

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



Sav-A-Life baby showers help mothers, families

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Gadsden church's food pantry showcases God's provision in tight times

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Experts share latest human trafficking info

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Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

The congregation of Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva worships in the sanctuary of Fultondale First Baptist Church. Vida Nueva's pastor, Joshua del Risco, will begin mentoring Hispanic church planters this year through a new residency program.

Plan to multiply

Growing need for Spanish-speaking churches leads to residency program

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Bayron Mosquera moved to Alabama from Ecuador in the early 1990s, there weren't many Hispanic pastors in the state.

The church that called him — Dawson Memorial Baptist in Birmingham — had recent-

ly planted a Spanish-speaking congregation led by former International Mission Board missionary Brian Harper, who suggested they bring Mosquera in as pastor.

Foresight to act

"Our Hispanic congregation at Dawson was started by a small group of people who had the foresight to see the implications of what was happening with our Hispanic population here, though in the early 1990s it was really small," said Ben Hale, Dawson's evangelism and missions pastor.

Now the Hispanic population of the U.S. numbers more

than 60 million — the second-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world behind Mexico. More than 200,000 of those individuals make their home in Alabama.

And as that number has grown, so has the church. It draws in people from 15 countries who live all over the Birmingham metro area.

"Over the past 27 years as Pastor Bayron has been here and worked with us, we have seen our Hispanic congregation not only grow numerically but also in maturity," Hale said. "Bayron's congregation [includes] some of the most

faithful and most evangelistic people we have in our larger congregation."

But a reality stared them in the face — though the church was doing great work, they couldn't reach the growing Hispanic population by themselves. They were going to need more churches — and more pastors like Mosquera to lead them.

Joining forces

In 2011, the evangelistic spirit of Congregación Hispana Dawson took them to the northern part of Jefferson County to link up with a
(See 'Picture,' page 10)



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Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Deb Lowery (standing in doorway, left), TAB Media's financial assistant and a volunteer at North Jefferson Women's Center/Sav-A-Life, looks on as center guests open presents at a Gift of Birth Baby Shower held Feb. 7.

TAB staff have heart for unborn, mothers

If you got to know Deb Lowery, TAB's financial assistant, there's one thing you'd learn quickly — she has a heart for the unborn and for mothers in tough situations.

That's why for the past three years she has volunteered at a women's center in Fultondale.

"I thank God for the privilege of serving at North Jefferson Women's Center/Sav-A-Life, alongside all the others there who love Jesus," Lowery said, "[sharing] His truth and love with the men and women who walk through those doors.

"The testimonies shared from these precious [people] whose lives have been transformed by the power and love of Jesus Christ never fail to bring tears of joy from my heart.

"I am thankful for all the churches and individuals whose hearts are knitted together with Christ's love for the unborn and their mothers and fathers."

Lowery noted Psalm 139:13-18 — which portrays God's heart for unborn life — is the truth behind her passion for the ministry.

On Feb. 7, TAB Media staff came alongside her and Sav-A-Life to participate in a Gift of Birth Baby Shower at Graysville First United Methodist Church.

Julie McLendon, the center's

director, said the showers offer a "great opportunity" to celebrate the babies and their families.

For some, it might be the only shower they have, and it's a great way to meet some core needs.

Every family honored at the shower has been through 10 hours of classes on topics like birth, baby care and parenting.

Beyond education

"We want to meet people in that unplanned pregnancy situation, but we want to go beyond that," McLendon said.

"Jesus wants us to have abundant life, and we want to walk that journey with our families.

"We want to provide that parenting resource and be that place of help when times get tough."

North Jefferson Women's Center/Sav-A-Life offers free pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, prenatal assessment, STI/STD testing for men and women, childbirth education classes, parenting classes and fatherhood programming.

"That's our heart — to see our families flourish in abundance and experience that fullness of life," McLendon said.

"We want to equip them with skills to have a God-focused family." (Grace Thornton)

For more information, visit savalife.org.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

The Alabama Baptist

"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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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

People of faith always ready to step up to lend a helping hand

The opportunity to share with advocates working to eliminate human trafficking (see story, page 17) always reminds me of how much work still needs to be done — and how daunting the situation can be for one group working alone.

But all of us striving together toward the same goal lightens the load and provides the encouragement and motivation we all need from time to time.

Working in cooperation with others also allows us to broaden the reach as we carve out our specific area and focus on it while staying connected to each other.

The same concept can be applied to pretty much anything we do in life and especially as believers serving Christ by serving others.

Check out page 1 for the latest effort to plant and develop Spanish-speaking churches.

The new residency program not only fills a gap but also allows churches, associations and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to work together, each bringing something vital to the effort.

Page 2 showcases how individuals, church groups and other organizations can partner

with Sav-A-Life or similar pregnancy centers to give new mothers coming out of a crisis situation a boost with tangible support and important educational resources as well as prayers and encouragement.

Pages 8, 14 and 15 demonstrate how everyday believers and ministry leaders launched efforts to feed the hungry and those with limited nutritional resources.

“The story of the loaves and fishes — it’s happening even now at our church,” explains Jon Costa in the story out of Gadsden on page 14.

Shawn Lowery shares on page 15 how the effort in Randolph

revolves around a “take what you need, give what you can” philosophy.

And Amos Crews outlines the “miracle” food distribution through Birmingham Metro Association’s Christ First Community Church on page 8.

“We’re a church of 20, and I knew we wouldn’t be able to (feed 1,000 people) on our own,” he said, noting he trusted God would provide. And He did.

Three area congregations joined in the effort, a family in the neighborhood contributed financially and the Alabama Hunger Offering took care of the rest.

State Missionary Kristy Kennedy says 44 ministry centers across Alabama receive money from the offering — which is highlighted Feb. 20 through a special emphasis.

Find out more at alsbom.org/hunger.

While the needs remain high in these and other areas across the state, it’s people of faith who step out day after day and week after week to make a difference.

During the session I led at the human trafficking summit, I shared how people of faith can always be counted on to help. They merely need to know where the needs are.

Baptist communicators discuss opportunities to partner; determine collaborative efforts make us all better

Members of the Association of State Baptist Publications discussed the importance of collaboration and working together in Baptist communications efforts.

The panel was moderated by incoming ASBP president Shannon Baker (left) of the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey. They talked about how to form networks of writers/photographers and ways to share content with each other.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Brandon Porter (center) of the SBC Executive Committee shares about settling into his new media role. Barbara Denman (second from left) of the Florida Baptist Convention and Pam and Trennis Henderson (right) of The Baptist Paper also shared about their areas of work.

Your Voice



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

TAB photographer, writer shares how God opened doors of opportunity

By Tracy Riggs

Freelance photographer and writer

Growing up, I had two far-fetched dreams: to be a professional photographer and a published author. However, I wasn't a risk-taker and pursued a teaching career instead.

While in college, I shot some weddings. I was paid, so technically I was a "professional," but I felt like a fraud. I had no formal training and didn't have "professional" equipment.

Later, as a single parent with a full-time job, I gave up photography work. I took photos of my family and penned long-winded journal entries, but I had no faith that my

dreams would ever materialize.

Unbelievably, years later I found myself in a place in life where I could try to pursue full-time photography.

Another plan

At first paid jobs were rare, so I got a part-time job as a receptionist at a salon. The owner suggested taking photos of prom girls getting makeup and hair done and making them available to their parents.

I advertised through a display of my work. Though I never sold any of those images, God had another plan in mind.

One afternoon TAB Media President and Editor-in-Chief Jennifer

Davis Rash came to the shop. While scheduling her next appointment, she noticed the display and said she needed a local photographer. Though extremely excited, I kept my composure and replied that I'd love to be considered.

Five months went by before I heard back from her. Was I still interested? Was I available? I quickly said yes to both.

That first shoot for TAB was nerve-racking. After detailed editing, I submitted the images and held my breath. That first assignment led to photographing the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference and Alabama Baptist State Convention that year.

Four months later I asked if we could cover the "Not Alone Conference." Focused on breaking down the stigma of mental health concerns in the church, I was passionate about this topic as I personally dealt with these issues.

The answer was yes, but there wasn't a reporter available. I was asked to take notes so someone else could write an article. But again, God had other plans.

Attending the conference ignited my passion for the topic. I summoned every bit of courage I had and asked about writing the articles myself. To my surprise, I got a green light.

I applaud TAB Media's content editor, Carrie McWhorter, for her

extreme patience. I fumbled around while learning the journalistic style of writing. But with each new assignment, I gained experience and saw improvement in my skills.

Since then, I've interviewed nationally known Christian performers, done some event reporting and written research-based articles.

But even after having my byline on numerous articles, part of me felt I still wasn't an "author" because I hadn't published a book.

I discovered Christian Writers for Life through a workshop called "The Writing Minister," sponsored by TAB Media and taught by the group's founder, Denise George.

When the group held a contest to be included in a published essay collection, I gathered my courage and entered.

In my heart, I still thought being published at all would be a fluke. I was completely amazed when my story was chosen.

"Triumph from Tragedy" doesn't have my name on the cover, but it's still a dream come true. God carved out a path I couldn't have ever imagined to fulfill 35-year-long desires, even though I had no faith.

I'm so humbled now to see what He has done.



RIGGS

The importance of theology

Sometimes it can feel like there is a chasm between the great seminary-trained minds in the pulpit and the layperson in the pew.

Theology, however, is not limited to historical monks or ordained ministers.

The call is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37).

The Bible doesn't say to love God with your podcast pastor's mind or the Instagram influencer's mind; you must engage with God yourself.

Every college freshman, every stay-at-home mom, every retirement-age accountant can and should be a theologian. ...

No matter where you land in your investigation, it is essential that God's glory and Christ's exaltation remain the primary purpose and desire of your search. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10:17).

Kelly Redding

"God's sovereignty and man's responsibility: A brief history"

The-Scroll.com

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

EDITOR'S NOTE — Tracy Riggs is a photographer and writer based in the Birmingham area. Contact her at her website, novelphotos.com. Find the book "Triumph from Tragedy" on Amazon.

“Complaining reveals our view of God and His provision.”

TARA-LEIGH COBBLE

Host, *The Bible Recap* podcast

We really believe God wants to use young people, and we are pleading with this generation to make their life count for Jesus — because He is worthy. There’s no greater cause than to live for Him and to make sure that in our lifetime that we give every person in the world a chance to hear about Him.

Jess Jennings
IMB missionary

“We have spiritual family members there [in China], and they are being persecuted,” said Voice of the Martyrs spokesperson **Todd Nettleton**. “They are suffering at the hands of the communist government. Let’s not just enjoy the Olympics and cheer on our country. Let’s use this as a reminder to pray

for our brothers and sisters who live in China and who face persecution there.”

The most effective person at reaching a student with the gospel is another student that has a heart that beats with passion for Jesus, and that same heart is broken over the spiritual lostness of their own generation.

Shane Pruitt
National Next Gen Director
North American Mission Board

The power of the message of the Apostle Paul was not in his size, speech, education or pedigree. It was simply this: “For I bear in my body the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 6:17). Could this be

why the world is not listening to our message? We have no scars. Our Christianity costs us nothing. We are lacking scars that prove our love for Jesus. Where are your scars?

Terry Long
Associational missions director
Choctaw Baptist Association
From his sermon, “The Power of a Surrendered Life”

Parents, six additional minutes of reading a day will significantly improve your child’s reading performance. Just be sure you give them the classics to read. Teach them early, and they will fall in love with great literature.

Pastor Mac Brunson
Valleydale Church
Birmingham

From the *Twitterverse*

@drtonywolfe

Last week my 72-year-old Dad, pastor of a normative-sized SBC church, helped an 85-year-old church member clean up his overflowed toilet in his home because no one else would come. All his life he’s modeled for me what it means to be a servant-shepherd.

Love them, pastor, & you will serve them.

@jbwester

The biggest threat to the SBC today is not men lacking courage but men lacking character.

@ricklance

God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, acts with a hand that never fails. —Charles Spurgeon

@revandyfrazier

Our kids are a blessing from God, & disciplining them is seri-

ous. It’s not our duty to disciple our kids into our dreams & ambitions for them, however good those things might be. We’ve been given the grace to disciple & love our kids to follow Jesus & His plan for their lives.

@GaryFenton07

Being passionate on social media about a particular Christian doctrine or a theological position is not the same as being passionate about the Christian faith. The Christian faith is to be lived with passion rather than argued with passion.

@MAusberry

Today, a woman shared with me, “Pastor I have not been in live service for over 2 years. Live streaming is nice, but there is nothing like being present in live worship. I’ve missed it so much.” There is something special that happens when we meet together for worship.

@pastorclint

You want to be a better thinker and theologian as a preacher? Try preaching through Hebrews. Goodness! Finding out just how much I don’t know! And I love it! Come on!

@JonTyson

I’m often amazed at how the people throwing the strongest critiques at others are often so fragile and defensive when critiqued themselves. Lord grant us a non-defensive spirit.

@GarrettMWalden

Just left a local Baptist association meeting where I was the youngest in the room by 40 years. There are 7 churches in our county currently looking for a pastor.

Aspiring pastor-friends, there are jobs. But you’ll have to be OK with rural obscurity like the +99.9% of history.

Power of instrumental worship

One way to define worship is a rhythm of revelation and response.

God reveals himself through revelation, and his people respond in praise, awe, delight, love and obedience.

Jesus describes such a full-orbed response in Matthew 22:37 when He identifies the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Instrumental worship seems to provide a unique avenue of response by engaging the whole person intellectually, physically and emotionally.

Furthermore, instrumental worship allows a group of skilled individuals to worship simultaneously, even as they support a larger group of worshippers corporately.

One reason why corporate musical worship is so powerful is because it allows large groups to easily rehearse the same truth in unison, and singing amplifies the sonic energy of the voice compared to speaking.

Adding instrumental participants not only increases the sonic energy of the gathering, but also allows instrumentalists to engage a different aspect of their being, even while it supports the involvement of the rest of the group.

In this light, the expansive use of instrumental worship throughout the Old Testament is understandable: it encourages a more full-orbed expression of praise both individually and corporately.

Timothy Lee Bandy
Associate minister of music
Whitesburg Baptist Church
(Excerpt from his Southern Seminary doctoral project, “The Developing Role of the Instrumental Ministry at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama”)

3 stories you should know



IMB photo

International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood (right) joins others in praying for missionary Brodie Craig (center) during an IMB Sending Celebration on Feb. 2 at Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Glen Allen, Virginia. During the meeting held Feb. 2–3 in Richmond, IMB trustees approved the appointment of 52 new fully funded missionaries and recognized the lives of 92 colleagues and one missionary kid who died in the past year. (IMB)

SBC VP named interim Exec Committee president

Willie McLaurin was named interim president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee Feb. 1, becoming the first African American to lead an SBC entity.

McLaurin has served as vice president for Great Commission relations and mobilization at the EC for two years, coming to the role in January 2020.

Prior to that, he worked at the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board for 15 years and held pastoral roles in several churches.

The EC is scheduled to meet Feb. 21–22 in Nashville. Read more at tabonline.org/mclaurin. (TAB)



McLAURIN

Sexual Abuse Task Force investigation continues

Guidepost Solutions has processed numerous documents and interviewed dozens of people as part of its independent investigation into allegations that the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee mishandled allegations of sexual abuse.

A Feb. 7 update by the Sexual Abuse Task Force of the SBC confirmed Guidepost has interviewed 32 current or former SBC EC staff members who were in their positions during the relevant time period of the investigation. Guidepost has interviewed 54 current and former SBC EC trustees, with additional interviews scheduled.

Guidepost also is meeting with survivors who have reached out through the task force website, sataskforce.net. Read more at tabonline.org/satf-update. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Latest wave of attacks in Nigeria prompts pleas for government help

PLATEAU STATE, Nigeria — Muslim Fulani herdsmen killed 21 people in two predominantly Christian villages in Nigeria's Plateau State.

The relief group Barnabas Fund reported 18 individuals — including a 3-month-old baby — were killed Jan. 12 when the herdsmen attacked the Irigwe village of Ancha.

It is the latest in a wave of attacks on Irigwe people that have led to calls for government intervention to prevent genocide of the Irigwe.

In Plateau State's Tyaana village, a Fulani ambush on Jan. 10 left three Christians dead and two wounded, Morning Star News reported.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian, up from No. 9 on the 2021 World Watch

List. The country led the world in the number of Christians slain for their faith last year.

Myanmar militia take Christian lives through massacre, air strikes

CHIN STATE, Burma — The Myanmar military killed at least 16 people in January in two separate attacks.

At least 10 people were killed in Chin State's Matupi township. The Matupi massacre began when the Myanmar army, known as the Tatmadaw, arrested 11 people Jan. 6–7, relief group Barnabas Fund reported.

During the next two days, the bodies of 10

of them were found. Among the dead were 13-year-old La Nang and journalist Tui Dim, who was visiting from India, the report said.

Days later, military helicopter gunships bombed a camp for displaced people, killing six. The air strikes happened Jan. 8–9 in Loikaw, the capital of Kayah state, according to The Irrawaddy, a news outlet.

Six civilians were killed, according to the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force. Other reports said victims included a 7-year-old girl and her 18-year-old sister.

The Tatmadaw seized power Feb. 1, 2021.

Chin State is 90% Christian, and Kayah State has a large Christian population, according to Barnabas Fund.

Myanmar is No. 12 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



Barnabas Fund photo

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **James “Jim” Lee Branum**, a longtime music and community minister in the Birmingham area, died Jan. 27. He was 68.

Branum held a bachelor’s degree in music education from Samford University and master’s degrees in divinity and music from Southwestern Seminary. He was in his 50th year of serving Southern Baptist churches, spanning from Florida to California.



BRANUM

He served the past 12 years as minister of music at Mulga Baptist Church. Previously Branum served 12 years as minister of music and education at Fultondale First Baptist Church. He also served on the staff of what was then called the Birmingham Baptist Association, working with the Center at Central Park and other ministries.

Branum was the founder and executive director of the nonprofit ministry CareNet Connection and started the ReMedy medical equipment loan ministry.

He is survived by his wife of 43 years, Nell; three children; and nine grandchildren.

► **Sharon Smith Henning** of Trussville died Jan. 29. She was 69.

Henning was a longtime pastor’s wife and active in church life. She was also the administrative assistant for the Southern District Office of the Christian and Missionary Alliance for 15 years and later worked in the business office for Jimmie Hale Mission in Birmingham.

She is survived by her husband of 48 years, Timothy, president of the Alabama Baptist Bivocational Pastors Fellowship and senior pastor of New Beginnings Fellowship, Trussville; three children; and seven grandchildren.



HENNING

► **Carol Swaney Brown**, wife of Pastor Bill Brown of Happy Hill Baptist Church, Heflin, died Feb. 9. She was 75.



BROWN

Brown was a gifted musician who played piano and sang at churches in Georgia and Alabama from the age of 14.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by five children, 17 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

► **Raymond Thomas McElhaney** of Athens died Jan. 30. He was 85.

McElhaney felt called to serve the Lord in 1955 at the age of 18. He was pastor of First

Baptist Church Tanner for 37 years. He previously was bivocational pastor of Farm Hill Baptist Church, Cantonment, Florida, and Old Town Creek Baptist Church.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and retired from The Chemstrand Corporation.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Clara; three daughters; six grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

► **Brannon S. Pinion**, 86, died Oct. 19, 2021.



PINION

During his 62 years of ministry, Pinion served First Baptist Church Reform; Rosedale Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa; Mount Olive Baptist Church, Coker; and Coalfire Baptist Church, Reform. He also served churches in Georgia and Florida.

Pinion served for the last 10 years at Moores Bridge Baptist Church, Elrod. He is survived by his wife, June, and a large extended family.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Bryan Geer** is the new student minister at **Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer**. He has been in full-time ministry for more than 16 years, serving in a variety of family ministry roles, a speaker and member of Beyond Here, a worship band. He has a bachelor’s degree in psychology and Christian leadership with a minor in biblical studies from Palm Beach Atlantic University. Geer and his wife, Katie, have three children. Mitch Grissett is pastor.



GEER

► **Zach Pratt** is the new pastor of **Valley View Baptist Church, Leeds**. He has worked as an interim college minister for 10 years. He received his undergraduate degree from Troy University and is currently a student at Southern Seminary. Zach and his wife, Allison, have one son.



PRATT

► **Ross Robinson**, missions pastor for **Valleydale Church, Birmingham**, retired Dec. 31 after 17 years of service. While at Valleydale, Robinson served first as discipleship pastor and then missions pastor. He is a graduate of Belmont University and Southwestern Seminary.



McELHANEY

Previously Robinson served as minister of recreation at Royal Haven Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. He has also served as minister of education for First Baptist Church Paducah, Kentucky; Northside Baptist Church, Columbia, South Carolina; FBC Beaumont, Texas; Delaney Street Baptist, Orlando, Florida; and Cedar Heights Baptist Church, Cedar Hill, Texas.

During Robinson’s retirement, he and his wife, Brenda, will serve as volunteers with the Baptist Union of Moldova. He has led at least 30 short-term missions trips to Moldova since 1993.

The couple has been married 40 years and have three adult children. The church held a reception Dec. 26 in his honor. Pastor Mac Brunson tweeted about Robinson: “great pastor, great friend, great staff member.”



MAJERIK

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **James Majerik** is the new pastor of **Verbena Baptist Church**. He was licensed to preach at Holtville Riverside Baptist. He previously served as pastor of Wayside Baptist Church, Rockford. He and his wife, Cierra, have four children.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz**, invites everyone to its spring revival Feb. 27–March 2. Bob Pitman will speak and Phil Cross will lead music. Sunday services are at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Wednesday services begin at 6:30 p.m. Mike Goforth is pastor.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► **Charles Brown**, pastor of **Government Street Baptist Church, Mobile**, for 45 years, retired Jan. 16.

In 1977, Brown became pastor of West End Baptist Church. West End later merged with Oakdale Baptist Church to become Government Street. During his time as senior pastor, he led the church to buy a new facility and land to create Camp Christian.



BROWN

The church held a reception in his honor, and Mobile City Council member Ben Reynolds presented a proclamation from the City of Mobile declaring Jan. 16, 2022, to be Dr. Charles E. Brown Day.

Bread of life

By Grace Thornton
Special to the State
Board of Missions



Photo courtesy of Amos Crews

Marcus Nesby, a deacon at Christ First Community Church in Birmingham, grills chicken for hot meals his church distributed to the community.

Birmingham pastor calls hunger offering funds vital part of 'miracle' food distribution

Pastor Amos Crews said one day he was just walking through his house when he heard God speak to him, plain as day.

"He said, 'I want you to feed 1,000 people a hot plate,'" said Crews, who serves as pastor of Christ First Community Church, part of the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. "We're a church of 20, and I knew we wouldn't be able to do that on our own. I said, 'You're going to have to be our Provider.'"

And in faith, Crews stepped forward.

First, he called State Missionary Kristy Kennedy and asked if it would be OK for him to use three months' worth of his church's allocation of hunger fund money to buy enough chicken leg quarters to cook 1,000 hot meals. She said yes.

"We bought 1,500 pounds of frozen leg quarters, and I said, 'OK, Lord, what else are we going to do? How are we going to cook it?' Our building was pretty much falling in," he said.

It wasn't too long before three other small local congregations came together and volunteered to prepare the food to be cooked. And one of Crews' deacons, who had a tow-behind double smoker barbecue, volunteered to bring it to the church.

That just left side dishes, and Crews didn't have the money to buy any.

"We were at the church cleaning chicken and putting it in bags, and a man rode up on a bike with his three children," he said. "It was also one of the days when we were distributing food boxes, so I thought he had come to get food. But he said, 'No, God put on my heart that you're about to do something big, and I just wanted to bless you.'"



Photo courtesy of Amos Crews

As part of their outreach to the community, Christ First Community Church took food to firefighters at Firehouse #19.

The man handed him a check, and Crews thanked him, folded the check and put it in his pocket and asked the man if he could pray for him and his family.

After the man left, he looked at the check and saw it was for \$500.

"We used that money to buy the canned baked beans and make the coleslaw," Crews said.

And on the day they made the plates, Crews and his deacon cooked meat for nearly 24 hours straight, and volunteers made and handed out plates in the parking lot and under the bridges in the city. They fed 1,200 people that day.

Crews said without God's provision through the Alabama Hunger Offering funds, that never would've happened.

He's not alone in that sentiment. All across

the state, others also rely on those gifts to meet needs in their communities. Forty-four ministry centers across Alabama receive money from the Alabama Hunger Offering, which is collected year round but will be highlighted Feb. 20 this year, Kennedy said.

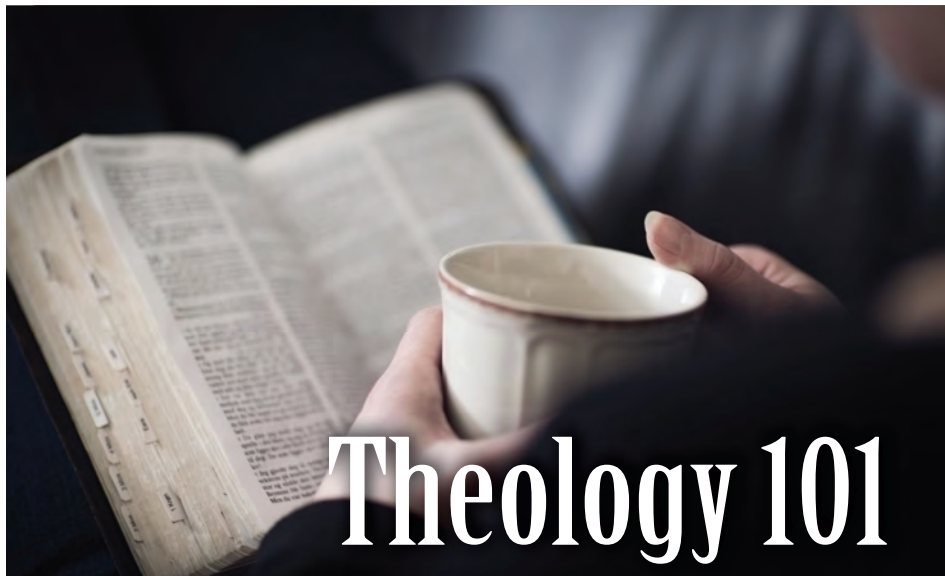
"Ministries that receive funds through the offering help feed people in their communities who are food insecure," Kennedy said. "Ultimately our goal is to meet the physical need people have while meeting their spiritual need for the Bread of life."

Even though Christ First Community Church used three months' worth of their hunger fund money on the meat, it didn't keep them from being able to distribute food boxes each Wednesday as they had been doing. God continued to provide and stretch their money, Crews said.

Over the years, he has seen God do many miracles to help his church feed people, and he said he won't forget any of them, including the one God did with funds from the Alabama Hunger Offering that helped him be obedient to God's direction to feed 1,000 people who needed a hot meal.

**HUNGER
SUNDAY IS
FEBRUARY 20.**

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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The People of God

One Body, Many Members

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

As we continue to look at the biblical analogy of the Church as a body, we not only focus on Christ as the head, but also on God's people as the body. The analogy also compels us to give thought to the members who compose it — a portion of the body already is with Christ, while the rest is scattered throughout the earth and manifested in local congregations.

A major passage about the Church as the body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, which opens with the observation, “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (v. 12).

Unity of the local church

One of the truths flowing from the body analogy is the unity of the local church. A healthy body functions as a unit. No part of the body can go its own way and do its own thing without affecting the whole body. A wayward gland or selfish organ that sought to detach itself and withhold its function would wreak havoc with physical health.

Church life works best and most fruitfully when every member chooses to function in harmony with all the others.

The Bible attaches importance to our collective unity and fel-

lowship, which should eliminate a spirit of competition between local congregations. In the big picture, local churches are members of the same team.

Helping one another

This collective belonging to one another is not merely associating with other members. It has to do with how genuinely and practically we seek to help one another. We care about one another because we know that if any part of the body is missing or malfunctioning, the whole life of the body is affected.

We also are to share a mutual-ity of service. Here the focus is outward, having to do with how we together carry out Christ's ministry and mission in the world. We do not live simply to maintain healthy bodies — we maintain healthy bodies so we can function and be of use in the world around us.

Healthy churches attend to their health in order to be Christ's instruments of compassion and caring in the world.

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.



Someone You Should Know

BARBARA WOODYARD

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Barbara Woodyard, 84, of Leroy has had various responsibilities in church through the years. She has been clerk, Sunday School secretary, hostess, Vacation Bible School volunteer and choir member. But the post for which her church recently honored her was church secretary, a role she served in for 37 years. The alumna of Massey-Draughon Business College in Montgomery said her mission is “to be of help and use wherever I'm needed.”

Q: What is the focus of your greatest ministry efforts?

A: My efforts revolve around serving my church and my church family. I recently retired from being church secretary since the 1980s. I served under pastors James Nichols, A.L. McGill, James Watkins and Ben Posey. I've always been active in church from a very early age and still sing in the choir. I taught Sunday School for children and served as church hostess for years, helping decorate for all seasons. I served where there was a need and made myself available.

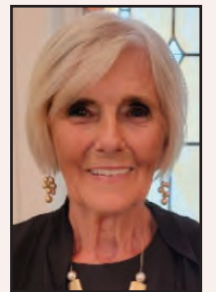
Q: What was a “turning point” in your life and how was God involved?

A: I know God has been involved in my life from an early age. One specific time I felt His protective hand was March 1984. My husband was at the church for a brotherhood cookout and my son, Will, and I were at home (he was 11). The sky grew dark and the wind began to blow so hard that the metal roof on our house started making a big noise. We got into a small closet and shut the door. The huge oak tree in front of our yard blew onto the house. One of the limbs came straight through the roof, down in front of the door about a foot from where we were. We feel like God protected us during the storm. God also provided a place for us to stay afterward — our church had

MINISTRY: Helper

CHURCH NAME: First Baptist Church Leroy, Washington Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).



bought property with a house on it. The day after the storm, our church family and community friends helped us salvage what we could and move into the other house. We lived there two years while we built a new house.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: God is good all the time, and He is still in the miracle business. My husband's health has deteriorated over the last year. He was to the point that he could not stand up on his own. My family doctor diagnosed him with normal pressure hydrocephalus (which) was confirmed with other testing. After a shunt was put in, treatment and therapy, he is now practically back to normal. It is just a miracle.

Q: Have you read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith?

A: “His Eye Is on the Sparrow”

Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you?

A: We have four children — three girls and a boy. My oldest and youngest daughters are musicians. Each Christmas (except during the pandemic), the church features them in a musical concert. After the concert, everyone is invited to stay for a reception with food provided by the ladies of our church.

‘Picture of heaven’ on earth

New residency is a result of partnerships and community among believers

(continued from page 1)

handful of volunteers from North Jefferson Baptist Association who had been doing ministry in a mobile home park.

Steve Loggins, director of missions for North Jefferson Association, said the volunteers had seen God at work there.

“Three ladies from Mount Olive First Baptist started the [ministry],” he said. “They were all octogenarians. Two of them were retired schoolteachers. One of them kept kids, one of them did ESL and one of them did citizenship classes.”

They were based out of a modular building made available by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Loggins said.

And then Dawson’s Hispanic congregation came alongside, helping host ESL events, soccer tournaments and Bible studies.

Other churches also participated, including Gardendale First Baptist and a local Methodist congregation, Loggins noted.

‘Evident’ need arises

Over time as they worked together, Hale said the need for a church in that area “became evident.” Research indicated between 7,000 and 8,000 Hispanics lived there. So with Mosquera’s congregation taking lead, they began working to plant a church.

At first, Fulton Springs Baptist Church — an aging congregation preparing to close its doors — responded with excitement to Loggins’ encouragement to give its facility to the new church.

Instead, the City of Fultondale decided to purchase the property through its power of eminent domain, the right of government to claim private property for public use. That paved the way for a new



Screenshot from video by The Alabama Baptist

The Lord is moving in the Hispanic community of northern Jefferson County through Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, a church plant led by Pastor Joshua del Risco (center) that meets at Fultondale FBC, where Mark Gainey (right) is pastor. Steve Loggins (left) is director of missions for North Jefferson Association.

partner — Fultondale First Baptist Church.

Mark Gainey said he heard from Dawson the week after he became lead pastor of Fultondale FBC, asking if they might be interested in hosting the new church plant.

He said yes, knowing that was something he wanted to pursue. The church had a long history of ministry to the area’s Hispanic community.

They had run a bus ministry in years past, and at one point sermons were live translated into Spanish.

“We began to meet with the leadership of ... Dawson, and God paved a way,” Gainey recalled. “Every door was just wide open.”

The new church began meeting in the youth room at Fultondale FBC. Several families from Dawson’s Hispanic congregation served as the core team to help the work get started, and Mosquera filled in as pastor.

But God already was preparing the way for a full-time pastor. The money from selling the Fulton Springs Baptist property to the city would become seed money for that salary.

And God was preparing the person too — Joshua del Risco, who had previously

served with the North American Mission Board and as evangelism director for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Bayron Mosquera is pastor of Dawson’s Hispanic congregation.

He was someone who knew what a church plant like that could do.

For nearly his whole life, del Risco had a soft spot for the model of English-speaking churches partnering with Spanish-speaking churches. A church like that is where he surrendered his life to Jesus as a boy.

A faith with Cuban roots

His family’s faith story started back in Cuba.

“My grandmother — her husband was a successful businessman and passed away, and they went from having a lot to having nothing and ended up sleeping in parks,” del Risco related.

Someone told her a local Baptist church was looking to hire someone to help with cooking and cleaning, and she got the job. She got involved in the church and made a profession of faith.

That trickled down all the way to del Risco years later at Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, where his father served as pastor of the church’s Spanish-speaking congregation after the family moved to the U.S.

“I was a rambunctious little boy and was constantly getting in trouble for fighting,” he said.

Each Sunday while his parents were in the worship service, young del Risco was somewhere else.

A realization

“I figured out at a young age that once the Spanish church started, I could go down to the basement, eat doughnuts and watch football games on TV,” he remembered.

“And so I had it timed where at the appropriate time when the last amen was said, my parents would look back and there I was sitting in the back pew.”

He did this every Sunday until one week when he came back upstairs, and the timing wasn't quite right — the visiting revival preacher was still speaking.

"I can't tell you exactly what it was that he said, but I do remember that I felt he was talking to me," del Risco recalled. "I was in and out of trouble, and his words helped me understand what my problem was. I needed a relationship with Jesus Christ."

That realization changed his life, and the call that came afterward eventually brought del Risco to Fultondale where he is pastor of Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, the church plant that meets at FFBC.

Del Risco was familiar with Congregación Hispana Dawson before he got the call about coming to serve as pastor of the new church plant. He had gotten to know Mosquera at events for Hispanic Baptists in the state and had spoken at the Dawson Hispanic congregation's men's retreat. During his first visit to FFBC, he saw something he wanted to change.

"I said, 'I'd love to see us worship in the sanctuary because I really feel like that would fuel the growth of our ministry,'" del Risco recalled.

Gaining momentum

Gainey agreed, and everything seemed to fall into place, according to del Risco. The congregation of FBC would meet for worship on Sunday mornings, then Vida

Nueva would meet at noon.

"It's been a blessing for our people to be able to participate alongside First Baptist in this partnership," del Risco said. "So it's been a good relationship. First Baptist has been a tremendous partner in allowing us to use the facility, and Dawson's been a great partner in helping us administratively and helping us in other areas."

Blessings

"So as the church strengthens, I think everybody can walk away [knowing] that they've done their part to birth and nurture this new church."

Gainey said any blessing his church might give pales in comparison to the blessings they receive.

"One of my favorite aspects of this partnership has been doing ministry together," he explained. "Events like Vacation Bible School and our fall festival, our churches have partnered ... so we can reach all of the community. Every time we do that, I see a picture of heaven. I see God using both of our churches to reach people we wouldn't reach otherwise."

Ben Hale said it wasn't long before the Hispanic congregation at Dawson added more people to the space the core team had left, and as Fultondale FBC also grew, the combined total was many more than one church could have reached alone.

And it wasn't long before ev-

To watch a video version of this story, visit tabonline.org/Hispanic-churches.

For more information or to apply for the residency program, email [Ben Hale at bhale@dawsonchurch.org](mailto:Ben.Hale@dawsonchurch.org).



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Joshua del Risco, pastor of Vida Nueva in Fultondale, will lead the residency program — funded by Dawson Memorial Baptist Church's Go Love Tell initiative — to mentor and train Hispanic church planters.

everyone involved began to realize this would be the perfect environment for even more pastors to be mentored and sent out to serve the growing Hispanic population in other parts of Alabama.

With that in mind, after much planning, Dawson is kicking off a church planting residency program this year to train Hispanic church planters who will start eight new congregations across the state in the next several years.

The program — funded by Dawson's Go Love Tell initiative — will involve a church planter candidate working alongside del Risco for 12 to 18 months. After that long, practical mentorship, the resident should be ready to plant, Hale said.

"After that period of time, the church planters will move and locate where they plan to plant their church," he noted.

"Those churches will be planted in various places in Alabama that have already been identified as having a great need for Hispanic congregations."

The residency training curriculum, developed by Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, teaches and equips the planter to raise support for the church plant.

It also teaches basic church growth and how to relate to other congregations in the community.

"It is a practical, hands-on learn-

ing experience where they will walk side by side with Pastor Joshua," Hale said.

Del Risco said he's "really excited" about it, and Gainey agreed.

"The fact that it's a work including multiple churches, multiple associations — it's a testament to God's kingdom at work, and that's the way it should be," Gainey said. "We are passionate about doing whatever it takes to partner with others to reach people for Christ and make disciples. We see it as an extension of what God has called us to do already in this community."

And Brian Harper — the former pastor of Congregación Hispana Dawson in the early 1990s — also will play a role. Now lead church planting strategist for SBOM, Harper will provide information about areas of need and help identifying potential residency candidates.

Encouraging others

Hale said he hopes the model that's developed will encourage other Alabama Baptist churches to consider planting Hispanic congregations or serving as a host church for new plants.

"We are hoping that by planting new Hispanic churches that our existing Anglo churches will learn better how to minister to their brothers and sisters that are becoming a larger portion of our population in the years to come," Hale said.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Ben Hale (right), evangelism and missions pastor for Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, and Bayron Mosquera, pastor of Dawson's Hispanic congregation, share about their church's new Hispanic church planting residency in a video produced by TAB Media.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

2022 marks 185th birthday of Fanny Coppin

Fanny Jackson Coppin (1837–1913) dedicated her life as a teacher and administrator to improving the lives of African Americans. This year marks the 185th anniversary of her birth.

Born a slave in Washington, D.C., she was 12 when an aunt purchased her freedom for \$125. She moved to Newport, Rhode Island, and worked as a domestic servant, using her income to hire a tutor in order to attend the Rhode Island State Normal School.

After receiving a scholarship from the African Methodist Church, she enrolled in 1860 at Oberlin College (Ohio), the first college in the U.S. to accept both African Americans and female students. She studied Greek, Latin and mathematics.

“It was in me, to get an education,” she wrote later, “and to teach my people. This idea was deep in my soul.”

As a junior, she taught

fellow students in a preparatory class, the first African American student to be a pupil-teacher. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1865, one of the first African American women in the nation to do so.

Upon graduation, she taught at the Institute for Colored Youth, a Quaker school in Philadelphia. In 1869, she became head principal of the Institute, the first African American woman to be a school principal.

For the next 20 years, she supervised teacher education and incorporated industrial training programs and worked with employers to hire her students. She established a Women’s Industrial Exchange to display the mechanical and artistic works of young women.

She retired from her beloved institute in 1902 after 37 years. Upon her retirement, she began a new career as a missionary.

She accompanied her husband, Levi J. Coppin, a distinguished A.M.E. minister and bishop for South Africa, to Cape Town. She taught women about temperance and helped organize missionary societies. They founded the Bethel Institute, a missionary school.

After several years in Africa, Coppin’s health deteriorated. She returned to Philadelphia where she died Jan. 21, 1913.



COPPIN

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).

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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Government Street Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., is actively and prayerfully searching for a senior pastor whom God has chosen to lead and grow our church family into the future. We are a biblically based church that treasures the doctrines in the word of God. If you feel led by the Holy Spirit to be considered as our preacher and pastor, please send your resumé to: Pastorsearchcommittee@governmentstreet.org. Psalm 5:3, “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.”

PASTOR

Union Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumés will be received through March 31 by mail at: Pastor Search Committee, Union Baptist Church, 5251 Grand Bay Wilmer Road, Grand Bay, AL 36541, or by email at: admin@ubcgrandbay.org.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumés to: padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com or to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35905.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Bromley Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor. The church is located in north Baldwin County in the community of Bromley. Mail resumés to: ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 7977 Bluefield Drive, Bay Minette, AL 36507, or email to: bromleybaptist316@att.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

South Mobile First Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a godly man to serve as bivocational pastor. Email resumé c/o Search Committee to: vgnelson@bellsouth.net. Visit our website southmobilefbc.org and our Facebook page for information about our church.

SEEKING

Fern Creek Baptist Church is seeking part-time and/or full-time ministerial staff in the following areas: music, youth, children or education. According to the applicant’s gifts and skills, two of these areas could be combined for a full-time position. Applicants must exemplify a growing relationship with God, spiritual maturity, responsible authority, fervent evangelism,

sound theology and effective communication skills with all age groups. Applicants should have experience and education in ministry. Anyone seeking the music position must be an excellent musician, worship leader and educator. Send resumés to: Fern Creek Baptist Church, ATTN: Personnel Committee, 5920 Bardstown Road, Louisville, KY 40291, or email to: linda@ferncreekbaptist.org. Resumés will be received through Feb. 21. Questions? Call 502-239-0316, ext. 103 (Linda Barnes Popham).

WORSHIP LEADER

Mount Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, is looking for a part-time worship leader. Send resumés to: mt.carmelbaptistchurchwb@gmail.com.

YOUTH MINISTER

First Baptist Church Center Star, youth minister position. Part-time (20 hours estimate). For more information about this job opportunity, contact the FBCCS church office at 256-757-1310.

BIVOCATIONAL CHILDREN’S MINISTER

East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle, Ala., is prayerfully seeking God’s choice for a bivocational children’s minister who will lead the children’s ministry program. Applicants should subscribe to the doctrinal statement of the Baptist Faith & Message. See additional information under the announcements tab at ehbc.church. Please send resumé to: cmssc@ehbc.church.

OTHER POSITIONS

HISPANIC CHURCH PLANTING RESIDENCY

Dawson Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, is seeking candidates for its Hispanic Church Planting Residency. Once trained these residents will seek to plant eight new Hispanic churches in Alabama before 2025. The residency director is Joshua del Risco, pastor of Iglesia Vida Nueva in Fultondale, Alabama. Financial support during the residency will include salary and housing. Funding for the church plant will continue for an additional four years following residency. Residents must agree with Dawson’s Doctrinal Foundation as shown at dawsonchurch.org/doctrinalfoundation and complete the NAMB planter assessment. Questions and/or resumés should be sent to: Ben Hale, Dawson’s missions pastor, at bhale@dawsonchurch.org.

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HUNGER SUNDAY IS FEB. 20.**LOAVES & FISHES****Gadsden church's food pantry showcases God's provision in tight times**

By **Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

Jon Costa said in food pantry ministry, times are worse than ever, but the miracles are even greater.

“The miracle is that God sends us the food to give out,” said Costa, who along with his wife, Mary, coordinates the food pantry ministry at The Church at Wills Creek in Gadsden.

“The story of the loaves and fishes — it’s happening even now at our church.”

Since 2020, Wills Creek Food Pantry has doubled the amount of food it gives out to members of the community.

“Right now, we’re giving out 250 to 300 boxes a week,” Costa said. “Last year we gave out 10,800 boxes.

“There’s a limited amount of money to buy food. You can do the math — 10,800 boxes of food, no one could purchase that. It’s God’s provision.”

Part of that comes through funds given to the Alabama Hunger Offering, which will be highlighted statewide Feb. 20, though it’s collected all year.

Kristy Kennedy, an associate in the office of associational missions and church planting of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said the offering also helps support 43 other ministry centers around the state.

Where the money goes

Each year, 25% of the offering stays in Alabama to help people who are food insecure, and the other 75% is sent to Southern Baptists’ International and North American Mission Boards to help feed the hungry across North America and around the world.

In Alabama the hands-on ministry, which is funded in part by hunger



Photo courtesy of Jon Costa

“It’s been wonderful to see people rally around this cause, to have the pastor and the leadership of the church support our efforts,” said Jon Costa of the food pantry he directs for The Church at Wills Creek in Gadsden.

offering funds, is done by churches, associations, food pantries and after-school ministries for children who don’t have enough food to get through the weekend, Kennedy said.

While Wills Creek Food Pantry uses some of those funds, it also runs on donations, Costa noted.

“Community partners, other church volunteers and Christian ministries provide us with additional food and resources to support us in meeting our guests’ needs,” he explained.

One of those is Dan Fastuca and his V & Me ministry, which also stretches its reach in the state with the help of Alabama Hunger Offering funds.

With all that coming together, Costa — retired director of the Etowah County Department of Human Resources — said Wills Creek Food Pantry is able to provide food on a weekly basis, as well as social services information and free Christian counseling.

fessions of faith in Christ, and one was baptized.

With the struggles people are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic, the food pantry is “able to minister to folks more than ever before, and we hear of answered prayers as people come back to tell us what God has done through their visits with us,” Costa said.

Making an impact

He recently got a thank-you note from a family who regularly receives food from the ministry.

“The note talks about how difficult their times were — it was an older lady recently widowed whose son has had heart attacks,” Costa said.

“They were so grateful for the help we were able to provide.”

He noted it’s been wonderful to see how God has brought everyone together to make the ministry happen, from volunteers who helped out last year to Jason Ellen, founding pastor of Wills Creek who also serves as director of the pantry.

“It’s been wonderful to see people rally around this cause, to have the pastor and the leadership of the church support our efforts,” Costa said.

“We couldn’t do it without God working through everyone to meet the needs.”

Volunteers are a critical help for the food pantry, Costa said.

“A core group of 30 dedicated volunteers has been a tremendous blessing and the reason for the ministry’s impact on our community.”

Prayer effort

Those volunteers provide a strong prayer effort as well and try to build relationships and share the gospel with guests.

Last year, eight people made pro-



Photo courtesy of Jon Costa

Volunteers of all ages help with The Church at Wills Creek’s food pantry. Over the last couple of years, the Gadsden congregation has doubled the amount of food distributed to its community.

Consider providing a 'blessing box'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Shawn Lowery became pastor of Union Springs Baptist Church in Randolph in 2019, church members already were talking about doing some sort of food ministry. They just didn't know what.

"We have several areas around us that are not financially well off, and we just had a desire to help our community," Lowery said. "But we're in Chilton County and kind of isolated, so we were trying to figure out how to make that work."

'Take what you need'

Then a church member mentioned an idea he'd seen — a blessing box, a variation of the Little Free Pantry idea started by Jessica McClard of Arkansas as a grassroots effort in 2016.

The idea is to build a weather-proofed, cabinet-like box outside the church, office or organization filled with nonperishable food items, paper goods and hygiene items people in the community can take from when needed, no questions asked.

The motto is, "Take what you need, give what you can."

McClard took the Little Free Library idea — where neighbors take or leave a book at a tiny "library" in someone's yard — and adapted the concept to meet food needs.

A little over a month later, CrystalRock Cathedral women's ministry in Ardmore, Oklahoma, started Blessing Box, and by August 2016 the movement was global.

The tiny pantries have been popping up all over since then, including outside of Baptist churches around Alabama. Lowery said it's been a "very profitable ministry" for Union Springs Baptist.

"It was just a way we were able to do a food ministry with our budget and our manpower," he said.

"We asked people to donate, and our general thing has been to tell people, 'When you go buy your groceries, just pick up a few extra nonperishable items and bring them to the church.' We've also had monetary donations."

The Little Free Pantry website offers tips to build a box including:

► Consider your location.

Choose a place accessible by car, safe and away from high traffic or high crime areas. Position the box facing north or east to shield food from the summertime heat.

► Make plans.

A Google search for "Little Free Library plans" will bring up

several options that can be adapted for a blessing box.

► **Decide how to stock.** How will you get donations?

► **Stay safe.** Keep your box well maintained both inside and out. Check with a lawyer and see if property insurance covers the pantry.

For more information, visit littlefoodpantry.org.



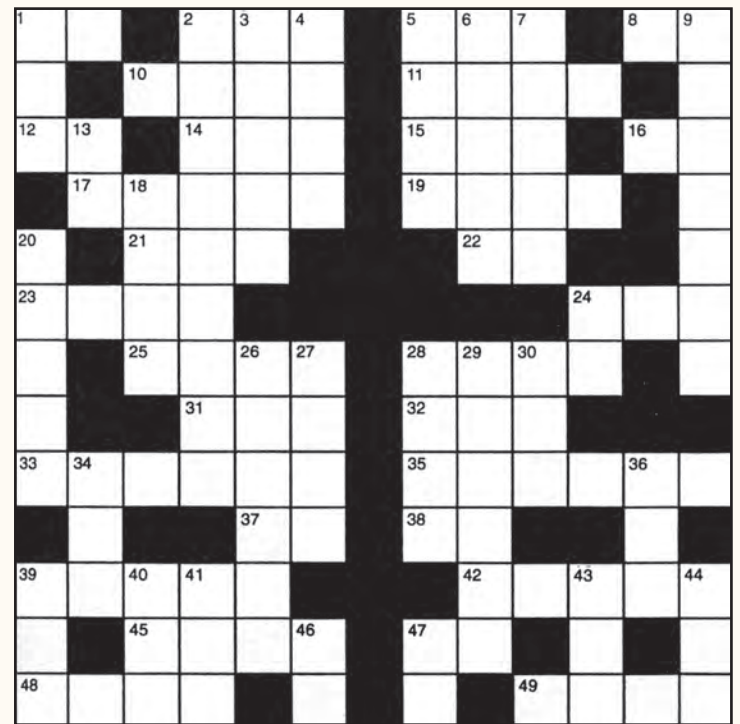
Photo courtesy of USBC

This Community Blessing Box provides those living around Union Springs Baptist Church in Randolph with food and supplies.

CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Thou shalt not muzzle the _____. (1 Tim. 5:18)
2. To put on a garment.
5. ____ of me, and I shall give thee. (Ps. 2:8)
8. Washington, _____.
10. Set the city on _____. (Josh. 8:19)
11. The wicked ____ their bow. (Ps. 11:2)
12. _____, the winter is past. (Song of Sol. 2:11)
14. Why ____ we here? (2 Kings 7:3)
15. A time to be born, and a time to _____. (Eccles. 3:2)
16. 40 (Roman numeral).
17. Mexican fare.
19. ____ with her suburbs. (1 Chron. 6:70)
21. A place to store coal.
22. An elevated track.
23. From whence cometh my _____. (Ps. 121:1)
24. I will break also the ____ of Damascus. (Amos 1:5)
25. Time in nothing _____. (Acts 17:21)
28. Biblical word for "wash."
31. The 7th Greek letter.
32. _____, lama sabachthani. (Matt. 27:46)
33. Subject for an essay.
35. Delivers a blow.
37. New Testament. (abbr.)
38. I go ____ prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
39. To begin.
42. Elimelech's wife. (Ruth 1:2)



By Marge Lifo

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45. ____ up and walk. (Luke 5:23)
47. In the year of our Lord. (abbr.)
48. Where Christ was placed after His Crucifixion.
49. A heavenly garden.

DOWN

1. Thou anointest my head with _____. (Ps. 23:5)
2. Jesus had 12 _____. (Matt. 10:1)
3. Which maketh Arcturus, _____, and Pleiades. (Job 9:9)
4. They forsook their _____. (Mark 1:18)
5. Son of Shammua. (Neh. 11:17)
6. To fish a certain way.
7. Let us ____ before the Lord. (Ps. 95:6)
9. When they were come to the place, which is called _____. (Luke 23:33)
13. Old Testament. (abbr.)
18. Having the ability.
20. _____, O Israel. (Zeph. 3:14)
24. To exist.
26. Limits to a certain amount.
27. As far as the ____ is from the west. (Ps. 103:12)
28. ____ some evil take me. (Gen. 19:19)
29. The ____ tree shall flourish. (Eccles. 12:5)
30. Seven. (Roman numeral)
34. The sun waxed _____. (Ex. 16:21)
36. A shade tree.
39. ____ on the right hand of God. (Mark 16:19)
40. Put on strength, O ____ of the Lord. (Isa. 51:9)
41. Adam lost one for Eve.
43. Not young.
44. Hotel.
46. For example. (abbr.)
47. I ____ the bread of life. (John 6:35)

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Experts share latest human trafficking info

Advocates in the fight against human trafficking gathered Feb. 3-4 in Montgomery for the 8th Annual Alabama Human Trafficking Summit.

Organized by the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force, the summit brought together law enforcement, survivor assistance providers, rehabilitation centers, faith-based groups, researchers, child welfare representatives and more.

Active in the effort

The Alabama Baptist and TAB Media Group were among more than 20 exhibitors, and TAB Media's Jennifer Davis Rash led one of the six breakout sessions during the two-day event.

Rash's session featured faith-based groups active in the effort to fight human trafficking and how The Alabama Baptist serves a vital role in keeping the faith-based audience informed and connected.

Other faith-based groups present included Blanket Fort Hope, Camille Place, Renew Hope 85, The Well-

House, WellHouse Child and Trafficking Hope, most of which have been featured or referenced by The Alabama Baptist through the years.

Doug Gilmer, Alabama's resident agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations, also shared during the summit. He also helps church groups get involved.

Chris Lim, coordinator of the Alabama Anti-Human Trafficking Alliance, pointed out how the topics, presentations and discussions at the summit proved the work is advancing.

"We've grown beyond where we are still doing the basics of what is human trafficking," he said.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Alliance provides the opportunity to bring it all together and come full circle with the needs of the state, Lim explained.

"We can effectively pull together ... the victim service providers, law enforcement and community partners ... to use our expertise and impact," he said.



Photo by Susan Stevens/The Alabama Baptist

Canines with the Alabama H.E.R.O Program, which utilizes comfort animals to help victims throughout the criminal process, greet visitors to the exhibit hall during the Alabama Human Trafficking Summit in Montgomery. Alabama's Office of Prosecution Services coordinates the H.E.R.O. Program.

The core principles for the alliance are to be trauma informed, victim centered and justice focused (seeking both survivor healing and offender prosecutions).

"We seek to collaborate ... and use data-based decision making," Lim said. "We need good, accurate data so we can make informed decisions on what type of resources are needed."

Cameron Perry, a special agent with the alliance, said,

"Our main goal is to connect ... and develop the relationships. ... I'd like to teach our (nongovernmental organizations) and victim service providers to think like law enforcement and vice versa and [help all parties] understand where their options are, learning who's out there. If we figure that out in the beginning then we don't have to try to figure it out in the middle [once overwhelmed with cases]."

A panel discussion by service providers who focus on rehabilitating youth survivors also highlighted the

need for working together, supporting each other and understanding each step of the process.

Alexa James from Blanket Fort Hope and Carolyn Potter from WellHouse Child shared the challenges that come when volunteers or others don't understand the process.

Everything from trauma bonding, where the survivor tries to get back to the trafficker, to a basic inability to make good decisions means the young people in the rehabilitation centers need specific guidance and intentional steps, as well as time, the service providers explained.

"We've dedicated our lives to this ... and want to instill the hope in these youth that they have a future," James said. "They need to know how valued they are before they can even accept our help."

Pat McCay, chair of the task force, commended participants for the work that has been done in the fight.

"I'm so proud of all of us. We've had such great accomplishments." (TAB Media)

Find more information at EndItAlabama.org or dhs.gov/blue-campaign.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 20

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



FUTURE SEEN Daniel 7:1-14

Daniel's supernatural gift was the ability to interpret visions and dreams. Several interpretations were in regard to immediate revelation from God, like Nebuchadnezzar's tree dream and Belshazzar's handwriting on the wall vision.

Others were intermediate in nature, like the revelation concerning the Messiah. Still others were eschatological in nature, pointing to the end of days.

Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream in Daniel 2 revealed four major empires that would arise in anticipation of the Messiah. Conservative evangelicals, who recognize Daniel to be a historical figure from the time of the exile, usually understand these four kingdoms to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Edward J. Young and Stephen Miller are among commentators who interpret Daniel's dream in Chapter 7 to be another prophetic revelation of these historical empires dreamt by Nebuchadnezzar.

Three Beasts (1-6)

Daniel's dream included beasts that represented empires and horns that represented kings. The first three kingdoms were a lion, a bear and a leopard. The lion had feet and a mind like a man.

He also had wings like an eagle, until the wings were torn off. The bear fed on ribs, and it was told to gorge on meat. The leopard had four heads and four wings, and it was granted authority.

One of the key rules of biblical interpretation is for Scripture to interpret itself. Daniel asked for clarification from the revealer of dreams. "These huge beasts, four in number, are four kings who will rise up from the earth" (vv. 16-17).

The Fourth Beast and the Horn (7-8)

The fourth beast was not characterized like other creatures. This beast "had large iron teeth" (v. 7) and "bronze claws" (v. 19), human eyes, a mouth that spoke arrogantly

and 10 horns. Three of those horns were then uprooted by a little horn that grew and stood in their place. The 10 horns represent 10 kings, with the little horn (another king) overthrowing three kings (vv. 23-24).

In the 40 years since I was saved by God's grace, I have seen "experts" interpret biblical prophecy through the eyes of current events.

They made confident assertions who these 10 kings were. Some said they were member nations of the Soviet Union, or the United Nations or the European Union, or most recently, a confederation of Islamic states. With each claim came an explanation that the little horn was the rising Antichrist.

Each generation of Jews and Christians has had its prognosticators connecting these kings and kingdoms to their own eras. Which ruler will "speak words against the Most High and oppress the holy ones" and "intend to change religious festivals and laws" (v. 25)?

Even in the days of Jesus, Jews were anticipating the coming of the Messiah, who would rid Israel of their Roman oppressors and fulfill the Davidic covenant to establish an everlasting Kingdom (2 Sam. 7:16; Mark 11:10; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 1:6).

The Judgment (9-14)

God will judge the nations, and He will be glorified in His judgment upon the Antichrist who fulfills Old and New Testament prophecies. God the Father is the "Ancient of Days," and Jesus is "one like the Son of Man" to whom was given dominion over "every people, nation and language."

Far too often, the focus of end-times Bible study is an attempt to discern who the contemporary Antichrist is or at what point Christians will escape the terror at the end of days. Peter explained Christ has not yet returned because God is still saving the lost (2 Pet. 3:9). Let us join Him in the work by making disciples of all nations until Jesus returns.

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



THE PITFALL OF BITTERNESS Genesis 45:1-5, 9-11

Pharaoh had dreamed a pair of dreams that even the best of his diviners could not interpret: Seven fat cows were devoured by seven lean cows, and seven plump ears of grain were devoured by seven withered ears of grain.

Two nearly identical dreams in succession must surely mean something, but what? Thankfully, the young Hebrew Joseph was on hand to solve the mystery.

Finally remembered by the cupbearer who had once been imprisoned with him, Joseph was hauled out of prison and cleaned up for a royal appearance. In Pharaoh's presence, Joseph conveyed God's message. The seven fat cows and seven fat heads of grain were seven years of plenty; the seven lean cows and seven withered heads of grain were seven years of famine. Preparations must be made during the years of plenty to see the country through the bad years to come.

Joseph was put in charge of the vital preparations. For seven years, he collected one-fifth of the grain of the Egyptians and set it aside for the seven years of famine ahead. The wisdom of Joseph's preparations was evident as soon as the famine came. When the people could no longer produce food on their own, they sought out Joseph and found a ready supply to carry them over to the next year.

But the famine reached well beyond Egypt. Even the people in Joseph's former home of Canaan suffered through a most difficult time. When things grew dire, Joseph's father, Jacob, sent his sons to Egypt in hopes they could find food there. These brothers could scarcely have imagined they would be forced to get food from the brother they had once sold into slavery.

Embrace your pain so you can move forward. (1-3)

When the brothers appeared before Joseph, he immediately recognized them. But they failed to recognize him.

Concerned about the treatment

of his younger brother, Benjamin, Joseph imprisoned one brother and refused to let him go until Benjamin also made an appearance.

Jacob was none too happy about the prospect of sending Benjamin to Egypt, but when circumstances grew bad enough, he found he had no choice. Now all Jacob's sons were in Egypt.

Though the brothers may not yet have realized it, their fates were on a knife's edge. Assured of Benjamin's safety, Joseph could have disposed of his treacherous brothers with a snap. Who would question the second-in-command in Egypt if he demanded their deaths? But rather than kill his brothers, Joseph took pity on them. Weeping loudly, he revealed himself. "I am Joseph," he said. "Is my father still alive?" So stunned and terrified were his brothers that they could not answer him.

Forgive those who have wronged you. (4-5)

At first they could hardly believe their eyes. Could this really be Joseph? But when the gravity of what they had done resettled upon them, disbelief turned to dread. They deserved death.

What would their brother do to them now that he had them under his thumb? Joseph chose to forgive.

He told them that though they had intended evil, God had worked to turn Joseph's circumstances into a source of life for Egypt and for his family.

Restore broken relationships by seeking their best. (9-11)

Joseph could hardly have realized it at the time, but his act of mercy preserved the life and hope of God's chosen people and, by extension, our own spiritual heritage.

When Joseph chose to forgive, he kept alive the brothers who would become the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. He saved the nation and even saved his own father, whom he asked the brothers to now bring to this place of shelter in Egypt.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Lanell Downs Smith

The Alabama Baptist

Author shares personal battles overcoming anxiety, depression

Christian communicator and author Caris Snider is passionate about sharing the hope of God with those battling anxiety and depression because she's been in their shoes.

In a recent TAB "Amplify" podcast, Snider spoke about her book, "Anxiety Elephants: A 31-Day Devotional to Help Stomp Out Your Anxiety," and how her personal experiences with mental health issues inspired her to write about anxiety and depression.

Snider wants other women to know they aren't alone — God is with them in the battle against fear and despair. Her book uses Scripture, real-life stories and advice on handling triggers to offer readers hope and tools for overcoming anxiety.

Many of the resources helped Snider herself. She described experiencing anxiety-induced migraines as early as 10 years of age. Bullying at school brought on the headaches, and when her vision was impacted, doctors diagnosed her with having an anxiety disorder.

"I didn't want to tell anybody about [the bullying]," recalled Snider. "And I remember when I went to the doctor and he asked me, 'Are you being bullied or is



CARIS SNIDER Photo courtesy of Caris Snider

something happening at school?" I started to cry. That pressure was relieved. My vision came back and he said, 'You know this is anxiety that you're dealing with.' That made me feel better to know that there was [a cause]."

Hitting a wall

People didn't talk as openly about mental health back then, said the wife and mother of two. Thinking she needed to just "suck it up," she attempted to go on with her life. But at age 28 Snider hit a wall and could not go on.

"I was pushing everything out and pushing everything down," she remembered. "'Trust God more. Work harder. Pray harder.' And unfortunately, that would be the advice and the wisdom that I would try to give others."

Snider began experiencing anxiety attacks that were debilitating and frightening.

At one point she thought she might be dying of a heart attack. The condition escalated into anxiety attacks and depression, which struck randomly, often while she performed normal daily activities like cooking, driving or watching TV.

Hidden battle

Feelings of panic and fear would suddenly overwhelm her, often accompanied by acute shortness of breath, racing thoughts, insomnia and an accelerated heart rate.

"It was just a constant struggle, like you're that hamster on a wheel, ... going constantly, and you want off the wheel," Snider said.

But without help "you cannot get off [the wheel]. And I carried that all to myself. I wouldn't tell anyone," she said. Feeling ashamed and embarrassed and fearing rejection, Snider avoided other people and kept her battle hidden. Fear of failing God plagued her, and she worried He could never use her for His glory.

Words like useless, purposeless and worthless replayed constantly through her mind. Snider attempted to numb the pain by starving it. Living on the brink of an eating disorder, she suffered a miscarriage and felt she had

hit the "bottom of the bottom."

That's when Snider sensed God urging her to find help.

With the assistance of her doctor, a counselor, friends and family, she began to find healing and restoration.

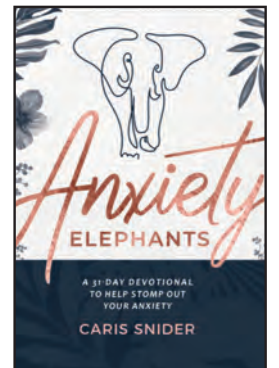
She hopes sharing her story will help others know they also can find acceptance and healing.

"Being able to [talk about mental health] began to help me," she said. "As the Church, as we walk in faith and talk about anxiety, talk about mental health.

"That's the right thing to do. And just how much stronger can we be together if we link arms and recognize we're not in this alone?"

Snider's next two books, "Anxiety Elephants for Tween Girls" and "Anxiety Elephants for Tween Boys," are slated for release March 1.

To hear more of Snider's story, check out the TAB "Amplify" podcast at tabonline.org/podcasts.



For more information, visit carissnider.com.

"Being able to [talk about mental health] began to help me. As the Church ... just how much stronger can we be together if we link arms and recognize we're not in this alone?"

Caris Snider
author

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.



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