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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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MAY THE
God
of
hope

FILL YOU WITH

joy
and
peace.

ROMANS 15:13



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(Top to bottom, left to right): Jennifer Davis Rash, Annette Brown, Debbie Campbell, Margaret Colson, Janet Erwin, Maggie Evans, Sarah Gill, Lauren C. Grim, Amy Hacker, James Hammack, Linda Harrison, Pam Holt, Jessica Ingram, Deborah Lowery, Richard Maddox, Melanie McKinney, Carrie Brown McWhorter, Hannah Muñoz, Haley Piersol, Susan Stevens, Grace Thornton, Cynthia Watts.

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Photo by Amy Hacker

TAB staff members (left to right) Cynthia Watts, Linda Harrison and Hannah Muñoz decorate TAB's black, white and red (read) tree for Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries' Trees for Hope event.

TAB decorates, donates tree for ABCH auction

What's black and white and red (read) all over? This Christmas season, the answer wasn't just the print edition of TAB — it was also a tree designed by TAB staff for the Trees for Hope event, a fundraiser for the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries.

The second annual Trees for Hope, held Nov. 30, featured a live auction and an all-virtual silent auction that offered a variety of themed and pre-decorated Christmas trees, wreaths and more.

The funds from the event will help support the ongoing ministry of ABCH, which provides foster care, campus homes for children, family



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Davis Rash

Jennifer Davis Rash (left) and Cynthia Watts represent TAB Media at the Trees for Hope event in Birmingham.

care and professional counseling for children and families in need.

For more information about ABCH, visit alabamachild.org. (TAB)



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

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 15.

MY RASHIONALE

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

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@RashionalThts



Fresh grief ushers in different kind of Christmas for Debbie

Editor's Note — So many of you have experienced the life and joy Debbie Campbell brings to everything she does. I've had the privilege of working beside her in a variety of roles at TAB for more than 20 years, and in recent years we've partnered as your TAB Trouble traveling duo (prior to the global pandemic).

While I never had the opportunity to meet Debbie's sister Candy, I feel like I've always known her. Debbie has shared lots of fun stories through the years, and we all especially loved how Candy and her husband, Jim, would always show up for Christmas a day or two earlier than expected.

We even made it a competition some years to see who could guess which day Debbie would get a surprise call and then be seen running out of the office in a flash to do a quick touch-up on the house before Candy and Jim made their way in from the next town over.

We all will miss the special sister stories from Debbie, and we all hurt for her as she works through the grief and pain.

I wanted you to hear from her about how her Christmases have changed forever.

By **Debbie Campbell**
Director of Communications

Christmas will be different for me this year. It all began like any other Christmas, getting boxes of Christmas lights and decorations down from the attic. But suddenly a wave of grief

swept over me, and I didn't want to open any of the boxes, much less decorate a tree.

Candy, my only sister and sibling, won't be sharing Christmas with me anymore. She finished her earthly race Nov. 16 after struggling for almost four months with cancer.



Photo courtesy of Debbie Campbell
Debbie (left) & Candy

It all seems like a blur. Candy seemed in great health when she came for a visit in mid-July, but by the end of that month, we were facing brain surgery with the shocking news that she had stage 4 glioblastoma and there was no known cure for it.

I can't remember a Christmas celebration without my big sis. She was always there, smiling and laughing, helping me put together toys and reading my new books with me.

Our relationship grew closer through the years. In fact, people said we looked alike, thought alike and even could finish a sentence for each other. It freaked our kids out.

We did everything together, even crazy adventures, and became known as Lucy and Ethel (a reference to the "I Love Lucy" show from the late 50s for those of you too young to remember that far back).

But this Christmas isn't shaping up too well for me. There are good days and bad days. Ups and downs. I am reminded of the words from the song by Mark Schultz:

"There's one less place set at the table; one less gift under the tree ...; I'm unwrapping all these memories; Fighting back the tears; It's just a different kind of Christmas this year."

Prayers, phone calls, cards and personal messages from friends are helping me cope as I walk with the Lord through this loss. I am trusting but it still hurts, and the emptiness remains.

Afternoons are the toughest for me right now. Candy and I talked most days, and when possible FaceTimed each other at 3 p.m., our special coffee time. During those afternoon coffees we laughed and cried and solved all the world's problems.

Now at 3 p.m. I find myself wishing I could give her a call and catch up with the latest news or share a new recipe I found. Yes, Christmas will be different this year.

And just when I think my heart will break over losing my big sis, I am gently reminded of the One who loves me and cares for me — the One who wasn't surprised or caught off guard by this tragedy. My Lord is ever present, showering me with His love and comfort. He knows just when I need that special touch.

One morning as I sat in tears at my kitchen table a friend sent me a text saying that during her devotion she read a verse that "made me think of you."

"The Lord is near to the bro-

kenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

Wow. What encouragement! God knows when we are at the end of our rope, and He renews our spirit.

Another afternoon, I was sitting by the fire sinking into a depressed mood when I received a text to look on my front doorstep.

Once again, along with a beautiful plant and a card, God showed up with a promise that "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3).

I thank the Lord for giving me such a wonderful big sis and allowing me to have these years with her.



Photo courtesy of Debbie Campbell
Debbie (left) & Candy

She always did everything first, showing me the right way or sometimes showing me what not to do from her mistakes.

Now in passing from this life, she has once again done a first, leading the way to our heavenly home. Running across that finish line of

my life's final race won't be so difficult after all, because "Big Sis" has already done it, paving the way for me to follow.

I will be looking for her in the stands cheering me on to the finish line.

I love you, "Ethel." Thank you for a life full of wonderful memories. Love, "Lucy." 🙏

Your Voice



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

When are the 12 days of Christmas?

By **Scott Aniol**
Special to The Alabama Baptist

You can't escape them. There are 12 Days of Christmas contests on the radio, 12 Days of Christmas sales at the mall, 12 Days of Christmas charity drives and, of course, that very long song.

Most people (in America, at least) seem to assume that these infamous 12 days describe those leading up to Christmas Day, as evidenced by the aforementioned contests and sales.

And yet it is actually that very factor — the American marketing machine — that has led to this erroneous labeling of Dec. 14–25 as THE Twelve Days of Christmas. For retail business, Dec. 25 marks the end of the Christmas season.

However, in the Christian tradition the Twelve Days actually refer to the celebration of Christ's nativity — also called "Christmastide" — between Christmas (Dec. 25) and Epiphany (Jan. 6), the day that celebrates the visit of the Magi. For this reason, the evening of Jan. 5 is called "Twelfth Night," made famous by William Shakespeare's play of that title.

The days preceding Christmas — four weeks to be exact — are more traditionally referred to as Advent, the time in which Christians anticipate both the first and Second Comings of Jesus to earth. In the historic tradition, Christians don't actually celebrate (or sing about) Christ's birth until Christmas Eve, and then they continue to sing about and celebrate the Nativity for the Twelve Festival Days of the season.

There is no biblical mandate to celebrate the Church year, and if



Photo by Marco Verch under Creative Commons 2.0

someone chooses not to follow the traditional Church calendar, I certainly respect that. Yet utilizing this historic Christian practice can be a great blessing for individual Christians, families and churches alike.

Delaying the celebration with four weeks of yearning makes our focus on the incarnation even more sweet. These weeks of Advent remind us of the reality of sin and desperate need of salvation. They place within our hearts anticipation of not only the first coming of Christ but also His Second Coming.

They allow us not to escape from the realities of pain and sin around us, but to acknowledge them and direct our longing to the only real solution — the incarnate Son of God. As is true of the Book of Psalms, joy and praise become deeper when they are preceded by lament.

And then, with a preparatory period of longing complete, the joyous celebration of Christmas can fill our hearts with a delight and thankfulness made even more stark against

the backdrop of longing. The darkness turns to light, lament becomes praise, and longing changes to reality.

Especially at the end of a year that has been for most filled with anxiety, pain, sickness and even death, use these four weeks leading up to Christmas as a time to cry out to God with longing in your heart for the soon coming again of our Savior.

Then rejoice for 12 days in the reality of His first coming, continuing to anticipate His Second Coming, a time in which sin and sorrow will no longer grow, when His blessings will flow "far as the curse is found."

May that day come quickly! O come, O come, Immanuel!

EDITOR'S NOTE — *Scott Aniol, Ph.D., is an author, speaker and teacher of culture, worship, aesthetics and church ministry philosophy. He is associate professor and director of doctoral worship studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.*

Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas. And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time that's set apart to celebrate love, friendship and God's gift of the Christ child.

Amy Grant

And when the Lord Jesus has become your peace, remember, there is another thing: good will towards men. Do not try to keep Christmas without good will towards men.

Charles Spurgeon

May the hope, the peace, the joy and the love represented by the birth in Bethlehem this night fill our lives and become part of all that we say and do.

Richard J. Fairchild

The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.

Pastor Ralph W. Sockman (1889–1970)

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Luke 2:14

“Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep ...”

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

From the poem “Christmas Bells”

The goal is to not just come to church and hear preaching but to live on mission wherever God has [you].

Pastor Matt Carter
Sagemont Church
Houston, Texas

As the family gathers together for another Christmas, we measure our lives against who we were last year, and we realize our dreams haven't materialized. We're still single. We're still childless. We're still grieving. We're still battling illness. We're still not who we want to be. The holidays, perhaps more than any other time of year, remind us of what we're missing.

But what if this Christmas you found yourself seated at the table you've been longing for all this

time? ... In Ephesians 2:6, Paul writes, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

This little word, seated, allowed me to visualize myself at a grand table next to Jesus. Here, I had everything I needed because I was seated with Christ. What could be better?

Heather Holleman
crosswalk.com

From Genesis to Malachi, [the Old Testament] is the story of people not being able to freely come near to God because of His holiness and their sin.

But the glory of the incarnation is that God Himself has come near to us. For Jesus to be swaddled, God had to be touched. For the shep-

herds to praise God for the Savior that was born, God had to be seen.

Author Jackie Hill Perry
Speaking at The Grove, Atlanta

This Christmas, no matter what's under your tree, remember the key to a full Christmas comes when we allow the Gift of Christmas — Jesus — to fill all the empty places in our soul and lives.

Kristen Welch
incourageme.com

Emmanuel. God not against us, God not far from us, God not abandoning us, God not forsaking us, God not punishing us — but God with us and for us, always and forever.

Ann Voskamp
annvoskamp.com

From the *Twitterverse*

@Corey_OGrady

Why is it crucial for Christians to see theological learning as important? LEARNING about God increases our LOVING of God which motivates our LIVING for God. You can't love what you don't learn and won't live for what you don't love.

@BarnabasPiper

“The early Church didn't say, ‘Look what the world is coming to!’ They said, ‘Look what has come into the world!’” — Carl F.H. Henry

@dailyspurgeon

The day is coming when He will ride on His white horse and go forth conquering and to conquer; but today it is the red horse; for

His Church still suffers; still is she stained with the blood of persecution.

@timkellernyc

Gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience and turning every conversation toward myself and self-interest.

@PaulTripp

There is no power like the restorative and transformative power of God's amazing grace. There is no bond so strong as the bond of God's redeeming love.

@ChrisCrain4

Praying for pastors who wake early on Sunday morning with adrena-

line flowing and passionate hearts but have no place to preach. Forced termination, retirement — whatever the circumstances — do not take away God's irrevocable call.

@louiegiglio

Anointing is all about God's glory. It is God in you. If no one applauds, or if they do, make sure you applaud God.

@newheightsky

“You can see in the Bible that wherever God sows true believers, Satan always sows a counterfeit.”
@PSChadBurdette

@JL_Wood

We serve a mighty God! Praise His name!

Reach out this holiday season

Churches, groups, fraternal organizations, etc., need to think about reaching out to people this season. Real, actual communication is the key.

People don't need more robocalls, more Facebook videos or mail to read. People need real human interaction, and this may be the toughest December in our modern history to have this.

Sunday School classes, senior adult organizations, school organizations, classes [and] teams should coordinate efforts to reach out to each other and to others. Letting others know you are thinking about them with positive reinforcement will be critical this holiday season.

Make a holiday telephone list of people you are going to call often between now and Jan. 1. You may call them every week. Or it may be someone who needs a call every two or three days. Keep the calls brief. Often five or 10 minutes will be a boost to someone.

If you text message or video chat then commit to connecting with others with occasional chats and brief hellos.

One of the ways to boost your spirit is to be helpful. Who can you help this holiday? How can you help your local school? How can you help someone who is hurting more than you? How can you help a local human aid group or senior citizen's group?

You may know people who have lost loved ones. If you do, it helps to talk to others and say, “I know how you feel and what you are going through.”

There are people all around who may not be suffering as much as you. When you take your mind off yourself to help someone else, then you will find your load will be a little lighter and your spirit brighter.

Excerpt from “Blue or Merry Holiday Season”
by Glen Mollette, author
and columnist

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An artist's rendering shows what the new Birmingham Metro Baptist Association building will look like after improvements are complete in early 2021.

'Same mission'



Photo courtesy of BMBA

Baptist Health System gifts BMBA with new building, \$350,000 for improvements

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Birmingham Metro Baptist Association will soon own a much larger facility than the office it is currently leasing, thanks to a gift from Baptist Health System.

The 16,000-square-foot building — located next door to BMBA's current office on Montclair Road, directly across Medical Park Drive NE — will offer the association space for larger meetings and new ministry partners, said Chris Crain, BMBA executive director.

The BHS board voted to approve the gift Dec. 7, along with \$350,000 to put toward building improvements.

"The BMBA is in a new season," Crain said.

In November, the association formerly known as Birmingham Baptist Association entered into a new partnership with Bessemer Baptist Association and became BMBA, a new association with a new vision and new governing documents.

"Now we have this opportunity to move into a new facility," Crain said, adding that the association

hasn't owned its own building since 2004, when it started leasing its current building from BHS.

For the past several years, that lease has been \$1 per year, he said. "It has already been a tremendous blessing to be in partnership with Baptist Health."

That partnership has been a long one.

BMBA created BHS in 1922 with the purchase of what is known today as Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham. The association approves all of the members of the BHS board of trustees and has three members on the board.

Amy S. Allen, BHS president and CEO, says BHS and BMBA have "maintained a

partnership and close relationship throughout the years."

Spreading the gospel

"We have virtually the same mission, which is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in Birmingham; however, ours is focused in the health care arena," Allen said.

In early October, BHS found another way to help out their partner in that mission. In 1975, the American Heart Association ground-

leased the property at 1449 Medical Park Drive NE, with the agreement that when they ended their lease, any building built there would revert to the ownership of BHS.

In October, AHA terminated that lease, leaving behind their Birmingham headquarters building, which was built in the early 1980s.

'Investment in their future'

"We began discussing the possibility of donating the American Heart Association building to the BMBA as soon as we received it in early October," Allen said. "We had no use for the building and knew that it would be a valuable asset for the BMBA. We wanted to make an investment in their future by gifting it to them along with \$350,000 in cash for needed improvements to the building."

The goal is to have the paperwork completed by Dec. 31 and building improvements made between January and March 2021. BMBA hopes to make the move in the first quarter of 2021. Once BMBA moves, BHS will sell the current BMBA building at 750 Montclair Road.

"For us to have our own facility and be in this new season of ministry, we are just overwhelmed with all that God is doing through the association right now," Crain said. "It's truly remarkable."

The new building nearly doubles their capacity — the current building is 9,600 square feet and holds BMBA staff along with partner ministries, including Workfaith Birmingham, Discovery Clubs of Alabama, Metro Changers and Pathways Professional Counseling.

"All that combined has been a

great opportunity to create synergy among those ministries and the work (we do) together," Crain said. "We're excited to continue that."

In the new building, BMBA will occupy the first floor and partner ministries will use the second floor.

The third floor will then be available for additional ministry opportunities, as will a conference center and additional meeting rooms.

"This is space we haven't had before that we can steward for God's work as our vision continues to unfold," Crain said.

He says he's especially excited about the possibility of using the conference center space in the future as a place to incubate church plants.

"We will have the opportunity to allow church plants and language and ethnic churches to meet in the facility alongside us as scheduled," Crain said. "We are also encouraged by the reality that we will have a space where we can gather larger groups and socially distance and use that space to accomplish our mission, which is to encourage, equip and engage biblically faithful churches for the glory of God."

'Wonderful stewards'

Allen said BHS is excited to be a part of this transition.

"Baptist Health System board members who served before us were wonderful stewards of our resources, which allowed us to be in a position to be able to provide this donation of the building and cash to the BMBA," she said. "We are excited to be able to provide for their future occupancy needs for hopefully many years to come." 🙌



Photo by Grace Thornton

Amy S. Allen (left), BHS president and CEO, and Chris Crain, BMBA executive director, stand outside the building that BHS voted Dec. 7 to gift to BMBA for its new offices.

What is Baptist Health System today?

From first hospital bought in 1921 to recent partnerships, BHS continues to provide care

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

About a century ago, Alabama Baptists had a burden — they wanted to get involved in health care so they could minister to the state's hurting. So they earmarked \$100,000 and chose a location for a Baptist hospital — Selma.

For state Baptists, it was a start.

But Birmingham Baptists couldn't shake the burden they had for the "great need" in their own area, said Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. A Selma hospital, while great, wouldn't help people in their own city.

First facility

So on Oct. 22, 1921, representatives of the association signed a contract to buy Dr. W.C. Gewin's privately owned infirmary in Birmingham's West End. For \$245,000, they acquired a 90-bed hospital, part of which was a house. They also got the services of a part-time pharmacist, a part-time pathologist and a medical staff of 77 doctors.

A seven-year-old nurses training school with 12 students also came as part of the deal.

And suddenly Birmingham Baptists were in the hospital business, kicking off a ministry that's still going today.

In 1922, that original facility, Birmingham Baptist Hospital (now called Princeton Baptist Medical Center), merged with Montclair Hospital to become the start of Baptist Health System.

"The desire of the association



Princeton Baptist Medical Center Facebook photo
Princeton Baptist Medical Center (originally Birmingham Baptist Hospital) was BMBA's first hospital purchase in 1921 and the start of the Baptist Health System.

in forming the hospitals was to extend the healing hand of Jesus Christ to the Birmingham area through excellent health care," Crain said. "Without a doubt, the desire of the association in forming what became Baptist Health

System was to advance the gospel."

So what does BHS look like today?

Over the past 98 years, the system has changed a good bit, and at one point it had 10 hospitals under its umbrella.

For the second half of the 20th century, BHS was one of the largest health care providers in Alabama.

But starting in 2003, a money crunch forced it to sell off six of its Baptist medical centers. That helped get things back on track, according to then-CEO Shane

Spees. By 2008, things were leveling out and looking up.

The legacy today is strong.

Throughout the system's history, BHS hospitals have made an impact, pioneering treatments like cutting-edge cardiac procedures. In 2006, one of its hospitals — Trinity Baptist Medical Center — was the site of the first robotic mitral valve repair in the state.

Mobile clinics

Then in 2011, BHS employees were on the front lines of disaster relief help, setting up mobile clinics in four communities devastated by tornadoes.

That same year, three BHS hospitals were named among the nation's best in quality treatment for needs such as heart failure, pneumonia and surgical care.

For all of its history, BHS directly owned and operated hospitals in its local area until a change came

in 2015. At that time, it was operating four hospitals — Princeton Baptist Medical Center, Shelby Baptist Medical Center in Alabaster, Walker Baptist Medical Center in Jasper and Citizens Baptist Medical Center in Talladega.

New partnership

In October of that year, BHS formed a partnership with Tenet Healthcare Corporation out of Dallas, Texas. As laid out in the agreement, the two would own the four Baptist hospitals together along with Brookwood Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham, said Amy S. Allen, BHS president and CEO.

The joint venture — called Brookwood Baptist Health — is 70 percent owned by Tenet and 30 percent by BHS and is managed by Tenet.

"Under the joint venture arrangement, all five hospitals maintain the Christian ministry of Baptist Health System and the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association," Allen said. "So not only does the Christian ministry remain in our previous hospitals, but it also has been expanded to Brookwood. We continue to ensure strong pastoral care programs at all five hospitals and to ensure that clinicians can practice their profession in a Christian environment."

Additionally, Baptist Health Foundation, a separate legal entity that supports Baptist Health System and Brookwood Baptist Health, provides additional support and resources to families and patients in need, she said.

And the tie to its parent organization, BMBA, is still strong, she said. The association approves all of the members of the BHS board of trustees and has three members on the board.✚

"Without a doubt, the desire of the association in forming what became Baptist Health System was to advance the gospel."

**Chris Crain
executive director, Birmingham
Metro Baptist Association**

For more information, visit brookwoodbaptisthealth.com.

Hope *for the* grieving heart *at Christmas*

Sensitivity, comfort from Scripture help the hurting during difficult season

By **Laura Lee Leathers**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Walking into the store, the automated greeting Santa states, “Ho, Ho, Ho, Merry Christmas” and waves with his white-gloved hand.

Inside the store, the intercom plays, “Tis the Season to be Jolly,” interrupting your thoughts and bringing you back to reality.

Christmas season is anything but jolly when you are dealing with grief. It’s all you can do to muster a fake smile and say “Merry Christmas.”

Grief is anything that causes intense emotional suffering such as the death of a loved one, financial loss, a prodigal child, divorce, expectations not met, a disease such as Alzheimer’s or loss due to natural disasters or fires.

COVID-19 challenges

It was challenging to deal with loss before COVID-19; now, the pandemic has compounded our lives with additional physical, financial and emotional strains. It has robbed many from having normal visitation and funeral services.

Visiting loved ones in a nursing home was suspended. Memory-making moments, such as weddings, graduations and childbirth had to be celebrated differently.

Grief comes to everyone, and as the countdown to the Christmas season approaches, a black cloud of dread and anxiety can arise. Loneliness engulfs many people. Tears flow, emotions are raw, memories echo from the past of the relationships and things lost. The Christmas season only seems to exacerbate the loss.

Facing grief at Christmas can be especially difficult, said Morris Murray Jr., a health care management specialist and minister of music and outreach who lives in Jasper. He offered three primary reasons why:

1. Reduced joy. “The flooding of memories at Christmas tends to dilute the happiness once associated with the deceased person’s presence, which has now turned into absence.” Some people struggle with



Unsplash.com

survivor’s guilt or a myriad of questions.

2. Ruptured expectations. “Grieving at Christmas tends to puncture our previous conceptions or ideation about the meaningfulness of life itself.” Daily we go through the typical hello and goodbyes, “but at Christmas, a dawning realization tends to set in that it is the only goodbye. That realization, in itself, may destroy our hopes, dreams and expectations about the future and thereby lessen the significance of life.”

3. Revolving associa-

tions. Anything such as objects, a Christmas card, gift or song brings reminders of the loss. Colder temperatures can hinder us from interacting with others. The lack of exercise and fresh air makes a person more lethargic, rendering an individual more prone to emotional outbursts.

Basic biology

Accepting the reality of the loss can be difficult, in part because of basic biology, Murray said.

The human brain is a complex organ. When faced with tragedy and loss, it takes time to process what has taken place.

No easy solutions exist. Many times, there are no answers to the “why” questions as an individual is looking for closure.

“The word closure customarily refers to some degree of acceptance about the death of a loved one or friend. It may send the mes-

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The human brain is a complex organ. When faced with tragedy and loss, it takes time to process what has taken place. No easy solutions exist. Many times, there are no answers to the ‘why’ questions as an individual is looking for closure.

The Bible offers many stories of individuals who experienced loss, their grieving process and the ability to move forward. Hope for the grieving heart is found in Jesus.

sage that if you cannot let go and move on at the rate someone else dictates to you, then ‘you must be abnormal and in need of psychiatric care’ hyperbolically speaking — but not necessarily.

“It is always risky to play the role of God and tell others authoritatively just how, when and what ‘they need to do’ to restore balance to their lives,” Murray said.

There are ways to bring hope and comfort. He offered these tips for those helping loved ones through a difficult season.

► Be sensitive to the timing and ask questions that may help them process the loss. Additionally, be aware of an individual’s personality style. Is that person an introvert or extrovert? What are his or her strengths and weaknesses? What is in that person’s background regarding a loss?

► Remember, crying is therapeutic, “an inherent release valve,” Murray said.

Yet many people hold back the tears because they are afraid of what people will think of their lack of control. Eventually, again based upon a person’s personality, there comes a moment when the crying

becomes controllable. But anything can trigger and reignite the flow.

► Share hope with those who grieve. When God created humankind, He gave us the ability to experience joy and pain. He also gave us the ability to grieve. It is a natural healing process for the body, soul and mind.

Hope in Jesus

► The Bible offers many stories of individuals who experienced loss, their grieving process and the ability to move forward. Hope for the grieving heart is found in Jesus.

Isaiah 53 is an excellent place to start. He is “... A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (v. 3). He can identify with every thought and emotion you are experiencing. And He is the grief bearer: “Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows” (v. 4).

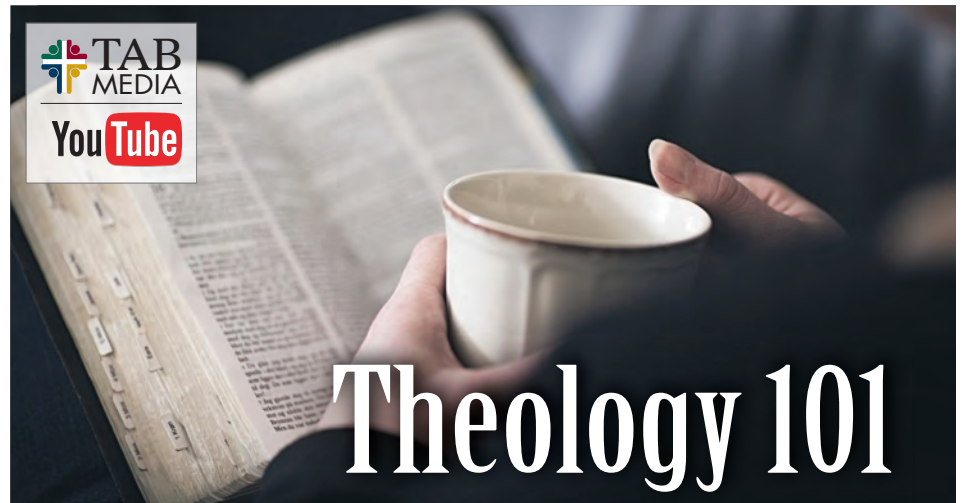
God is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3–7). As believers, we have the hope and

the vast treasure of His word to comfort others and ourselves. Personal experiences are a testimony of God’s steadfast love, peace, faithfulness and His provision of sustaining grace through loss.✝

For more on facing grief at Christmas, listen to a conversation featuring Morris Murray Jr. and TAB Talks hosts Jennifer Davis Rash and Debbie Campbell. Find the episode at tabonline.org/Christmas-grief.



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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christmas

A Time for Inward Pondering

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

Last week our emphasis was on Christmas as a time for godward rejoicing. This week our attention focuses on Mary following the actual birth of Jesus when shepherds visited the stable and viewed the infant Jesus for themselves.

During that visit the shepherds related the things told to them by the heralding angel while they were still tending their flocks. These were the things that caused Mary and Joseph to marvel.

Luke 2:19 records simply, “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” From Mary’s example, we might deduce for ourselves that our Christmas season is also a good time for inward pondering.

Meditation modeled

We probably think of inward pondering as meditation. In the Bible, meditation is both commanded by God and modeled by godly persons. Pondering was a discipline the Lord urged upon Joshua when the time came for him to succeed Moses as Israel’s leader, saying, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it ...” (Josh. 1:8).

Similarly, the blessed person is one described in Psalm 1 as one who does not walk in the ways of the ungodly, but “his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (v. 2). That psalm goes on to enu-

merate the results of such meditation as stability, fruitfulness, perseverance and prosperity.

We ponder the truths and spiritual realities taught in the Bible in order to achieve understanding and application, as well as to inform and enrich our praying. When schedules are tight, taking the time necessary to ponder God’s word without hurry or distraction can be a major challenge.

Unhurried time

Unhurried time is necessary for filling our minds with God and things praiseworthy and virtuous, things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Phil. 4:8).

We must take the matter of pondering God’s word a step further by noting that we meditate on the truths of the Bible in order to flesh them out in practical Christian living. The truth read and even memorized becomes the truth applied through its serious and persistent pondering.

As a practical discipline, our meditation on Scripture should yield some specific way in which we should respond to the passage. The end result is to become better doers of the Word.✝

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.



God is faithful

Churches, Operation Christmas Child adapt to provide shoebox gifts amid pandemic

By Lanell Downs Smith
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Debbie Smith of Walden Chapel Baptist Church, Danville, began sewing face masks to give to family and friends. Many recipients wanted to pay for the masks, so Smith accepted donations and collected funds to help fill more than 550 Christmas shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

God was faithful in spite of the pandemic, Smith said, and provided for the church's shoebox ministry at each step along the way this year. "Truly, God provided for my [personal] shoeboxes before the shutdown," Smith said. "Every time I went [shopping], I would find exactly what I needed and most of it was half price."

And when COVID-19 closed the church doors in

March, Smith said she wondered if the congregation, which is currently without a pastor, would be able to fill shoeboxes this year.

Shoeboxes and Vacation Bible School make up the primary outreach efforts for the congregation of just over 20, most of whom are senior adults.

'God kept providing'

When the church couldn't host VBS due to the pandemic, Smith felt it was vital that they find a way to do shoeboxes.

"[God] kept providing, and I just kept buying. I had no idea how many we would do, but I told [the congregation], 'This is not the time to stop sending the gospel to children,'" Smith reflected.

Since older church members couldn't leave home to shop, many gave money, as did others in the community.

"They just wanted to be a part of it, even though they



Photo courtesy of Melba Moss

Volunteers at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Gordo, pray over shoeboxes before they are shipped to Atlanta. The church has been a regional OCC drop-off site for 25 years.

couldn't get out," Smith said.

At packing parties, volunteers spread shoebox filler items throughout the church so participants could safely pack boxes while wearing masks and gloves.

Walden Baptist Church in north Alabama adapted their collection process as well. With the church building closed for several months because of the pandemic, shoebox coordinator Nancy

Graham said online wish lists at Amazon and Walmart helped the church meet and even exceed their goal this year.

Challenges addressed

"This allowed people to still be able to shop safely for those items and at the same time we still had people making monetary donations that allowed me to do the shopping for the needed

items," Graham said.

Local drop-off efforts looked different this year due to COVID-19, with many donors utilizing the church's curbside, touchless system instead of coming inside the building.

"We missed our donors coming into our life center and praying with us over their boxes one more time before they were packed for shipment. COVID took the personal touch out of it this year like it has so many other things, but I am thankful that a way was made for us to be able to do it at all," Graham said.

In Prattville, First Baptist Church's Candyce DeKruyff said their shoebox collection numbers were down only slightly from last year. Pandemic-related restrictions

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Photo courtesy of Candyce DeKruyff

FBC Prattville volunteer Kelvin Motin packs Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. The church collected 1,533 shoeboxes and served as a regional collection site.

kept the church from hosting their usual packing party, but it didn't keep 100-year-old Gertrude Chandler of First, Prattville, from crocheting festive borders for shoebox washcloths as she has done for the past four years, DeKruyff said.

Many First, Prattville, members also took advantage of the touchless collection system, DeKruyff said, where volunteers from the church gathered boxes from automobile trunks, leaving a thank you note behind. For those who were

comfortable handing their boxes out of car windows or coming into the church, volunteers prayed with them over the boxes, as they have done in previous years.



Photo courtesy of Walden Chapel
Walden Chapel Baptist Church, Danville, collected 595 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes this year.

DeKruyff said some church members used OCC's online packing option, which allowed donors to virtually pack a shoebox, an option that is still open to those who wish to participate.

"In the year of COVID, where we are trying to make things as accessible as possible, we added and

promoted that (online) option," DeKruyff said. "Some people wanted to be hands-on, but there are others who weren't able or weren't comfortable helping in person. We wanted to offer all options."

The church collected 1,533 shoeboxes and served as a regional collection site, shipping out more than 9,500 boxes to OCC's Atlanta processing center.

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Gordo, did not send anyone to the Atlanta processing center this year as it has in years past, but the church did reach a milestone in 2020 — 25 years as a regional drop-off location in West Alabama.

Mount Pleasant packed 614 shoeboxes and collected a total of 2,239 shoeboxes from other churches and individuals.

'Open doors'

"The children from North River Christian Academy in Tuscaloosa came over on Friday of collection week and brought their 76 boxes," said Melba Moss, who coordinates OCC efforts at Mount Pleasant. "The students prayed over their boxes, watched an OCC video and toured our OCC room at Mount Pleasant where we collect items all year long for our boxes."

Amid the global pandem-

"Not everyone is called to be a missionary, but we can help by giving them tools to help open doors for others to learn about Jesus."

Nancy Graham
shoobox coordinator, Ider Baptist Church

ic, Ider Baptist's Graham said people wondered at first if they would have time or resources to fill shoeboxes.

By October, those doubts had changed to praises to God for providing more than enough for the shoeboxes, Graham said.

She uses shoeboxes to

teach her daughters how to give to others and also the importance of the Great Commission.

"Not everyone is called to be a missionary," she said, "but we can help by giving

them (the missionaries) tools to help open doors for others to learn about Jesus."✝

For more information about this year's Operation Christmas Child collection effort, visit samaritanspurse.org.

With every passing morning, 2020 has presented many challenges.



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3 stories you should know



U.S. State Department photo

The U.S. State Department has added Nigeria to its list of 'countries of particular concern,' or those deemed to have the most egregious violations of religious freedom. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (left) announced the latest designations Dec. 7. In a Dec. 8 press briefing, Sam Brownback (right), U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, addressed Nigeria's addition to the list. Read the full story at tabonline.org/cpc-nigeria. (RNS)

New rule set to benefit religious contractors

The U.S. Department of Labor issued a new rule Dec. 7 intended to allow religious groups to participate equally as federal contractors.

The rule will be effective Jan. 8 and is the latest development in the long-running battle over how to balance religious rights with other, particularly LGBTQ, rights.

The department said the new rule builds on a Johnson-era order that requires contractors to follow affirmative action and nondiscrimination requirements. The rule "acknowledges that religious organizations may prefer in employment 'individuals of a particular religion,' so that they can maintain their religious identity and integrity," the department's statement said.

Read more at tabonline.org/new-labor-rule. (RNS)

ERLC addresses brief filed in NAMB lawsuit

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention issued an apology Dec. 9 for language in an amicus brief that mischaracterized Baptist polity.

The ERLC said it joined the brief, written by the Thomas More Society in support of a lawsuit against the SBC's North American Mission Board, "because of the importance of the underlying religious liberty issues at stake."

The brief's intent was to establish that cooperating bodies of the SBC "are inherently religious, and therefore protected by the First Amendment ... from interference by the state." But "problems with language in the brief ... created concern and unnecessary confusion," the ERLC acknowledged. Read the full ERLC statement at tabonline.org/erlc. (BP)

Headline news from around the Southeast

Florida

It's a long way from serving 13 years in prison to serving as a Florida Baptist pastor, but a Bible that Kory Gordon found under his bed in prison began the journey, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported. For the past two years, Gordon has served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Eastpoint, Florida. He and his wife "are living the transformed life as they minister to the community of Eastpoint," said Florida Baptist leader Lewis Miller.

Georgia

Starting Dec. 14, Georgia Baptists will be participating in a 12-event bus tour to encourage Christians to vote their biblical values in the state's Jan. 5 Senate run-off. The effort is being organized by two nonprofit Christian organizations along with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, *The Christian Index* reported. "There will be no campaigning for any candidates or politi-

cal parties. It is a time for prayer, encouragement and action," explained Mike Griffin, public affairs representative for the GBMB.

Louisiana

Louisiana College President Rick Brewer has a heart for students, as well as joy in playing the piano. This Christmas, he combined his two passions and released a Christmas piano album with proceeds going toward funding scholarships at Louisiana College. "Christmas" is available for order at the Louisiana College bookstore and streaming on Apple Music and Spotify.

Mississippi

Mississippi Baptists' 2021 budget is \$28,510,346, a decrease of 8.25% from the state's 2020 budget of \$31,073,945. "At this point we believe our reduction may very well be overstated because our receipts for 2020 have

remained on pace in spite of the COVID effect," Shawn Parker, Mississippi Baptists' executive director-treasurer, shared with *The Alabama Baptist*. "We plan to review the 2021 budget toward the end of the second quarter and make any adjustments that might seem appropriate."

Tennessee

Tennessee Baptists' executive director and president, Randy Davis, has publicly challenged the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission for stating, in an amicus brief filed by ERLC, that there is a denominational hierarchy in the Southern Baptist Convention, the *Baptist and Reflector* reported. "I take very seriously the preeminence and autonomy of the local church at the center of our denominational ecosystem," Davis said, citing language in the SBC constitution. "There is absolutely no denominational hierarchy." (See 'ERLC,' above.)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Ben Amlong**, pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church, Brundidge, died Nov. 15. He was 81.

Amlong served as a minister for churches in Dale, Henry, Houston, Coffee and Pike counties for 55 years.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Barbara; daughter, Terri; sons, Bryan and Jeff; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

► **Gerald R. Sykes**, who spent more than two decades serving as a pastor in Opelika, died Nov. 28. He was 84.



SYKES

Sykes spent 24 of his 49 years in ministry at Opelika's Airview Baptist Church and Central Baptist Church.

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Mary; daughters, Brenda and Juanita; two grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

BETHLEHEM ASSOCIATION

► **Pete Dunn** said one thing that amazed him throughout his years in ministry was the "total adventure of seeing God doing things and joining in on what He was doing."

Dunn — a longtime missionary, pastor and professor — said he "fell in love with Jesus" while he served over the years. He and his late wife, Pat, served 33 years with the International Mission Board in the Middle East before retiring from overseas missionary work.

And Dunn continued to serve. After returning to the U.S., he became pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Uriah — his only U.S. church to lead — and stayed there 18 years, until his recent retirement.



DUNN

"They taught me what the love of the local church should be," he said.

Before going to the missions field, Dunn earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from Auburn University and worked for NASA. He studied at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, finished his master's degree at Wheaton College and earned his doctorate from Luther Rice Seminary.

Over the years while in the U.S., he also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Mobile and as a missionary in residence for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

► As a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, Sonja Adams gets to celebrate anniversaries with a lot of churches. But this one — **New Harmony Baptist Church, Heflin** — was particularly special. Adams grew up in the church while her father,

W.E. Jones Jr., served as pastor. On Nov. 22, she presented New Harmony Baptist with a certificate from the ABHC honoring the church's 150th anniversary, and her son, Jonathan Adams, did a presentation on the history of the buildings.

During the special service, Pastor Chad Morgan preached, and Kim Driver and David Salmon sang solos. The church also dedicated its new fellowship hall and then gathered there for lunch. ► **Kris Henderson** is the new associate pastor of students and discipleship at



HENDERSON

Macedonia Baptist Church, Ranburne. Henderson previously served as pastor of International Christian Fellowship Church in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and alongside his wife, Alania, as associate missionary with the Honduras Baptist Dental Mission in San Manuel, Cortés, Honduras. He holds a master of divinity from Liberty University. Morgan Bailey is pastor.

MUD CREEK ASSOCIATION

► For 60 years, **E.J. Pruden** served his church — **West Jefferson Baptist, Quinton** — in a variety of capacities from deacon and Sunday School teacher to pastoral search committee member and church treasurer. But he also served in a lot of ways that no one noticed until he had died — for years, he had fixed things and changed air filters and light bulbs.



Photo courtesy of Sonja Adams

And Pruden served Mud Creek Baptist Association in the same selfless way for more than 45 years, said David Hobson, director of missions for Mud Creek Association.

"Before his death a little over a year ago, we believe he had been the longest-serving volunteer in the association in some capacity," Hobson said.

Pruden began as a church messenger and served on various committees, including the audit committee and the executive committee. He was someone the association could count on to be there and offer a positive attitude.

That's why this year the association presented its first E.J. Pruden Award for Associational Leadership during its virtual annual meeting. Lee Praytor — pastor of Oak Grove First Baptist Church, Adger, and outgoing moderator for the association — was the first recipient. Praytor also served as Crossover director for Mud Creek Association during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Birmingham in 2019 and is active in disaster relief work.

Hobson said the award will be given to each outgoing moderator for their service to the association.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Will Baker** is the new pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Jackson's Gap.** He previously served as youth minister at Hillabee Baptist Church, Alexander City. ► **Shane Dye** is the new pastor of **Good News Baptist Church, Jackson's Gap.**

(Alabama news compiled by TAB Media staff)



PRUDEN

Persecuted church

Pastor, two women in Nigeria captured by Islamic extremists

JOS, Nigeria — Islamic extremists captured a pastor and two women Oct. 19 who were traveling from Jos to Gombe, Nigeria, to participate in a church conference.

The kidnapers belong to Islamic State West Africa Province, but the three believers have been held captive by the Islamic group Khalifah Army, according to a Nov. 13 update by Christian persecution watchdog group Open Doors.

In an Oct. 29 YouTube video, the captive pastor, Polycarp Zongo of the Church of Christ in Nations, made an appeal to government and church leaders to help secure the release of

himself and the women. False reports later circulated online that Zongo had been released, according to Open Doors.

Nigerian Christian leader Gideon Para Mallam told The Christian Post that the militants had not yet asked for ransom — possibly indicating future plans to kidnap more Christians as they visit family in northern Nigeria in the days leading up to Christmas.

"The church needs to be wise" Mallam cautioned. "We can celebrate Christmas anywhere. Let's avoid becoming easy prey."

Nigeria is No. 12 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian and No. 2 for the number of Christians killed for their faith. (MS)



Drive-thru nativity

FBC Andalusia adds Jesus to annual city event

Each year, downtown Andalusia hosts Christmas in Candyland — a holiday celebration with Christmas lights and decorations, train and carriage rides, kid-sized cottages, music and snow shows.

This year, First Baptist Church, Andalusia, added another element to the annual tradition — a drive-thru nativity presentation.

“Our city does a great job with this huge Christmas production, but we really wanted to bring the focus of Christmas to celebrating the birth of Jesus,” said Kevin Wilburn, pastor of First, Andalusia.

A cast and crew of 200 helped design sets, create scenes and act out the nativity story. Camels, llamas, sheep, goats, horses and other animal actors played their roles too.

Gospel opening

Around 4,000 people drove through during the three nightly shows held Dec. 4–6, and as they did, they could tune their radios to a narration of the scenes and a gospel presentation.



Photo by William Worley

Volunteers from FBC Andalusia stage a live nativity for the church’s drive-thru presentation of the Christmas story held Dec. 4–6 during the city’s annual celebration.

Visitors also received a copy of “The Life Book” as a gift from the church and The Gideons International, Wilburn said.

The church is praying for gospel conversations over the next few weeks, he said.

Wilburn also said the project was good for the community and for the church in a year when many annual traditions have had to be canceled or adapted.

“Throughout this COVID year, we have worked to maintain our vision to ‘Love God, Love Others, Make Disciples and Make a Difference,’” he said. “We focused on what we could do instead of what we couldn’t do and decided

we would do a drive-thru Christmas story.

“We have made adjustments for worship online and on campus, and we have enlarged our television coverage,” Wilburn said. “This weekend was another adjustment in our journey.”

A video of the drive-thru nativity is available on the church’s website and Facebook page. Go to fbcandalusia.org to watch. (TAB)

A video of the drive-thru nativity is available on the church’s website and Facebook page. Go to fbcandalusia.org to watch.



Photo by William Worley

FBC Andalusia volunteers on horseback portray Roman soldiers during the church’s drive-thru live nativity. A cast and crew of 200 people helped with the production.

Gov. Ivey extends state health order into 2021

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey has extended the state’s current public health order, with no changes, until Jan. 22, 2021.

During a Dec. 9 press conference, Ivey and state health officer Scott Harris addressed the rising number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in the state. They said extending the mask mandate and continuing to emphasize handwashing and social

distancing is the right thing to do.

In Alabama, “we have learned to live with the virus, even as many states are reversing course,” Ivey said.

She attributed the state’s ability to keep churches, schools and businesses open while those in other states are being closed to the state-wide mask requirement.

Read more at tabonline.org/health-order. (TAB)

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EXECUTIVE PASTOR

First Baptist Prattville is hiring an executive pastor. Interested in joining a healthy church and strong staff team? Find the job description and application at fbcprattville.org/apply.

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PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER

Shady Grove Baptist Church in Bessemer, Alabama, is seeking

part-time worship leader. Must read and understand music. Call Pat Buckner at 205-601-3615 or submit resumé: shadygroveblc@gmail.com.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP MINISTER

Liberty Hill Baptist Church, Clanton, Alabama, is seeking a full-time minister of children/youth family discipleship. Send resumé to: search@libertyhillonline.org.

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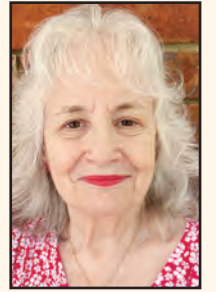
The Alabama Baptist newspaper.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

By Joanne Sloan

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



2020 marks 125th anniversary of death of prolific hymn writer

Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander (1818–1895) was a famous Irish hymn writer and poet. She wrote 400 hymns, including “All Things Bright and Beautiful” and the Christmas hymn, “Once in Royal David’s City.”

This year marks the 125th anniversary of her death.

Alexander was born in April 1818 in County Wicklow, Ireland, to John and Elizabeth Humphreys. As a young girl, she had a poetic gift, which her father encouraged her to pursue.

She became a prolific writer of hymns. In 1846, her first publication was “Verses for Holy Seasons.” It had six editions.

Hymns for children

Her “Hymns for Little Children,” published in 1848, reached

a 69th edition in 1896. When she wrote for children, she wrote in simple language, helping them to understand concepts of baptism, the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and The Lord’s Prayer. Her proceeds went to establishing an institution for the deaf.

Poems

In the 1840s, many of Alexander’s hymns were included in Church of Ireland hymn books. She also contributed poems and translations of French poetry in the *Dublin University Magazine*.

In 1850 she married Anglican clergyman William Alexander. He became Bishop of Derry and then Archbishop of Armagh in Northern Ireland. He was also a poet.

Married for 45 years, they had four children.

In the 1850s, she wrote several other collections of poetry and hymns including “Poems on Subjects in the Old Testament” (1854) and “Hymns Descriptive and Devotional” (1858).



ALEXANDER

She wrote the Christmas carol “Once in Royal David’s City” as a poem. It was first published in 1848 in her hymnbook “Hymns for Little Children.” The next year English organist Henry Gauntlett set it to music.

Christmas hymn

The first two stanzas of the hymn beautifully tell the Christmas story: “Once in royal David’s city/ Stood a lowly cattle shed,/ Where a mother laid her Baby/ In a man-

ger for His bed./ Mary was that mother mild,/ Jesus Christ her little child.

“He came down to earth from heaven,/ Who is God and Lord of all,/ And His shelter was a stable,/ And His cradle was a stall./ With the poor and meek and lowly,/ Lived on earth our Savior holy.”

Charitable work

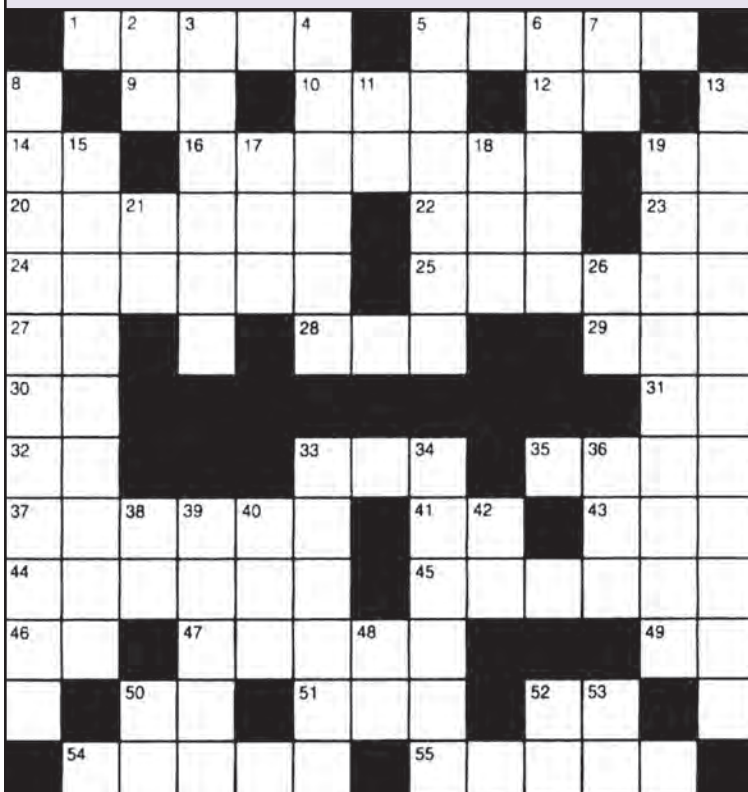
Alexander did charitable work for much of her life. She worked with the Derry Home for Fallen Women and developed a district nurses’ service.

She was a tireless visitor to the poor and sick, traveling many miles each day providing food, warm clothes and medical supplies to them.

Alexander died Oct. 12, 1895, at the Bishop’s Palace in Derry and was buried in the city cemetery. 🇺🇸

Christian Crossword

By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Twelfth Hebrew alphabet letter.
- Thou preparest a ___ before me. (Ps. 23:5)
- Dad.
- That. (Spanish)
- Joshua had taken ___ and utterly destroyed it. (Josh. 10:1)
- Elder.
- Wake up, O ___. (Eph. 5:14)
- International unit. (abbr.)
- Tried.
- Prior to.
- New Testament.
- Assert without proof.
- The king will ___ him with great riches. (1 Sam. 17:25)
- Intervals of two. (prefix)
- Nor the inhabitants

- of ___ and her towns. (Judg. 1:27)
- To and ___.
- Size.
- Eldest son of Judah. (Gen. 38:3)
- Roman number two.
- Depot. (abbr.)
- Branches.
- I ___ the Lord and He heard me. (Ps. 34:4)
- Compass direction.
- And let his ___ that he hath hid catch himself.
- ___ the Archite came to meet him. (2 Sam. 15:32)
- Anno ___.
- Plural suffix.
- Ye ___ polluted bread. (Mal. 1:7)
- “___ Deum.”
- Added to a letter.
- Southern general.

- I stand ___ the door and knock. (Rev. 3:20)
- Liquid measure. (British)
- I am ... a ___ woman. (2 Sam. 14:5)
- News service.
- Put his hand under the thigh of ... His ___. (Gen. 24:9)
- Signed over the property.
- Type of dancer.
- Balder.
- Long Island. (abbr.)
- Like the earth which he hath ___ for ever. (Ps. 78:69)
- Compass point.
- We should pray for ___. (1 Tim. 2:2)
- Any seem to be

Down

- ___, and bridleth not his tongue. (Jam. 1:26)
- Not a ___ to stand on.
- Sea eagle.
- Measure of increase.
- Sea level.
- In case.
- Repress.
- Peter, and ___ his brother. (Matt. 10:2)
- Cuckoo.
- Forgive ___ our debts. (Matt. 6:12)
- Person of the Trinity, the Holy ___.
- ___nium, silvery metallic element.
- Ex. officio. (abbr.)
- Shoe width.
- Greek letter.
- Commercial message.
- Who will have all men ___ be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)



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

FROM
THE STATE BOARD
OF MISSIONS

Merry Christmas

In a year of unprecedented challenges, may you find strength and comfort in the unchanging nature of the Savior whose birth we celebrate!

Please remember that your Cooperative Program and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering gifts must be received by the State Board of Missions no later than Thursday, December 31, to be counted in 2020. You may mail them to the State Board of Missions, P.O. Box 681970, Prattville, AL 36068-1970.

Thank you for your faithful and generous support of missions and ministry in Alabama and around the world!



COVID cancels Singing Christmas Trees, other traditions

Christmas programs, musicals and spectacles are a staple this time of year. They present an opportunity to reach out to the community and bring in unbelievers for a time of fun, worship and gospel presentation.

But Christmas will look different this year for everyone — and for some more than others.

At Belhaven University in Jackson, Mississippi, where the first Singing Christmas Tree was held in the 1930s, a lack of rehearsal and per-

sonnel was the problem with holding the celebration this year.

None of the choirs on campus have sung together this year because of the risk of COVID-19, said Belhaven President Roger Parrott. And the school's students were sent home at Thanksgiving. Bringing them back to do the Singing Christmas Tree made no sense.

Adapting

At a virtual workshop hosted by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Mike Harland, who serves in worship leadership at First Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi, shared how his church will be handling the Christmas season.

"I inherited a great tradition," he said. "Last year was the 50th anniversary of 'Carols By Candlelight' Christmas worship, which we can't do this year. The



Photo courtesy of Belhaven University

A Singing Christmas Tree performance in 2014 at Belhaven University in Jackson, Mississippi.

question was 'since they can't come to our house, how can we get to their house?' So we've purchased local TV airtime for a program featuring our pastor and musicians."

Abilene Baptist Church in Martinez, Georgia, has moved its Singing Christmas Tree from the church's sanctuary to a nearby park this year, said Tommy Sun-

derland, associate pastor of music and media.

"In the end, God spoke to my heart to do the Tree," he said, while admitting things could change before the three scheduled performances are completed.

"God could shut it all down tomorrow," Sunderland said. "It belongs to Him, not me, not our music ministry nor our church." (TAB/RNS)

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Luther Rice Gains SACSCOC Accreditation

LITHONIA, GA. (December 8, 2020) — Today, Luther Rice College and Seminary was granted membership as an accredited institution by the Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate, masters, and doctorate degrees.

The announcement was made by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees during their December Annual Meeting. This exciting announcement is the result of many years of institutional planning, execution, and prayer among the Luther Rice Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, donors, and alumni. SACSCOC ac-

creditation will provide multiple benefits for Luther Rice students in the future, including opportunities for broader acceptance of transfer credits for post-Luther Rice work and recognition in the work place where a SACSCOC accredited degree is preferred or required.

Led by President Dr. James Flanagan, Luther Rice has now further strengthened its position to execute its mission of serving the church by providing biblically based, on-campus and distance education to Christian men and women for ministry with an end to granting undergraduate and graduate degrees. "Accreditation by SAC-



SCOC has fulfilled a strategic goal that we've worked toward for decades. I am grateful for God's guidance and my colleagues' efforts to accomplish this milestone," says President Flanagan.

In addition to SACSCOC, Luther Rice continues to be accredited

by the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) and the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE).

Known for its adherence to biblical inerrancy, ministry development, 100% online degree programs, and affordable tuition and fees, Luther Rice College and Seminary continues to be the

trustworthy option for those committed to ministry and in need of an education.

Luther Rice College and Seminary is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award baccalaureate, masters, and doctorate degrees. Questions about the accreditation of Luther Rice College and Seminary may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 20

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



PROCLAIMED Luke 2:4–19

Students sometimes ask why angelic visitations, miraculous healings and exorcisms are not commonplace among Christians. After all, they seem to have been normative in the context of the early church.

In the 21st century, Christians in the West have largely relegated supernatural beings and events to the realm of entertainment and fantasy, rather than as heavenly messengers and spiritual warriors.

In this third lesson from the Gospel of Luke, we read of an angelic encounter. This time, an angel of the Lord is accompanied by a heavenly entourage, proclaiming: “Glory to God in the highest.”

As you prepare to study or teach this lesson, be sure to note three proclamations in the text: 1. proclamation through the prophet; 2. proclamation by the angel; and 3. proclamation of the shepherds.

Fulfilled (4–7)

Mary and Joseph lived west of the Sea of Galilee in a hilly town called Nazareth. The prophet Micah prophesied centuries earlier that a promised ruler would be born in a rather obscure town called Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) — not in Galilee, but in Judah (first century Judea). How would God’s promise through the prophet be fulfilled?

God uses even pagan government officials to accomplish His purposes. A Roman census established by Emperor Augustus required people to travel to their ancestral homes for taxing purposes. Joseph (and his betrothed and very pregnant wife-to-be, Mary) made the journey from his hometown to Bethlehem, the home of his ancestral father David.

Announced (8–14)

Outside the town of Bethlehem are relatively level fields where shepherds cared for their own flocks or flocks belonging to others. Readers familiar with David’s story know that David came into Bethlehem from the fields in order to receive an anointing by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 16:11). Luke records that

shepherds were outside of town tending flocks in the fields.

An angelic messenger broke the monotony of the night watch with a brilliant, fear-inducing appearance. The angel announced good news. The shepherds’ fear was overcome by joy because a Savior had been born in Bethlehem. Immediately after the angel’s announcement, a heavenly host joined the messenger in proclaiming God’s glory.

We each read the passage in the context of our own experience. As I read this section, I envision a handful of shepherds spread across the field. In contrast to their normal starlit sky comes a bright, angelic spokesperson in a spotlight, accompanied by a gigantic angelic choir singing a piece from Handel’s Messiah. Yes, this is anachronistic on a number of levels, but we envision the story based on our own interests and experiences rather than reading Scripture in the reality of its own context.

Found (15–19)

Once the shock wore off, the shepherds agreed they needed to abandon their post to find something infinitely more significant. First, they headed into town. It would have taken a while to get to town. Next, they looked for a newborn baby. In a small town like Bethlehem, where everyone knew everyone’s business, people would have known when a new baby was born. They found him bedded down in a feeding trough.

In sharp contrast to the angelic announcement, the simplicity of the nativity scene would have been unremarkable. In some ways, He appeared to be like any other newborn of the time.

And yet, this baby was different. What other baby received such angelic fanfare? What other child was proclaimed by prophets, angels and shepherds? Once the shepherds found the baby, they proclaimed to everyone what they had seen and heard about this child. They were, in fact, the first witnesses to testify of the newborn Christ.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Will Kynes, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



EMBRACING JOY Psalm 95:1–3; Luke 2:4–14

What inspires the “joy” in “Joy to the World”? Gifts? Family gatherings? A season of peace and good cheer? Cookies and eggnog?

According to the carol, the source of joy is the fact that “the Lord is come.”

Isaac Watts based his famous Christmas hymn on Psalm 98, but its call for the earth to rejoice in God’s salvation is found across the psalter, from which it echoes in the Gospel accounts of the Lord’s coming in Jesus Christ.

We can experience joy because God is our salvation. (Ps. 95:1–3)

Psalm 95 is one of those psalms that expresses this invitation to rejoice in the Lord.

In fact, it begins with an imperative, commanding the congregation to join in exaltation of the Lord as “the Rock of our salvation” and the supreme God, the “King above all gods.”

Psalm 82 similarly declares God the judge over all gods.

In the verses which follow the focal passage (Ps. 95:4–5), the psalm, like Watts’ hymn, draws heaven and nature into the Lord’s praise, declaring all the earth, from the depths to mountain peaks, the sea and dry land, to be His creation.

The only appropriate response to this God caring for us as a shepherd for His flock (v. 7) is to “bow down in worship” (v. 6).

Jesus, the Son of God, was born to bring us salvation. (Luke 2:4–7)

How does this majestic God choose to save His people? In the exodus, He sent terrible plagues, routing the Egyptians, the most powerful nation on earth, and their Pharaoh, who claimed for himself divine status.

But when Caesar Augustus, ruler of the mighty Romans and similarly a self-proclaimed god, decreed a census, the Rock of our salvation

appears as a helpless infant born in a manger.

Though Joseph, the child’s father, submits to Caesar’s command to return to his own town, there is a hint that a greater king is at work.

Twice in verse 4, David, the great king of Israel, whose son God promised would reign forever, is mentioned.

This baby, the son of David, will be King above all “gods.”

The birth of Jesus is cause for great joy. (Luke 2:8–14)

The angelic messenger carries the joyous news of the Messiah’s arrival to lowly shepherds.

Though no earthly king would choose such humble emissaries to declare his reign, the Lord glories in His role as shepherd of His people (Ps. 95:7; Ps. 23).

One day, this baby will declare Himself “the Good Shepherd” who “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

And, when He does so, nailed to a Roman cross, and then triumphs over death, He earns for His flock an enduring joy, and the redemption of creation itself (Rom. 8:18–25).

The only appropriate response to the arrival of this baby, this King of kings and Lord of lords, is to bow down in worship (Ps. 95:6) and rise in shouts of joy (Ps. 95:1), for the joy He offers surpasses anything the season that celebrates His birth can offer.✠

**The Alabama Baptist
will not publish
a Dec. 31 issue.**

**Sunday School lessons
for Jan. 3 will be available
at tabonline.org/lessons.**

TAB Media



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

Netflix's holiday musical 'Jingle Jangle' features biblical themes

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Remember the days of live-action family-friendly musicals — when classics like “Mary Poppins,” “The Sound of Music” and “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang” dominated the big screen?

Thankfully, such films are no longer relics of the past.

Netflix's “Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey” (PG) is the latest live-action musical to target families, joining “Beauty and the Beast” (2017), “Mary Poppins Returns” (2018), “Aladdin” (2019) and “The Greatest Showman” (2017) as recent examples of this unique genre.

“Jingle Jangle” might be the most kid-friendly of these recent films, however. In fact, it might be the most family-friendly movie Netflix has ever made.

The movie follows a young father and inventor, Jeronimus, who lives in the fictitious village of Cobbleton and owns a famous shop, Jangles and Things, which sells “games, gadgets and gizmos.”

Jeronimus' latest invention is his best one yet: a doll (known as “Don Juan Diego”) that can talk, sing and dance. It practically has a mind of its own — and it likely will make Je-

ronimus a world famous millionaire.

But then tragedy strikes. Jeronimus' apprentice, Gustafson, steals the doll and the blueprints, as well as Jeronimus' “book of inventions.” Jeronimus is unable to recreate his masterpiece. Then his wife dies. Then his daughter — unable to cope with his constant grieving — leaves him.

A second chance

Jeronimus becomes a hermit and a shell of his former self. But years later, his young granddaughter (his daughter's daughter) returns to Cobbleton to meet the grandfather she never knew. Can she help him rediscover the joy of life?

The film stars Oscar winner Forest Whitaker as Jeronimus, Keegan-Michael Key as Gustafson and Hugh Bonneville as the banker. Phylicia Rashad also has a key role.

The all-black cast was intentional: Director David E. Talbert (who also is black) told the *Willie Moore Jr. Show* he grew up watching “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang” and “Mary Poppins” and wanted his son to see “these magical wonderful movies like I did” but with “people in it that look like him.”

Talbert also said the movie has biblical themes, including ones about forgiveness and grieving.



‘Jingle Jangle’

Netflix photo

“There are Bible stories all through there. Jeronimus is Job,” Talbert told *Faithfully Magazine*.

It contains no coarse language, no violence and no sexuality (minus some slight innuendo by a widow toward the widower Jeronimus). The music is engaging and fun.

“Jingle Jangle” is rated PG for some thematic elements and peril.

Also worth watching this month:

Adults/teens

► **“The Real Right Stuff” (Disney Plus)** — It's a 90-minute documentary about the Mercury astronauts — Alan Shepard, John Glenn and the rest — that helped America catch the Soviets in the space race. Rated PG.

► **“Holiday Home Makeover with Mister Christmas” (Netflix)** — Expert interior designer Benjamin Bradley uses lights and tinsel to help homeowners take their Christmas decorating up a notch. Rated TV-G.

► **“The Repair Shop: Season 3 (Netflix)** — Jay Blades and his restoration team bring new life to antiques and family heirlooms — such as a 110-year-old camera and a violin with a long history. Rated TV-PG.

► **“Voices of Fire (Netflix)** — A

church holds a singing contest with the goal of assembling the best-ever gospel choir. Rated TV-PG.

Children

► **“Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2 (Netflix)** — Flint Lockwood and his friends travel back to Swallow Falls island to stop food-animal hybrids from taking over the planet. Rated PG for mild rude humor.

► **“Disney's A Christmas Carol (Disney Plus)** — Ebenezer Scrooge learns about generosity, love and grace in this classic Charles Dickens story. Warning: Due to a few frightening scenes, this one's best for older children. Rated PG for scary sequences and images. 🎄

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.



‘Jingle Jangle’

Netflix photo

Providing hope

Ohio Christian Job Corps leader: Pandemic heightens need to engage local communities

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMCU National Correspondent

VJ Sanchez doesn't mince words when she describes the significance of Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps in the life of a local church or community.

"I believe every community should have a Christian Women's (and) Christian Men's Job Corps because of the great need across the United States," she declared. "Why would you not have a Christian Women's and a Christian Men's Job Corps where you can reach out to the real needs of the people in your community?"

Sanchez, CWJC/CMJC consultant for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, has been involved more than 20 years with the Christian Job Corps program coordinated by National Woman's Missionary Union. But this year's coronavirus pandemic has added increased urgency to her mission.

Noting that many Christian Job Corps sites have had to put classes on hold or shift to online instruction, she acknowledged that "this COVID thing has really challenged us as it has everyone."

She quickly added, however, that "I see it as an opportunity to reach out to people who are in need and give them some hope because for many of them, the world's coming to an end in their eyes."

'Opened eyes'

In her role as a statewide consultant, Sanchez helps provide training and assistance to five Christian Job Corps sites across Ohio. She



Debbie Bapst, who teaches a computer skills class at The Trellis Christian Women's Job Corps in Circleville, Ohio, provides participants hands-on instruction as she helps them gain practical employment skills. The classes were restructured this fall to include social distancing, masks and other safety precautions.

also serves as the women's director of Metro Columbus Christian Job Corps and as a CWJC/CMJC national trainer.

Describing CWJC/CMJC as "a place where we come alongside people who are in need," Sanchez said many participants enter the program "not knowing their greatest need is Jesus."

In fact, "most of the folks who come to us do not have a relationship with God and actually they are angry with God or they think God hates them," she reflected.

"My response to that is, 'Let's see what your Creator says about you.' We open the Scriptures, and they see in the Word and honestly, it has to be the Holy Spirit that just

opens their eyes and they believe."

Bernadette Hocking is the executive director of The Trellis CWJC in Circleville, Ohio, one of the five sites Sanchez serves. Hocking actually began as a CWJC participant and then became a mentor and assistant director before being named executive director in 2018.

'Huge difference'

As a single mom with limited computer skills when she entered the program, Hocking said her path of CWJC participation, volunteering and leadership "was like the next step in my life. ... It just was a natural transition that I went through with the program."

Hocking said many of the women they serve are coping with mental health issues, addictions and even suicidal thoughts when they first come to The Trellis. Their experience in CWJC "makes a huge difference because they get the acceptance here that they don't get a lot of other places," she added. "We see a lot of change in our women."

Karen Baucum took a far different

route to her involvement in CWJC, but the results have been similar.

"I took sort of a backwards path," she recalled, starting out as a CWJC office volunteer and board member. After suffering two strokes a couple of years ago that affected her fine motor skills, Baucum asked the former director about enrolling as a CWJC participant to assist with her therapy. She said the director's immediate response was, "I think that would be a great idea."

'Most amazing work'

Baucum said classes in computer skills, art and nutrition/cooking all helped her improve her motor skills. "Plus, I got to see a different aspect of the program because being on the participant side, I got to see what the girls were actually experiencing," she said. "It's really worked well to be a liaison between the participants and the board, and I've gained tremendous insights about the program as well."

CWJC "is such a tremendous outreach to the women in our community. We can offer them so much, and so many of the women in our area are strapped economically," Baucum said. "They find out that we really are here to help them and to offer support in a safe place. ... It's just been incredible to watch how the girls grow and blossom."

Reflecting on the long-term impact of Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps, Sanchez said their overall goals remain unchanged even amid the pandemic. "We give them the tools to be able to be self-sufficient," she explained, as well as "resources that will assist them in becoming the whole person that God intends them to be."

"When they find out their purpose in life, they realize that they are of value and that they can do many things that they thought they couldn't do," she concluded. "It's the most amazing work that I've ever been involved in."✝

CWJC "is such a tremendous outreach to the women in our community. We can offer them so much, and so many of the women in our area are strapped economically."

Karen Baucum, CWJC volunteer and participant