gabriel's announcement with these words: "Behold, I am the Lord's servant."

When you receive a clear word from the Lord, how do you respond? Do you doubt its trustworthiness or do you respond with, "I am the Lord's servant"? 

Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



SHAKING OFF FEAR Psalm 91:1–6, 9–16

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact people across the globe, how should we think of the psalmist's promise, "Surely he will save you ... from the deadly pestilence" (v. 3)? In the past, Jews and Christians have worn words from this psalm in amulets as protection from danger.

Though we may approve of the faith they put in the truth and power of Scripture, attributing magical power to the words is surely to misunderstand them.

But if they don't guarantee divine protection, what purpose do these promises serve?

When fear strikes, trust God's power. (1–6)

As this virus has raged for month after month, it is tempting to tumble into despair and lose hope of ever escaping its clutches.

Suffering often feels overpowering when we are in the midst of it. However, Psalm 91 reminds us that God is more powerful than the afflictions we face.

If, with all our scientific knowledge, we still feel helpless against COVID-19, imagine how terrifying "pestilence" and "plague" would have been for ancient Israelites.

And yet, the psalmist proclaims, "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress.'"

Nothing — not the terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, pestilence or plague — is beyond God's control.

As the New Testament proclaims, nothing can separate us "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

When fear strikes, trust God's protection. (9–13)

The psalmist moves then to the protection available: "If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge.'"

It appears that already in the first century, these promises were considered a talisman against danger because the devil uses that interpretation to tempt Jesus in the wilderness.

After Jesus has quoted Scripture's instruction, "... man shall not live on bread alone" (Deut. 8:3), to resist the devil's temptation (Luke 4:3–4), the devil attempts to beat Jesus at His own game.

He takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and dares Him to throw Himself off because the psalm claims that God will send angels to protect those who believe (Luke 4:9–11).

But Jesus responds, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Luke 4:12), citing Deut. 6:16. Jesus' response to the devil's temptation indicates it would be misinterpreting Psalm 91 to conclude it gives those with faith immunity from any danger.


God's promises are not to be used for self-aggrandizement, for in so doing, we stray from trusting God.

When fear strikes, walk with God. (14–16)

It is significant then that the psalm ends with what the Lord says: "Because he loves me, I will rescue him."

The Hebrew word for "love" here, *hshq*, is unusual. In the few places it appears, it describes a passionate, even inexplicable, affection. This includes intense desire for a woman (Gen. 34:8; Deut. 21:11) and the reason-defying devotion the Lord, to whom the heavens and earth belong (Deut. 10:14–15), has for Israel, "the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

Deuteronomy connects loving the Lord with walking in obedience to Him and fearing Him (Deut. 10:12). If we fear the Lord by loving and obeying Him, we will not need to fear anything else.

As Jesus' life, death and resurrection demonstrate, even perfect love for the Father will not guarantee freedom from suffering, but we can trust God ultimately to deliver us. As Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). 



Media reviews

MUSIC

New project from Gettys offers songs of comfort for the close of day

By Tracy Riggs

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

A collection of hymns and lullabies inspired by the songs and prayers they use with their daughters at the end of the day is the latest project from award-winning Christian songwriters Keith and Kristyn Getty.

“Evensong: Hymns and Lullabies at the Close of Day” originated in honor of Kristyn Getty’s 40th birthday, as well as her 10-year anniversary of being a mother.

Now with four little girls, Getty wanted to share what she’s learned about the value of music within a family.

“With my own kids, we sing a lot of hymns. ... The importance of singing together and singing deep things of the Lord, and using it, not just as a beautiful thing, but as a spiritual formation thing. [There’s] also then the comfort — the production of it, the feel of it — is very much soothing for the close of day,” she said.

The album’s title comes from the name of a church service held in the early evening hours, to “redirect the mind and heart and sanc-

tify the night,” Getty explained.

Though the term “lullaby” might make one think “Evensong” is just for young children, it is also for adults, Getty affirmed.

Songs for everyone

“Children just probably show us the deeper forms of our own hearts. The vulnerability of nighttime, it doesn’t go away. We know a little bit more. We learn how to deal with it. But that little fear of the dark ... there is something about being scared of the dark,” Getty said.

Sharing during a recent “TAB Talks” podcast, Getty spoke about her own childhood.

The daughter of church planters, she grew up in a Christian home.

“I can’t remember not knowing the Lord. I can’t remember not knowing the story at a very basic level, of what Christ had done and the call of that on my own heart,” Getty said.

As a teenager, youth leaders encouraged Getty, who didn’t have much confidence, to use her musical gifts through singing. But it took meeting her husband, Keith, for her to start songwriting.



Getty Music

Kristyn Getty

“I loved singing since I was a young girl, but I hadn’t really thought about writing songs,” Getty noted. “Obviously as a singer I was then able to sing them. It was such a joy to be able to do that.”

The Gettys’ efforts have been very successful. Modern hymnbooks contain many of their songs, and one of their most popular hymns, “In Christ Alone,” is sung by millions each year in church.

While writing the songs for “Evensong,” Getty focused on a “clear declaration of the gospel,” looking to Scripture to help with the struggles in life — verses about fear, comfort and issues facing her own family.

“I love how singing things of the gospel helps just enlarge your view,” Getty said. “Singing the truth and knowing His word just constantly opens the windows in whatever space you’re in.”

The 13-track “Evensong” album includes both original songs and traditional hymns and lullabies.

The album also features guest appearances by Deborah Klemme, Ellie Holcomb, Heather Headley,

Sandra McCracken, Sierra Hull and Vince Gill. The project officially premiered as a virtual concert event at the couple’s Sing! Global Conference in September.

The Gettys now have partnered with RevelationMedia to bring audiences a special video event with selections from the concert.

Registration for the online event is free, but viewers will have the opportunity to support the production of a new family discipleship resource, “The 16 Worlds of The Pilgrim’s Progress.” For more information visit revelationmedia.com/evensong.

Hear TAB Talks featuring Kristyn Getty at tabonline.org/kristyn-getty.

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.



Keith and Kristyn Getty

Getty Music

Importance of connecting

Southern Baptists help Brazilians hone English skills for gospel advance

What's a good way to learn a language? Converse with a native speaker. What's a good way to advance the gospel? Invest in a missionary. What can catalyze both objectives? A global pandemic, apparently.

When COVID-19 grounded International Mission Board missionary Caron Johnson from travel (which had included an intensive English class in another city), she contacted Fernando Brandão, director of the South Brazil Seminary and executive director of the Brazilian Baptist Convention's National Mission Board, and offered to launch virtual English classes. Her idea was to connect volunteers in the U.S. with Brazilians to meet online for English conversations.

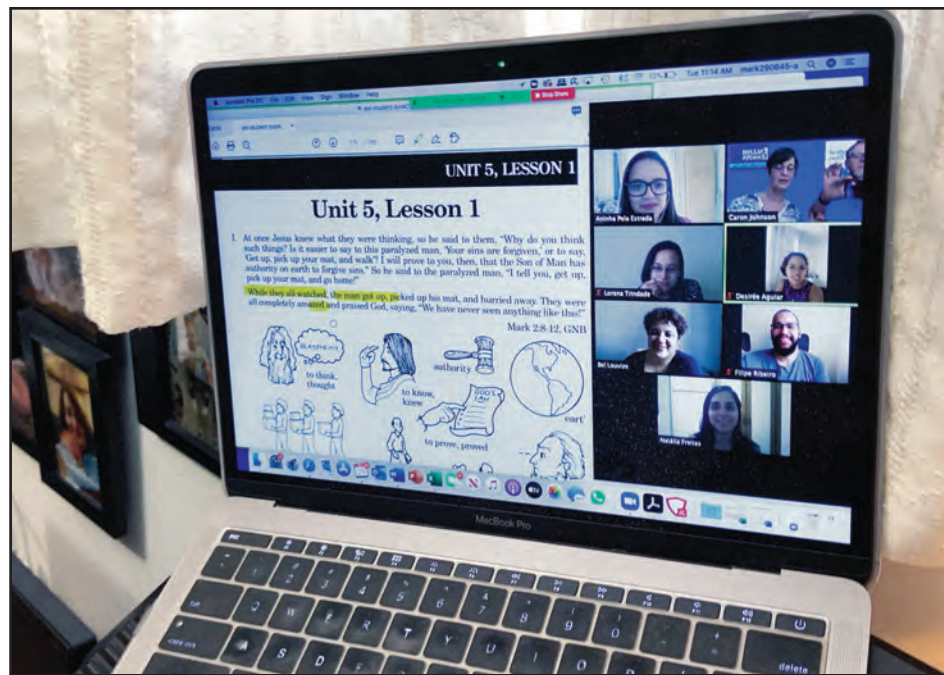
Brandão is a leader in the advance of the gospel. "It is my goal to have top leaders on my team," he said, "so I need to invest in my team." Connecting his team to Johnson's English classes helps Brazilian Baptists minister locally and globally.

Why English?

English is a world language, used by people of various mother-tongues to collaborate internationally.

"We connect in English," said Brandão, who is also vice president of a global network of churches. He said Brazilian Baptists mentor gospel partners from other nations through the shared second language.

English attracts people outside the church too. Johnson's curriculum, based on the Book of Mark, prepares students to use English classes as a ministry platform.



IMB missionary Caron Johnson connects volunteers in the U.S. with Brazilians to meet online for Bible-based English conversations.

Samuel Moutta, Brazil's National Mission Board vice president, said, "I need to reach my people with the gospel ... to train leaders ... plant churches." Johnson's classes provide a useful tool for Moutta's work.

"This program ... is wonderful," Moutta said. "We are ... talking about the Bible, talking with our friends and at the same time developing our English."

Cherished partnership

Brazilian Baptists cherish their partnership with Southern Baptists. They share a 139-year gospel-centered relationship. English skills facilitate international dialogue and cooperation among churches, Baptist entities and theological seminaries.

"It is very important for us to connect. We have partnerships with churches, state conventions, IMB," Brandão said. Brazilian leaders value "Baptistic knowledge" and leadership formation gleaned through these ties.

Johnson, who serves with her husband, Wendal Mark, in Brazil, wanted to mobilize Southern Baptists to join missions efforts in 2020, although closed borders meant canceled trips for scores of U.S. churches. Southern Baptists could not connect to Brazil by plane, but they could, Johnson realized, connect by phone.

"I suggested the idea of conversation helpers to some of my social media friends," Johnson said. "I was blown away by the response."

Missions — praying, funding, serving — is the Southern Baptist heartbeat. Neither travel restrictions nor the financial strain of a global pandemic causes Southern Baptists to forget who they are: churches

united to fulfill the Revelation 7:9 vision of a multitude from every language, people, tribe and nation knowing and worshipping our Lord.

Sharing conversations

Kelly Pyron is one of 18 U.S. volunteers equipping Brazilians with language skills to facilitate their role in the missions movement.

Additional volunteers await new students currently learning enough to converse.

Conversation partners discuss the week's Bible lesson. As they review for an oral exam on the 3 Circles gospel presentation, they are further equipped to lead others to Christ.

"The ultimate goal," Johnson said, "is for both Brazilian students and SBC volunteers to work together to share the gospel in a cross-cultural context, learning from one another."

Pyron is paired with Lorena. Both lead children's Bible classes in their respective communities. Their "conversation partners" role has segued into mentoring and mutual encouragement.

Similarly, volunteer Pat Bryant encourages the young

Brazilian mother assigned to her, and Pastor Brandão inspires Pastor Steve Hussung to guard time alone with God.

Bill Rogers, having traveled to Brazil 17 times, now pours into Renato, the mis-

sion board's ministry coordinator for people who are drug-addicted or displaced and for children orphaned or living on the streets.

Since launching the initial classes, Johnson has added classes at an additional seminary and at Krieger Language Center — a commercial institute on South Brazil Seminary's campus.

Johnson reports, "I have done some initial training with several Krieger teachers, [who] hope to offer it to more students soon." (IMB)

Find more information and resources to promote the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions at imb.org/lottie-moon-christmas-offering.

"This program ... is wonderful. We are ... talking about the Bible, talking with our friends and at the same time developing our English."

Samuel Moutta
vice president, Brazilian Baptist Convention's National Mission Board