The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Eva Nell Hunter recently retired as director of the Serving Center at Central Baptist Church in Decatur. Hunter served the center for 64 years, 61 as director. She was recognized for her library ministry Jan. 16 at the church.

Focus on serving

Decatur church's Serving Center, librarian recognized for ministry

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Central Baptist Church in Decatur celebrated two milestones Jan. 16 — the 75th anniversary of the church's Serving Center and the commitment of its long-time director.

Eva Nell Hunter was recognized for 64 years of service to the church's library ministry (now called the Serving Center because the resources have expanded beyond books).

Hunter, who served 61 of those 64 years as director, recently retired from the full-time post but plans to volunteer occasionally under current librarian Patty Easterling.

"It has been a joy," Hunter said. "All I've done is what I figured the Lord wanted me to do."

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, said Hunter "did the thing that people think cannot be done, not for herself — she did it for children, she did it for young people, she did it for adults, she did it for the community — but most of all, she did it for the honor and glory of God."

'Faithful to the work'

Berg presented a plaque to Rob Hatfield, senior pastor of Central Baptist, during the special service.

"You have an amazing library, an amazing service center," she said. "In fact, I would venture to say that it's unmatched in all of the churches that I've been in, and that is because you have been faithful. You've been faithful to giving, to providing volunteers, to doing the work."

More than 30 ministries are housed in the Serving Center, including die-cutting, displays of dolls and items from around the world, lamination, a card ministry and a church history collection.

It is open to the public, and local educators and classes make use of the services.

One unique ministry is Bible repair for well-used Bibles, fixing the pages back in place and providing a new leather cover at no charge.

Berg showed the church her repaired Bible.

(See 'Christ-loving,' page 17)

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New 'Stories' podcast season will feature three missions widows

Gloria Sloan-Castellanos knows what it's like to face the unthinkable.

In 1999 — just six months after she and her family made it to the missions field in Mexico — she sat on the beach next to the lifeless bodies of her husband and daughter.

It was an unbelievable tragedy. But what happened next was something that changed the lives of a lot of people. The ripple effect has kept going in ways she never would've expected.

We will share her story in the first episode of Season 5 of "Stories" podcast, which will release Feb. 25.

She's one of three women who will be featured this season who lost their husbands while serving on the missions field and haven't stopped following the calling God put on their lives. We think you'll be challenged and encouraged hearing their stories.

In episode 2, which releases March 4, we'll hear the story of Erica Patrick, who right now is in Alabama with her three children preparing to move to Taiwan. After being forced to leave their home and the people they served in East Asia in March 2020, the family came back to the U.S. to decide where to go next.

Then in October 2020, Patrick's husband, David, dropped dead unexpectedly one day in the back yard of the missions house at Five Points Baptist Church in Northport.

"Definitely the Lord has written a story, and as I thought through the story the Lord had written for my life, I just saw over and over His faithfulness to meet me in my weakness, to grant courage, to grant faith, to not only be able to take next steps but to have joy and to praise Him in it," Patrick said.

In episode 3, which releases March 11, you'll meet Staci Powers, whose husband, Jeff, died in 2014 after a yearlong battle with cancer. The couple had served in Africa together for 16 years, and Powers stayed on the field in Zambia after his passing. She's still there now.

Listen at tabonline.org/stories or wherever you get your podcasts.

Finding God faithful

Her story is a powerful one of walking through grief and finding God faithful.

"I've had to trust the Lord and go to Him and trust His guidance," Powers said. "It's been hard, but it's a blessing." (Grace Thornton)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

"Definitely the Lord has written a story, and as I thought through the story the Lord had written for my life, I just saw over and over His faithfulness to meet me in my weakness, to grant courage, to grant faith, to not only be able to take next steps but to have joy and to praise Him in it."

Erica Patrick
missions widow

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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OPINION

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org @RashionalThts

Will church life require a dual approach going forward?

Pastor Johnny from Mississippi asked the questions sincerely and with a heavy heart: "Is it just our church? Are we the only ones who have more than half of our people not wanting to return? Are we the only ones who can't find staff members?"

His fellow pastor friends sat quietly, nodding in agreement, as he described the discouragement he is experiencing.

I'm not sure if he wanted suggestions or if he merely needed confirmation he wasn't alone, but his willingness to express it was encouraging despite the downtrodden tone of his voice.

Stating it out loud and owning the situation provides the needed foundation to figure out the next step.

The other pastors assured him he wasn't alone and the concern was not only statewide but nationwide.

They didn't solve the situation that night, but they shared a moment of camaraderie and will likely be able to talk more freely about it going forward.

As I listened to the discussion, I thought of a comment I heard a few days prior, a comment from another Pastor Johnny — veteran Georgia pastor Johnny Hunt. He said in an interview with our team, "If you'll listen to people, they'll tell you what's important."

It doesn't mean people will always say or portray what's weighing on their hearts, but if we will truly listen, then we'll find it.

"Is it just our church?" indicates a plea for assurance that the pastor isn't alone, and the other pastors were sensitive enough to hear his heart and provide assurance.

"Are we the only ones ... ?" might also be a way of asking for help.

My mind swirled through several scenarios, wanting desperately to provide a suggestion about what to do, but I'm not sure any of us know exactly what to do at this point.

Even recent articles featuring experts discussing the stats and research reports stop short of sharing tips for how to adjust to this new church-life situation.

Latest stats

Lifeway Research reports that as of September, 75% of churchgoers returned to in-person worship services, but the question remains:

What happened to the churchgoers who have not returned?

"The Ripple Effect: Congregations, COVID and the Future of Church Life," a fall 2021 study from Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts, suggests those who didn't return might already have been among the least active group.

Infrequent churchgoers were more likely to stop attending in-person worship than those who regularly attended church before, according to Grey Matter.

Of those who attended church less than monthly before the pandemic, 25% chose to stop attending once the pandemic began, the Lifeway report explained in its review of the research. Only 11% of those who attended church at least monthly prior to the pandemic made the decision to stop attending in-person services.

The same applied for Bible readership and small groups.

Among those who read the Bible weekly, 10% decided to stop attending in-person services, according to Grey Matter. For those who read the Bible less often, the percentage jumped to 19%. Similarly, 9% of those in a small group chose to stop, while 16% of those not in a small group made that decision.

Still, we all know plenty of dedicated believers who remain cautious about gathering in crowds because of health-related concerns, so the statistics certainly don't tell the full story and shouldn't cause us to judge or shame anyone.

At the same time, it's helpful to think through all the potential reasons and compare what's happening at church with what's happening in the workforce as well as all public activities.

How to focus attention

It's also important to make sure we are shepherding the congregation we have — both those who show up on Sunday and those who are connected from a distance — without spending energy focused on who isn't participating.

Do stay in touch with those who disappeared as much as possible, keeping the welcome mat out and seeking to share Christ with all who don't yet know Him. But avoid the temptation of coaxing back those who have left at the expense of caring well for those who are actively participating.

Going forward, we'll likely need two approaches to church. In fact, those with strong homebound ministries already in place have the advantage.

And finding clear forms of consistent communication is an important step in keeping the entire congregation united.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

Yearning for something fresh from God

By Rick Lance
Executive director, State Board of Missions

I was blessed recently to hear Bill Elliff speak on the subjects of prayer, revival and spiritual awakening.

I was touched by his passion for something fresh from God to move in the lives of believers and in our churches.

While he spoke, I began to do a spiritual audit of my life. I began asking questions which convicted me and humbled me. I share these thoughts while praying they may be of help to you.

I asked myself, "Have I been seriously and passionately praying for something fresh from God in my life? Have I been praying for a spiritual awakening in our time?"

These and other questions flowed through my mind and heart.

I must confess with all our cultural challenges and with our seemingly apathetic attitude toward the things of God I felt as though I had abandoned my post in praying earnestly for God to do something fresh among us.

LANCE

I began rereading a biography of George Whitefield. Here was a man used so mightily by God in his day. He was a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley, both of whom influenced his ministry in so many ways.

Whitefield began praying for God to do something fresh in his life. He prayed for his country Great Britain where he seemed to fan the flames of a Great Awakening. Later he crossed the Atlantic, and he had the same effect on the American colonies.

Some believe Whitefield had a huge impact on the thinking of the Founding Fathers. Undeniably, Whitefield traveled the colonies preaching the Word and seeing God at work in the lives of people.

My heart has been warmed, strangely warmed, as John Wesley would say, but this heartwarming experience is a yearning for true revival among our people. This is so refreshing to my soul.

The situation is desperate. Evil is having a field day in our world, in our country and where we live as well. There seems to be a pandemic of evil causing all kinds of predictable problems.

Prayerful request

The answer is for us to pray earnestly for a fresh wind of God's Spirit among us. This is not a call for a new program but a plea for us to have extraordinary hunger and thirst for God to move among us.

Let's do our part and pray. Let's make this a priority in our lives. This may be the opportune moment for God to do something fresh in our lives and in the lives of others.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Find more articles on evangelism, church revitalization and other ministry topics at alsbom.org/blog.

The rewards of praying Scripture

I love to pray Scripture, and not only the prayers found in Scripture. I love praying many different portions of Scripture. ...

When prayed, Scripture comes alive and takes on a more personal significance.

Praying Scripture is simply taking God's word — what was written by His Holy Spirit through His servants — and applying it to what is going on in my life.

Sometimes those prayers are soothing and comforting. Other times those prayers are strengthening and encouraging. Still there are other times when those prayers are sobering and even convicting.

Not all Scripture is easy to pray. But it is all revitalizing and replenishing. Will you look at Scripture differently after reading this? Will you begin to pray Scripture daily? It will change your life.

George Yates
Church health strategist
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

No matter what you have done. No matter how far you have drifted. No matter how many times you have danced with the devil, there is hope for you.

Don't buy into the lie that there is no hope for you, wayward child. The cross of Calvary says otherwise.

"The Lord says, 'Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever'" (Hos. 14:4).

Read it again: HIS LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDS.

Kevin Blackwell
via Facebook

An orphaned child of God is left to fall into great danger. Therefore, it takes the family of God to raise a healthy child of God. So, please, don't uncouple evangelism from discipleship within a loving church family.

Daniel Wilson
Director of evangelism
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Our children are watching our habits and routines. Change starts with us.

Aamie Mason
Licensed associate counselor with Living Well Counseling in Little Rock, Arkansas

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

OPINION

> "I'm just thankful for the path that I've been on. ... God is just so good."
>
> COOPER KUPP
> *Most Valuable Player, Super Bowl LVI*

Everyone is doing theology. Some of us are conscious of it, and others are not. Some theology is done well, and some is done poorly. Everyone has something to say about God, so as Christians, why not make it our aim to say things that are good, right and true about Him to the best of our finite abilities?

Jess Leslie
The-Scroll.com

A teenager who begins to protest going to church may not be rebellious. He may be revealing that relationships at church are becoming so weak they do not draw him there. Teenagers live so much in the present that it does not take many scattered absences from church for them to begin feeling distant from leaders and peers. A teenager's complaint about attending on Sundays may be the logical consequence of family decisions to miss now and then.

Chris Shirley
"Family Ministry and The Church"

Unlike happiness, joy comes from deep within and is not based on the uncertain circumstances of the moment.

You can have joy in the midst of extremely difficult life experiences, not because of what you do but because Jesus is the One that gives internal joy.

Adrianna Anderson
Director of women's ministry
Hunter Street Baptist Church
Hoover, Ala.

Sometimes relationships are helped by what you do not say.

Pastor Gary Burton
Pintlala Baptist Church

From the *Twitterverse*

@pastorjaycbc

God wants you to know the gospel, believe the gospel, obey the gospel, be transformed by the gospel and live to proclaim the gospel.

@GreggMatte

When it comes to friendship, four quarters is better than 100 pennies.

@GregMathias

In talking to a church planter ... they spoke about the set times they pray memorized Scripture to combat their fears. The spiritual battle is real. Prayerlessness is not a viable option.

@shane_pruitt78

Sadly, a lot of #exvangelicals have allowed bad experiences, instead of a good gospel, to shape their views of Christianity.

@CatherineRenfro

Rarely do I struggle to find words, but when it comes to planting @HopeChurchJC, I do.

I'm simply in awe of the power and presence of Jesus. I couldn't be more thankful for Him, this faith family, the community we get to serve and those we get to serve with. #OnlyJesus

@kswhitfield

Political judgments are part of living in a social reality. But for those judgments to be Christ honoring they have to meet a certain criteria.

When they don't reach that bar, those judgments arise from a culture that opposes Him and not a culture that He inhabits (Eph. 4:20–24).

@drtonywolfe

The gospel doesn't need to be polished; it just needs to be presented.

It doesn't need a dynamic messenger; just a faithful one.

@Bezner

The day I stopped trying to become a "thing" in the Christian world and instead decided to serve Jesus wherever the Spirit led was the day my ministry actually began. Burn your ambition.

@BurkParsons

Don't believe everything you feel. Our emotions are the greatest liars we know. Preach the truth to your emotions, and the truth will begin to change your emotions by the power of the Spirit.

@nathanafinn

Sometimes ... in a worship service, I see teenage boys who appear to be bored and uninterested.

More often than not, they are sitting with unengaged fathers who never open their Bibles and refuse to sing. Dads, be the spiritual leader you want your sons to one day become.

@matalexander

When I was younger I felt like churches were generally unhealthy and I felt a sense of respite and hope in broader Christian culture.

Now I feel like broader Christian culture is so unhealthy that I'm remarkably glad for the respite and hope I find in the life of my church.

@davidjeremiah

Salvation is a mystery that can be experienced though not totally understood.

The value of a good reputation

Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10b).

Ruth did not expect favor. She was a needy widow and a foreigner in a stranger's field.

Ruth does expect favor to have a motive. The favor she experiences is not common or general, but instead it is directed toward her specifically.

Ruth's life has been fully reported to Boaz: "All that you (Ruth) have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me," he said in verse 11.

Her full story is common knowledge, not only the hardships she has faced but also her faithfulness to Naomi and her willingness to leave behind her family and land — everything familiar — to help Naomi.

Ruth exchanged her native existence for an unknown one with Naomi. She had a reputation as a hardworking, generous, sacrificial and moral person.

Application

Ruth's reputation motivated Boaz's favor toward her.

Reputation influences a person's generosity and how they receive your words.

Ask others to write down your reputation for you to read after they have left.

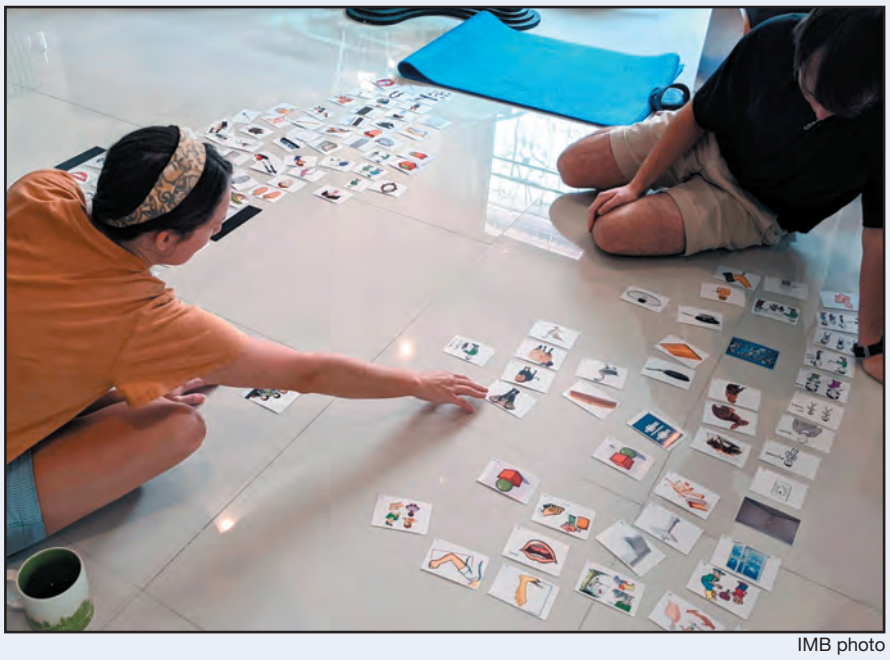
- What did you learn about yourself? What parts of your reputation are weak or strong?
- What kind of favor might a reputation like yours prompt?
- What do you need to do to make your reputation more like Christ's reputation?

God sent Jesus Christ to be an earthly example of His grace and compassion. Strive for Christlikeness in all you do.

Kevin Parker, Editor
Baptist New Mexican and GoBNM.com
From the "Tiny Sermons" series

NEWS

3 stories you should know



IMB photo

Missionaries serving in Southeast Asia through the International Mission Board's Macedonia project practice language skills (above). The Macedonia project allows those called to long-term missions to serve a three-to-four year term that combines online seminary training with ministry on a church planting team, allowing missionaries to enter the field earlier and gain real world experience. Read more at tabonline.org/macedonia-project. (IMB)

SBC Pastors Conference to use historic pulpit

The historic "Bellevue Pulpit" will be used by the 2022 SBC Pastors Conference in Anaheim, California.

Several Southern Baptist Convention presidents, including Adrian Rogers, R.G. Lee and Ramsey Pollard, once preached from behind that pulpit at Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee. The intricately carved pulpit will be transported from Bellevue for the June 12–13 conference, held in conjunction with the SBC Annual Meeting.

This year's Pastors Conference lineup includes 12 pastors. President Matt Henslee said "another page of history" will be written as they "stand behind [the pulpit] to proclaim the Word."

Read more about the Pastors Conference speakers at tabonline.org/pc-pulpit. (Margaret Colson)

GuideStone offers tax guide for ministers

GuideStone has released its most popular annual publication, the 2022 Ministers' Tax Guide for 2021 Returns, available now for GuideStone participants at GuideStone.org/TaxGuide.

The tax guide includes tax highlights for 2021 — including 2022 annual contribution limits, 2022 standard business mileage rates and key features from The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 — along with step-by-step filing instructions for ministers' personal taxes and comprehensive examples and sample forms.

GuideStone participants can receive both free resources by visiting the website or can request a free printed copy of the tax guide by calling 888-98-GUIDE or 844-467-4843. Printed copies are limited. (GuideStone)

Persecuted church

Ugandan Muslim hangs wife, children because of their faith

KAYUNGA DISTRICT, Uganda — A man in Uganda is suspected of hanging his wife and two children after she and one child converted to Christianity from Islam, Morning Star News reported.

A neighbor in Bwetyaba village found Shamira Nakato, 27, and her children — 3 and 8 years old — hanged Dec. 28, the report stated.

Nakato decided to follow Christ following a Christmas church service.

On Dec. 27, she went to a special prayer service. Her husband pulled Nakato out of the church and was seen beating her.

The next day, the mother and children were found hanged inside the home, a source said. Security agencies are seeking Kasimbi.

Uganda's constitution and laws provide for religious freedom.

Muslims make up no more than 12% of the population. Still, Open Doors ranks Uganda as the 69th most difficult country in the world to live as a Christian.

Chinese Christian arrested, tried after holding sign, no verdict given

GUANGZHOU, China — A Chinese Christian arrested on charges of "provoking trouble and picking quarrels" was tried Feb. 11, but no verdict was announced following the trial.

Gao Heng, a Christian attending Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church, is known for sharing the gospel in the streets, protesting abortion and helping to protect the rights of others, bringing him to the attention of the local police, according to China Aid.

On June 4, 2021, the 32nd anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Gao held the sign "June 4, pray for the country," while standing at a Guangzhou subway station.

Photo courtesy of China Aid

After midnight, authorities arrested him, China Aid reported.

Gao was placed in criminal detention until July 2021, at which time he was formally arrested. China Aid reported that it is not uncommon for Christians to be tried in secret.

China is No. 17 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY CARRIE MCWHORTER AND LEIGH PRITCHETT

NEWS

Alabama news

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

South Luverne Baptist Church will have revival services March 6–9. Daniel Wilson, director of the office of evangelism at the State Board of Missions, will be preaching in all services: Sunday, 10:55 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Monday to Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Tom Daniel is interim pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

SHIPP

Bobby Shipp retired as interim pastor of **Fellowship Baptist Church, Birmingham**. He has previously served as pastor of Rock Springs Baptist Church near Tallassee, Sulphur Springs Baptist Church, Stave Creek Baptist Church and First Baptist Church Butler. He also was the associate pastor of Centercrest Baptist Church, Birmingham, and oversaw counseling for 12 years. He went through clinical pastoral counseling at Baptist Montclair in Birmingham and the Samaritan Counseling Program for three years at Baptist Medical Center. He received his bachelor's degree from Samford University and his master's degree from New Orleans Seminary. This is his third time to retire, but he continues to minister to others through his devotional videos on Facebook.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

County Line Baptist Church, Enterprise, is hosting a Spring Fling on March 12, noon to 3 p.m. There will be a hot dog lunch with music, carriage rides, petting zoo, Bobert the balloon guy and door prizes. Mini-workshops will be held on beekeeping, backyard chickens, composting, fruit trees, butterfly gardening, hummingbirds, herb gardening, seed starting and gourds. Call 334-347-6082 for more information. Danny Wiggins is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

ARNOLD

Tony Arnold is the new senior pastor of **Central Heights Baptist Church, Florence**. He previously served as the interim pastor and youth pastor for the church. He studied education at Huntingdon College and is working toward a master's degree at New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Deborah, are expecting their first child.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

Brandon Bruce has been called as pastor of **Mount Zion Southern Missionary Baptist Church, Boaz**. He previously served Friendship Baptist Church, Rome, Georgia. Brandon and his wife, Lezlie, have three children and five grandchildren.

BRUCE

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

BONDURANT

Jake Bondurant is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Flomaton**. He received his master of divinity at New Orleans Seminary. He owns a local coffee shop and roastery, Sophia Coffee. He and his wife, Diana, have five children.

HYDE

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

Adam Hyde is the new pastor of **Bear Creek No. One Baptist Church**. He was licensed and ordained by New Prospect Baptist Church, Haleyville. He and his wife, Mitzi, have four children.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

Photo courtesy of Mylon Metcalf

Mylon Metcalf is the new pastor of **Brindlee Mountain Baptist Church, Lacey's Spring,** where he first began his ministry in the early 1980s as youth pastor (then known as Union Grove Baptist Church).

He holds a bachelor of divinity degree from Heritage Bible College, Huntsville, and has previously led Paint Rock Baptist Church; Shiloh Baptist Church, Scottsboro; First Baptist Church Altoona; and Huntsville Park Baptist Church. His wife of 42 years, **Debbie,** is the church's new worship leader. They have two children and four grandchildren.

COLVIN

Cale Colvin is the new student pastor of **Albertville First Baptist Church**. He previously served in student ministry at Bellevue Baptist, Gadsden, and First Baptist Church Saks, Anniston.

He has a bachelor's degree from Jacksonville State University and is currently enrolled at Midwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Jade, have two children.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

LOGGINS

Micah Loggins is the new associate minister of music and minister to college and graduates at **Enon Baptist Church, Morris**. He holds a bachelor's degree in music technology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a master's degree in worship leadership from Southern Seminary. Loggins served the last five years as worship pastor at Elkdale Baptist Church, Selma. Prior to that he served at First Baptist Church Fairdale, Kentucky.

He and his wife, Rachel, have three children and are foster parents.

LINK

Henry Link III, who formerly held pastoral roles at **Smoke Rise Baptist Church, Warrior,** is the new lead pastor of the Church on the Hill, Dundee, Florida. He holds a bachelor's degree in religion from Liberty University and is working on a master of divinity degree from Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Kayla, have two children.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

QUINTARD

Todd Quintard, former pastor of **New Beginning** church plant in **Phenix City,** is the new pastor of Central Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia. He has served as a youth minister, associate pastor, interim pastor and lead pastor for over 20 years in Georgia and Alabama. He holds a bachelor's degree from Columbus State University and has taken doctorate classes at Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Traci, have two sons.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

Eddy Williams is the new senior adults minister at **Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery**. He has previously served as the church's interim music minister as well as minister of music and youth ministry at two other churches. Most of his career has been in education as a band director while serving bivocationally in music ministry. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Alabama and master's degrees from Troy University and Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Pam, have two children and three grandchildren.

WILLIAMS

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY DIANNA L. CAGLE AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

NEWS

Headline news
from around the Southeast

FLORIDA

More than 400 college students and their leaders gathered Feb. 4–5 at First Baptist Church Daytona Beach for worship, teaching and to pack meals for children, according to the Florida Baptist Witness.

Photo courtesy of Florida Baptist Witness

Cam Triggs, pastor of Grace Alive in Orlando, was the keynote speaker for the event, which was sponsored by the Florida Baptist Convention's Next Generation Ministries. Triggs urged students to place prayer as their first response and not as a last resort. "Prayer is not a vehicle to revival; it is revival itself."

The students packed 3,000 meals for children who attend Title I schools in Daytona Beach to help Florida Baptist Children's Homes' "One More Child" effort.

GEORGIA

Georgia Baptist missionary Jason Cobb is awed by the Lord's power to change lives, even among the most hardened criminals he ministers to in the prisons of Argentina, reports the Christian Index.

Jason and his wife, Natalia, have been called to international missions out of First Baptist Church Fayetteville. They have been working in the prison ministry, called The Puerta del Ciel (Heaven's Door), in Argentina's most violent city, Rosario, for the past six years. "It's the most fruitful ministry I've ever done," Jason Cobb said. Many of the prisoners have been dealing and addicted to drugs since they were teenagers. One prisoner the Cobbs worked with was a young cocaine addict who ended up in prison for theft.

Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

"Going to prison was the best thing that ever happened to him," Cobb said of the young man. "He got sober. He was able to hear the gospel message. He got saved. He got baptized. It was a total change in his life. As a result of his salvation, his entire family has become Christians now. It was a transformation not only for him but for his entire family."

MISSISSIPPI

The Lauderdale Baptist Association recently hosted the East Mississippi Church Revitalization Conference at Highland Baptist Church in Meridian, according to The Baptist Paper.

The conference offered something to all churches, the association's mission strategist John Maxey noted. This included churches that are urban in a changing neighborhood, rural with a dwindling congregation, those dealing with conflict or trying to reach their community well after two years of facing a pandemic.

"We want to equip and strengthen the church," Maxey said of the Jan. 28–29 event.

Two Alabama Baptist pastors were part of the conference: Josh Cook, church revitalization specialist for Birmingham Metro Association and author of "Foundational Revitalization," and Dewayne Rembert, church planting strategist for Montgomery Baptist Association and lead pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm in Montgomery.

NORTH CAROLINA

Biltmore Church, a Southern Baptist church with seven locations in western North Carolina, launched the Big Give initiative in December, reported The Baptist Paper. An annual giving opportunity, this year's primary focus is on helping those left homeless by the Cruso flood, which occurred about 25 minutes from Biltmore's central campus in Arden last August. The church was able to help three families have a new home.

Screenshot from Facebook video

"This is the most contagious generosity I've ever been a part of — ever seen, ever — within a circle of believers," Biltmore's minister of missions Curt McClure said.

Through Big Give and also through partnering with local officials, residents and nonprofits, the church has provided food and other essentials to flood victims. The church has helped with cleanup, including flood recovery (mudouts) and debris removal, and also sends out teams to pray with those impacted by the raging flood.

TENNESSEE

Luke Love and Mary Rachel Gean are serving this semester as campus missionaries with the Baptist Collegiate Ministry at the University of Tennessee at Martin. The two recently led a team of BCM students from the school to help residents of Waverly continue cleanup efforts following a flood last summer, according to the Baptist and Reflector.

Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

Tennessee BCMs have seen an advancement in the campus missionary program across the state through the leadership of Steve Roper, retired BCM director at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

"He has been able to pull together the different approaches across the state BCMs to build consistency and cohesiveness for the future," said Morgan Owen, BCM director at UT-Martin.

LOUISIANA

Miranda Underwood walked into a pregnancy center as a single mother in Alexandria scared and in denial that she was pregnant. But she walked out with hope and a life-giving mindset, reported the Louisiana Baptist Message.

"The first day I found out I was pregnant, abortion crossed my mind, but I knew it was never the right thing to do," Underwood told the Baptist Message. "When I walked into the CENLA Pregnancy Center, I was at the darkest moment in my life."

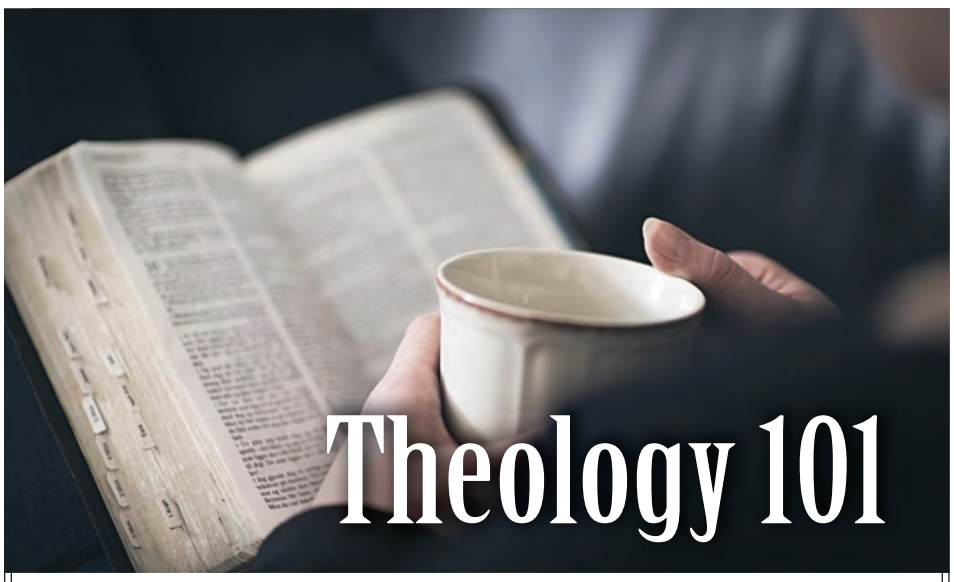
CENLA Pregnancy Center has served 1,064 women through coaching by trained advocates, free pregnancy tests, free ultrasounds, information about pregnancy options and other services.

More than 200 churches from various denominations worked together to establish the pregnancy resource center, a nonprofit, pro-life organization to provide compassionate support to women and men faced with difficult decisions.

Photo by Brian Blackwell/ The Baptist Message

First Baptist Church Pollock began praying in January 2014 about setting up a pregnancy center in central Louisiana. By December 2016, a nine-person board of trustees had been formed, with members, then, from Big Creek, Central Louisiana and North Rapides Baptist associations. Then a $1 annual lease was signed in 2017, a $72,000 annual benefit provided by the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY MARGARET COLSON AND THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The People of God

The Church Universal

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

As noted last week, the imagery of the Church as the body of Christ calls attention to the truth that all believers throughout all time and in all places make up the body.

This calls for us to think of Christ as the head of the body and of the members who individually compose the body itself. This analogy fits both the individual congregation as well as the Church universal.

A reading of 1 Corinthians reveals a local church beset with problems and division. However, it also brings to our attention the idea of the unity of the church as the people of God. A key declaration is, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (12:12).

Function in harmony

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. Church life at its best happens when every member chooses to function in harmony with the others.

Consideration of the members who compose the body compels us to give attention not only to the matter of unity but also to the matter of diversity. First Corinthians puts it like this: "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (v. 14). Later this passage reminds us that "if the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?" (v. 17).

Unique parts

Bodily parts or members are certainly not all alike nor do they all function the same way.

Furthermore, an awareness of being part of one body located in all places also can create a caring heart for the suffering segments of Christ's body. We think of such places as Afghanistan, India, Mozambique and Nigeria, as well as numerous locations in other hostile lands where believers are oppressed, persecuted, kidnapped and martyred every day for their faith.

Since the body of Christ is one body composed of all true believers, when any portion of the body is hurting, the rest should be feeling the pain.

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.

Dallas County churches recognize emergency officials

By Megan Harris
The Alabama Baptist

Northside Baptist Church in Selma recently hosted the fifth annual Law Enforcement and First Responders Appreciation Day. Responders from the sheriff's department, police, firefighters, state troopers, EMS and volunteer fire association in Dallas County attended the Jan. 28 event.

Kathy Smith, organizer and Woman's Missionary Union director for West Central Baptist Association and Northside Baptist, said, "It's my job just to love on them."

Dallas County Sheriff Michael Granthum explained how important the event is to the community.

"Just to be recognized" means a lot to him and the officers he works with, Granthum said. "For people to recognize them and just show their appreciation ... it goes a long way."

A 'much needed' event

Granthum said he also enjoyed the opportunity to gather together. Having a time of fellowship over a meal and conversation allows the responders to connect beyond interactions during work hours.

Captain J.T. Cole agreed that events like this are "much needed." The media often show the negative side, he said, so they have to work to build trust and show they care.

But their job isn't just handcuffs and arrests, Cole noted, saying the priority is "connecting to the people in the community on all levels."

More than 70 local businesses sponsor the event, and volunteers from at least 10 churches helped serve this year. Children from nearby schools and churches made cards and signs to encourage the first responders.

'Kindness in a storm'

When they arrived, first responders went to prayer rooms with a chaplain from Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief. The chaplains blessed the food and prayed over the officers for safety. Then the first responders were served a homemade meal before attending the awards program.

Describing their work as "the kindness in a storm," Lee Tate, associational mission strategist for West Central Baptist Association, thanked them for coming into difficult situations and bringing calm to people's darkest moments.

The event concluded with a ceremony for "Hero of the Year," presented to one dedicated individual in each of the six responder groups.

Department heads, six award recipients and other leaders also received gift baskets, and stuffed animals were collected for the responders to distribute to children during home visits.

Photo by Amy Hacker/The Alabama Baptist

First responders from across Dallas County received lunch and gifts during a recent recognition of law enforcement and first responders hosted by West Central Baptist Association at Northside Baptist Church in Selma.

Church planter Trey Van Camp baptizes a new believer at Passion Creek Church in Queen Creek, Arizona. Working with churches in nearby Phoenix to raise up church planters is what Alabama-native Jesse Powell does in his role with the North American Mission Board.

Photo courtesy of Jesse Powell

ANNIE ARMSTRONG EASTER OFFERING PREVIEW

A passion for church planting

Annie Armstrong offering helps Alabama native expand church plants in Phoenix

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Jesse Powell was a student at Troy University, he spent a summer as a missionary at the Grand Canyon, a summer he didn't know would start him on a path.

"God used that season to plant seeds in my heart about being in the West," Powell said.

But at first those seeds didn't lead to ministry — they led to marrying a young woman he met in Arizona and moving there for work.

Different kind of passion

"My major was risk management and insurance; I had no interest in being in ministry," Powell said.

But after he and his wife, Stefanie, moved back to Alabama because of the lower cost of living, they got involved in Journey Church, a church plant in Prattville. And God began to plant a different kind of passion in Powell's heart — for church planting.

"We began to feel like God was calling us, and I just assumed it was to plant a church," Powell explained.

But God had something slightly different in mind, he noted — a role in the West as a church planting catalyst. He and his family moved seven years ago to help churches in Phoenix identify, train and send out planters to start new churches.

When they did, they joined more than 2,200 North American Mission Board missionaries working to reach the estimated 275 million lost people in North America. That mission field is complex and made up of many cultures, languages and religions.

And all those missionaries are supported in some way by the Annie

"Phoenix is one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S. There's a net gain of more than 200 people a day moving to the metro area."

Jesse Powell, NAMB missionary

Photo courtesy of Jesse Powell

Jesse Powell, NAMB church planting catalyst, with his wife, Stefanie, and their children: (l to r) LynnLee, Wyatt, Selah, Gabriel and Lainee.

Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, 100% of which goes directly to fund missionary work. The national offering goal this year is $70 million, with the Alabama goal set at $6 million.

The AAEO season of giving begins with the Week of Prayer for North American Missions March 6–13, highlighting stories of missionaries who, like the Powells, are supported by the offering in their work across North America.

In Phoenix alone, that's a big task, Powell said.

"Phoenix is one of the fastest-growing cities in the U.S. There's a net gain of more than 200 people a day moving to the metro area. We're having trouble keeping up with the growth."

For more information or resources to promote the AAEO, visit anniearmstrong.com.

That's why a catalyst role like Powell's is so important — he's constantly working with churches to start new congregations to reach the sprawling city, and find new church planters to move to Phoenix to help with the task.

Giving and going

He asked for prayer for more partners to come alongside both in giving and going — like Elmore Baptist Association, who sent missions teams to work with churches in the city and help expand their reach.

Powell also requested prayer for pastors in Phoenix to be encouraged.

"For them, like for many people, the last couple of years have been very difficult," he noted. "They need encouragement to keep pressing on."

Meet this year's featured missionaries

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UNITED TO REACH THE NATIONS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

An estimated 275 million people in North America are lost. NAMB supports more than 3,000 missionaries and their families and endorses more than 3,500 Southern Baptist chaplains to meet this vast need. Here are just a few of those who serve.

NAMB photo

MICHAEL & TRACI BYRD

St. Louis, Missouri

Michael and Traci Byrd never expected to return to inner-city St. Louis. But armed with the gospel and an unimaginably good macaroni and cheese recipe, they are reaching one of the most difficult neighborhoods in the U.S. for Christ.

NAMB photo

ITAMAR ELIZALDE

Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

It's been crisis after crisis — hurricanes, earthquakes, pandemics, economic struggles — for Puerto Rico, an island in need of hope. And Itamar Elizalde helps teams of volunteers bring that hope — both practical and spiritual — to Puerto Ricans in crisis.

NAMB photo

JARED & JENNIFER HUNTLEY

Washington, D.C.

Military life comes with unique challenges, which those outside the culture could never fully understand. That's why army veteran Jared Huntley and his wife, Jen, feel uniquely qualified to reach servicemen and women in Washington, D.C., with the light of Christ.

NAMB photo

STEVEN & CINDY MARTINS

St. Catharines, Ontario

Hospitality is opening doors to the gospel in the Niagara region of Canada. For missionaries Steven and Cindy Martins, each cup of coffee is an opportunity to build relationships and reach new people with the good news of Christ.

NAMB photo

BRIANNA McKINNEY

Denver, Colorado

The numbers just don't add up. Denver's marijuana dispensaries and breweries drastically outnumber evangelical churches. People are looking for solutions in all the wrong places, but missionary Brianna McKinney is there to give them the real answer.

NAMB photo

AMER & VICKY SAFADI

Cincinnati, Ohio

Many Arabic-speaking countries are closed to missionaries. But when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a Cincinnati-based, Arabic-speaking church to meet online, it opened opportunities for people around the world to hear the gospel in their heart language from North American missionaries Amer and Vicky Safadi.

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UNITED IN PRAYER

The missionaries spotlighted in the Week of Prayer for North American Missions represent a larger missionary force. The prayers and gifts of Southern Baptists are a vital part of thir work. Read more about these missionaries and find prayer prompts in the daily prayer guide.

To download the prayer guide, visit anniearmstrong.com/week-of-prayer.

Mobile pianist 'service-oriented' from Super Bowl to Carnegie Hall

By David Roach
The Alabama Baptist

Photo by Al Miller/The Alabama Baptist

Bob Holm, pianist at Shiloh Baptist Church in Saraland, is also principal pianist for the Mobile Symphony.

Bob Holm performed in the 1988 Super Bowl halftime show for millions of viewers, but his appearance was emblematic of what he has done for decades: use his virtuoso musical talent not to steal the spotlight but to help others shine.

Super Bowl XXII in San Diego wanted 88 grand pianos to accompany Chubby Checker and The Radio City Rockettes in "The Super Bowl Twist." Holm auditioned and was chosen.

"We were bused in just in time to do the halftime show and bused out immediately after," he recalled, "so we didn't see any of the game."

Holm, who plays weekly at Shiloh Baptist Church in Saraland, went on to earn a doctorate in piano performance. He also is a Steinway Artist, which means Steinway dealers across the world supply him with concert grand pianos anywhere he's asked to play.

Out of the limelight

Despite his accomplishments, the nature of Holm's instrument tends to take him out of the limelight. Most of the time he's accompanying others — a role that fits well with his Christian faith, he said.

"Pianists, more than any other musicians, are people who support everything else that's going on," Holm noted. "We have very little say most of the time in what we are going to play, but we find enjoyment in playing anything we're assigned."

The piano is "a service-oriented instrument," he added.

His musical and Christian journeys began around the same time.

Growing up in California, Holm's parents were both in music ministry, first at a Baptist church in Redlands, then at Skyline Wesleyan Church in Lemon Grove when author John Maxwell was pastor.

Sitting on a pew through choir rehearsals, Holm came to faith in Christ and began to play piano before he can remember.

Holm started piano lessons at age 5 and was able to play a "semi-difficult piece" by 6.

When he reached college, piano practice comprised three to four hours per day.

After earning a scholarship to a graduate school of his choice, Holm went to the University of Illinois where he earned master of music and doctor of musical arts degrees.

Then trouble hit. He searched for a job unsuccessfully for two years.

The situation forced him to confront a question: Could a humble, quiet musician who felt happiest serving others make a career out of music?

God answered "yes" when Holm was appointed professor of music at the University of South Alabama in 1997.

During that time, he has given recitals in China, Brazil, London and Carnegie Hall in addition to playing 53 solo recitals at South Alabama and 260 recitals with other faculty and guest artists.

Music opens doors

At times music has opened doors to share his faith, especially when non-believing colleagues play pieces with Christian lyrics or themes and are forced to study them.

Since joining Shiloh Baptist in 2018, he has become known for his piano specials and a series of Sunday afternoon recitals he calls "Hymns and Classics."

> ***"Pianists, more than any other musicians, are people who support everything else that's going on."***
>
> **Bob Holm**
> **pianist**

Holm "exhibits the rare qualities of musical excellence and humility," said Al Miller, Shiloh minister of music and dean of the University of Mobile's Alabama School of the Arts. "Those two qualities rarely share the same platform.

"Bob is one of my favorite musicians and a joy with which to work and minister."

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102.

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. "In the morning, Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You and wait expectantly" (Ps. 5:3).

PASTOR
Pathway Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala., is seeking a full-time pastor. For details and qualifications, please email questions or forward resumé to: avpbcdothan@gmail.com, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, or mail to: Pathway Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 3551 Flowers Chapel Road, Dothan, AL 36305.

PASTOR
Horseshoe Bend Baptist Church seeks a full-time pastor. In prayer for supply pastors also. Please send resumé to: horseshoebendbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

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, Ala., 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.

PART-TIME COLLEGE MINISTER
Parkway Baptist Church, Auburn, is seeking a part-time person called by God to ministry who is highly motivated to teach, disciple and pour into the lives of college-aged individuals. Duties will include: teaching/leading on Sundays mornings and at other appropriate times, planning times of fellowship, offering avenues of opportunities for ministry and missions and equipping students to reach other students. This position would seek to use a team approach to ministry. Some experience preferred. Send resumés/inquiries to: jeff@parkwayauburn.org or call 334-887-3782.

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: cmsc@ehbc.church.

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ALABAMA
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Ephesians 4:11 says evangelists are God's gifts to the church. Therefore, it is my honor to recommend to you these Alabama Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists. I encourage you to use them in your churches and associations. Also, pray for them and their families as they faithfully and passionately spread the gospel. Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."

— DANIEL WILSON

director of the evangelism office, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

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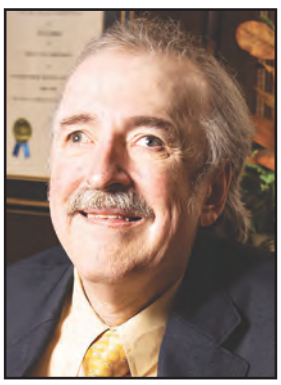

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ALABAMA HALL OF FAITH EVANGELISTS

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Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

Paid Advertising

Maintain an online presence

Churches should use available channels to reach communities near, far

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

Photo illustration by Lauren A. Chow

More than 8 out of 10 Americans use social media, which is why churches should reach their communities through wise use of various popular platforms. Stories of change and calls to action make for especially effective posts.

Running out of good church social media ideas?

It's important that your posts actually make a difference. Your members are getting together regularly on their favorite social media channels to be entertained, challenged and informed. So the local church needs to be present with the right content.

Statista reports 82% of Americans use social media. It's the way many start and finish their day. But it's challenging to come up with church social media ideas that truly engage members.

Instead, it often turns into straight promotion. And rarely does anyone tune into any media offering only ads. The church, full of content that matters, needs to do better.

Consider these seven church social media ideas that will actually make a difference — for the church and community.

1. Highlight ministries. Focus on more than just events. Take pictures or videos of the way lives are being changed through ministries, and create posts that will challenge people to join in.

Cleverly include in each post who it's for, a clear benefit of participating and a link to the ministry's webpage.

Sermon illustrations

2. Pull sermon illustrations. Listen during sermons for illustrations and illustrate them. Show visually what the pastor talked about and post a summary of the story, or show an edited video of the pastor sharing it.

Include a link to the entire sermon (for context) and give a timecode so they can easily find it.

3. Entertain around your thread. Your church should be known for something beneficial and needed.

Let's call it a "thread" because it weaves through all ministries and makes your mission practical. Since social media followers like to be entertained, put a smile on their faces with posts around the thread.

4. Request volunteers. Most ministries need more volunteers, so show opportunities or picture volunteers doing a great job and link to your church's volunteer opportunities webpage.

5. Ask questions about the sermon series. Coordinate with the pastor to ask pertinent questions to set up the upcoming sermon or the one that just happened.

Struggle with post engagement? Ask volunteers to prime the pump with a few answers. That'll push the post to more people.

Community impact

6. Highlight community impact. You are impacting your community, aren't you? Take pictures of your community and how your church is helping.

Even a member in a customer service job shows community influence. It doesn't have to be something controlled by church leadership.

7. Tell a story of change. Talk to church members (or leaders); you'll hear lots of church social media ideas from the way God is moving or challenging them.

Share stories, in text or video. Stories inspire like public testimonial times did (or do). Just edit them to something concise.

"Show visually what the pastor talked about and post a summary of the story, or show an edited video of the pastor sharing it."

Mark MacDonald
church branding strategist

EDITOR'S NOTE — Mark MacDonald is a communication pastor, speaker, consultant, bestselling author, church branding strategist for BeKnownforSomething.com and executive director of the Center for Church Communication, empowering 10,000+ churches to become known for something relevant (a communication thread) throughout their ministries, websites and social media. His book, "Be Known for Something," is available at BeKnownBook.com.

Social media needs to attract, engage

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

The community isn't listening to my church." It's a difficult statement I hear from many pastors. Is it that the church message is wrong? Is it that people don't want spiritual truth? Or are there other reasons the community isn't listening?

It's important to make sure your gospel message isn't ignored, since the church often can be blamed for the way a message is communicated.

If you find your community isn't listening to church messaging, there usually are 3 reasons why (and here are some solutions):

1. It's a noisy world. People are bombarded with so much information every day — desired and unwanted, promotional, entertaining and informational. In fact, notifications interrupt online communication to redirect us to even more information.

TV has information scrolling over talking heads with infographics behind them — all at the same time! It's impossible to keep up with everything. In fact, if you try, you end up missing details. For sanity, people have to decide what's important and what can be ignored.

If anything feels like it's adding to the noise for no perceived benefit, it's simply tuned out.

SOLUTION: Calm your messaging and designs for all channels.

Rather than several disconnected and complex items, speak in unison with one main beneficial message across all ministries so you become known for it.

People tend to spend more time on calm webpages.

2. You're not talking to them. We've been there: a busy room with lots of discussions.

You end up ignoring all the communication channels because nothing feels directed to you. Until someone says your name. Then you listen.

In our loud, noisy world, if messaging isn't directed at specific people in your community it usually will be ignored.

Then, when your community isn't listening, it's difficult to get them to pay attention again.

The sad truth? Our communities stopped listening a long time ago as church communication focused internally on the congregation using acronyms, insider language or clever sub-brands that didn't connect outside.

SOLUTION: Know who you're talking to in your community ("personas") and say their name (i.e., parents), their pain (i.e., Have problems finding time?) or a solution to their needs (i.e., A night out on us!) and you'll get their attention for a few seconds. It's in that brief engagement that you need to provide beneficial information.

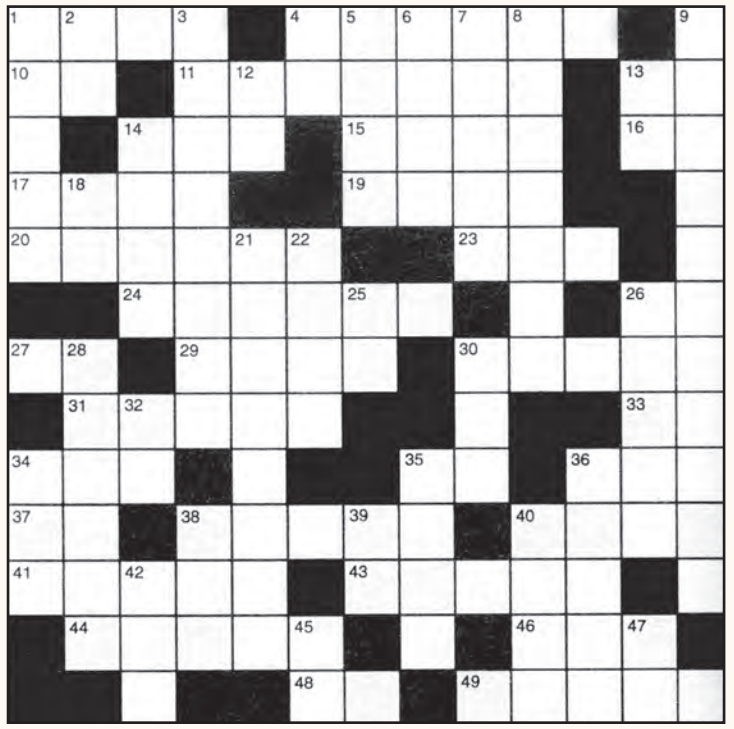
3. You're saying too much. Attention spans are dropping drastically. A study from a few years ago determined they're as low as 8 seconds.

The community isn't listening because they lost interest faster than it took you to deliver your message. Stop talking before they stop listening. It's difficult to say everything we want because the Bible is full of great messages.

SOLUTION: Edit your communication to attract and engage.

Only after they trust you to not waste their time can you give them more. Even then, edit, edit, edit. Lead with their name, concern or goal, then give them a snippet so they will click to find out more; or keep listening because you understand and love them.

CHRISTIAN crossword



By Bethany Keeny Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

ACROSS

1. The ___ our God will we serve. (Josh. 24:24)
4. The Lord smelled a sweet ___. (Gen. 8:21)
10. ___ they can save thee. (Jer. 2:28)
11. Any ___ thing shall not be eaten. (Lev. 7:19)
13. Tennessee. (abbr.)
14. This ___ that.
15. Miscellaneous. (abbr.)
16. ___ if he shall ask an egg. (Luke 11:12)
17. And shall ___ thee on a tree. (Gen. 40:19)
19. To cut.
20. I give ___ of all that I possess. (Luke 18:12)
23. ___ thou at my right hand. (Ps. 110:1)
24. "___ Night, Holy Night."
26. ___ that men would praise the Lord. (Ps. 107:31)
27. Charity suffereth long, and ___ kind. (1 Cor. 13:4)
29. Jacob married ___ after the first seven years of work. (Gen. 29:23)
30. Very slow to move.
31. Smote him with the ___ of their hands. (Matt. 26:67)
33. Delaware. (abbr.)
34. Is ___ for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)
35. Opposite of "out."
36. ___ the Lion.
37. And Huppim, the children of ___. (1 Chron. 7:12)
38. ___ the high priest, and Caiaphas. (Acts 4:6)
40. Home of the Andes mountains.
41. Opposite of "wrong."
43. God caused a deep ___ to fall upon Adam. (Gen. 2:21)
44. To pester.
46. Dead ___.
48. Second note of the musical scale.
49. And I will raise ___ against thee. (Isa. 29:3)

DOWN

1. Neither do men ___ a candle. (Matt. 5:15)
2. Ye are the light ___ the world. (Matt. 5:14)
3. For the land, nor yet for the ___. (Luke 14:35)
4. South Carolina. (abbr.)
5. Do not your ___ before men. (Matt. 6:1)
6. The ___ of the temple was rent. (Luke 23:45)
7. A body of water in the desert.
8. But ye have an ___ from the Holy One. (1 John 2:20)
9. Is God ___ who taketh vengeance? (Rom. 3:5)
12. North Dakota. (abbr.)
13. Paul was told ___ go ___ Macedonia. (one word)
14. Go to the ___s, thou sluggard. (Prov. 6:6)
18. Joshua sent men from Jericho to ___. (Josh. 7:2)
21. The ___ shall melt with fervent heat. (2 Pet. 3:10)
22. The waters called he ___. (Gen. 1:10)
25. New Hampshire. (abbr.)
26. And laid the wood in ___. (Gen. 22:9)
28. I will pour out my ___ unto you. (Prov. 1:23).
30. There was no room in the ___.
32. Did eat ___ thine own table. (2 Sam. 19:28)
34. I am like a green ___ tree. (Hos. 14:8)
35. John was exiled to the ___ of Patmos. (Rev. 1:9)
36. Jesus healed 10, but only one ___ thanked Him. (Luke 17:12–17)
38. Of their shame that say ___, aha. (Ps. 70:3)
39. ___ the hart panteth. (Ps. 42:1)
40. Mexican money.
42. Precious jewel.
45. A suffix used to show comparison.
47. ___ her feet he bowed. (Judg. 5:27)

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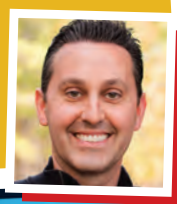

MARCH 13-14, 2022
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SUNDAY EVENING
Ronnie Hill & Ed Litton

MONDAY MORNING
Tim Beougher & Tom Richter

For both events, the Sunday session begins at 5:30 p.m. and Monday sessions are 9-11:30 a.m.

Sunday evening sessions at both locations are being livestreamed at live.alsbom.org. If you can't attend in person, consider gathering a group and participating online!

Ministers' Wives Gathering at both locations, Monday 9-10:30 a.m. More info at alabamawmu.org/ministerswivesgathering

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This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

evangelizeAL.org/sharinghope

Christ-loving

Central Baptist Church's library/resource center 'unmatched' across state

(continued from page 1)

"This Bible is my favorite Bible — 30-plus years old," Berg explained.

"I found out that one of the things that they did in the Serving Center is to repair Bibles. [Mine] was worn out; the pages were coming loose and would get out of order, and the cover was worn. It just looked awful," she said.

"I brought it up here and asked Miss Eva Nell, 'Would you repair my Bible for me?' They did that and now it looks beautiful, and I'm sure it will hold up for another 30-something years. I just hope I do!"

Another example of Hunter's dedication is her work with Jonathan Spears, executive pastor of Central Baptist.

Spears had only been at the church a year when he approached Hunter about including more information about discipleship.

Upon hearing that, Hunter jumped in and offered to create a special area of the library just for disciple-making resources.

"She quickly got two shelves put up and got some signs made that designate that as the disciple-making area of the library," Spears remembered. "We worked together to figure out what books need to go in that section.

"She has such an eagerness and willingness to come alongside the church as a whole.

"She's always gracious and appreciative," Spears said. "Her passion for the Lord and for His Kingdom work is evident in everything she does."

Hunter also organizes the North Alabama Church Library Conference every year, with at least 100 attending from Alabama and surrounding states, and she has started libraries for missionaries overseas in years past.

Global impact

"When [my husband and I] knew we were going to another country, we would look up the missionaries there, and then we would call them and ask, 'What is your greatest need?' and invariably — they had no idea what we did — (they'd say), 'We'd love to have a church library,'" Hunter related.

Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

The Serving Center is available not only to members of Central Baptist Church in Decatur, but also to the community. The Noah's Ark room contains stuffed animals for children to use.

And because of her perseverance, noted by several as the main attribute they learned from her, she always got those libraries started.

Amanda Thompson, assistant librarian at the Serving Center since 2005, shared about one library at a seminary in the Ivory Coast.

"Since she wasn't going to be able to go on that particular trip, we were going to try to help with some of the cataloging," Thompson recalled.

"We had the computer program they were going to be using and a list of the books they had. The only problem was all the titles were in French. We went through the list and translated all the titles into English so we could get the right Dewey number for them."

Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Lonette Berg (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission shares how Eva Nell Hunter and the Serving Center team repaired her Bible.

Rob Jackson, director of the office of church health for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and former pastor of Central Baptist, also participated in the January service.

"Eva Nell is one of the most Christ-loving, missions-minded, pastor-supporting and diligent-serving persons that I know," Jackson said.

"She has given her life to furthering the gospel through her library ministry. As she served with me at Central Baptist Church, I was often amazed at her tireless work ethic. Everything she does is always with excellence."

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 27

Explore the Bible

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

CONFESSION MADE
Daniel 9:4–19

Daniel was a student of the prophets. Decades earlier, Jeremiah had prophesied Jerusalem would remain in desolation for 70 years (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10). When did the desolation begin? When would the 70 years be complete? Would Daniel ever return to Jerusalem? In order to understand this prophecy accurately, Daniel approached the Lord through prayer, fasting and an attitude of mourning.

Confession Made (4–6)

In the Old Testament, godly men openly confessed sin. David confessed his personal sin publicly after being confronted by the prophet Nathan. Jewish civil leaders confessed and repented for the sins of the nation, as recorded in Nehemiah 1 and Daniel 9, among other Scripture.

These men acknowledged how generations of Israelites had abandoned their covenant relationship with God to serve other gods, asserting God was just in His sentence of exile upon the people.

Daniel alludes to Deuteronomy 7:9 when he confesses the Lord "keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands." By contrast to their righteous God, Daniel confesses a litany of transgressions committed by Israel, Judah and their leaders.

They "sinned," they have "done wrong," they "acted wickedly," they "rebelled," they "turned away from His commands and ordinances" and they have "not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, leaders, fathers and all the people of the land."

Righteousness Seen (7–14)

Daniel continues his twofold confession in this next passage: God is righteous, and His people have acted shamefully.

This passage begins and ends with acknowledging the Lord is right in all He does. God clearly revealed His covenant criteria through "the prophets," "His instructions" and "the law of Moses." The curses about which Moses warned them in Deuteronomy 28 were being fulfilled because God keeps His word and because His people failed to obey Him.

By contrast, note the themes of Daniel's confessional prayer regarding their wickedness: He notes their "public shame" and "disloyalty," saying "we have sinned against you," "we have rebelled" and they "have not obeyed." The confession continues: "All Israel has broken your law and turned away." The exile, Daniel confesses, is the direct result of rebelling against the Torah.

Forgiveness Sought (15–19)

God's nature is to forgive all who repent of their sin and trust in Him. At Sinai, He revealed this truth to Moses in Exodus 34:6–7: "The Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth ... forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin." These characteristics of God are echoed throughout the Old Testament.

God's people take this compassion for granted, assuming God will forgive them whether they repent or not. They fail to recognize faith is required to walk in fellowship with God — faith, not presumption or self-righteousness.

Daniel understood his assurance of God hearing his prayer was not based upon his own righteousness, but upon God's compassion.

And God would answer petitions on behalf of Jerusalem and the temple only for the honor of His Name: "My God, for your own sake, do not delay because your city and your people bear your name," Daniel pleas.

Studying national prayers of confession from Nehemiah and Daniel provides instruction for Christians today. Human history is stained with sin. Though we and our fathers have been unjust toward others in our national and family history, we have ultimately acted shamefully against God.

He "now commands all people everywhere to repent" and trust Christ (Acts 17:30–31). Only then can we receive His forgiveness.

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University

THE PITFALL OF GUILT AND GRUDGES
Genesis 50:15–21

The actions of Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37 rank among the worst acts of betrayal in Scripture. Joseph may not have been a perfect brother — far from it — but the brothers' attack sets them alongside David in his betrayal of faithful Uriah and Judas in his betrayal of Christ Himself. As Reuben later admits, they had callously ignored Joseph's pleas for help when they threw him in the pit (42:21). Adding insult to injury was the torment the brothers put their father through when they bloodied Joseph's coat and sent it back to him (37:32).

Suspicion appears to have lingered over the brothers. When Jacob saw his family suffering greatly from the famine, he sent his sons to Egypt to find food — except for Benjamin, that is. Jacob refused to send him because "he feared harm might come to him" (42:4). Jacob may have harbored suspicions the brothers were not entirely innocent in the matter of Joseph's supposed death.

Joseph's continuing distrust of his brothers is evident in the way he puts them to the test when they come to Egypt to buy grain. First, he insists they bring Benjamin with them on a return visit to Egypt, and holds Simeon hostage until they do. When Benjamin finally does come to Egypt with his brothers, Joseph has his men plant a silver cup in Benjamin's sack, then confront them over the theft.

What Joseph wants to see is whether the brothers will turn on Benjamin the way they had once turned on him. It is only when the brothers plead on Benjamin's behalf that Joseph knows their attitudes have changed and he is finally able to reveal himself.

Your guilt does not imply another's grudge. (15–18)

For the brothers' part, Joseph's revelation of his true identity was a moment both of relief (that they had not actually killed him) and renewed fear (that he might exact revenge). Though Joseph insisted God had used the brothers' actions to help him save many lives, it would be difficult not to worry Joseph might one day remember his anger toward them and act on it. This fear was never more palpable than when Joseph's father, Jacob, finally died.

Refocus on God's providence. (19–20)

As long as Jacob was alive, Joseph killing his brothers would only cause sorrow for his father. Now that Jacob had passed from the scene, Joseph could do as he wished to his treacherous half-brothers without fear of repercussion. They saw the trouble they were in and pleaded with Joseph to forgive them. They claimed — whether truly or not no one can say — that Jacob had asked Joseph to forgive them before he died. What would Joseph do?

Fortunately for the brothers, Joseph did just as he had said he would. Rather than harm them, he forgave his brothers.

Receive God's forgiveness and comfort. (21)

As Joseph asked, "Am I in the place of God?" he agreed with the notion that vengeance belongs to God and not individuals. He did not shy away from admitting the brothers had "planned evil against me," but he also recognized God's sovereign direction. So even his brothers' deceitfulness had served to put Joseph in the life-saving position he now occupied.

Many centuries later, James, the brother of Jesus, would insist, "Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires" (James 1:20). Had Joseph avenged himself against his brothers, his own feelings of anger might have been assuaged. In the process, though, he would have inflicted tremendous harm on the divine promise to Israel. By forgiving his brothers, Joseph, perhaps even without knowing he was doing so, kept alive the hopes of an entire nation.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust
The Alabama Baptist

‘Little House’ filled with life lessons, now free on Peacock TV

Fans of classic television let out a collective groan in January when they woke up in a new year to discover that one of their favorite series — “The Andy Griffith Show” — had disappeared from Amazon Prime Video.

No longer could they watch the adventures of Andy and Barney for free as part of their Prime subscription.

Even worse: The hit series didn’t land on another major streaming platform.

But classic TV fans shouldn’t fret, because there are plenty of solid options — including a major new one that is completely free.

My go-to for old-time television in recent weeks has been “Little House on the Prairie,” which is streaming on the free side of Peacock TV. The series follows the trials and triumphs of the Ingalls family in 1870s Minnesota. All nine seasons are available.

“LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE” Photo courtesy of NBC

Classic entertainment

The series — as you likely know — is based on a biographical book by Laura Ingalls Wilder and aired on NBC from 1974 to 1983. It starred Michael Landon as Charles Ingalls, Karen Grassle as Caroline and Melissa Gilbert as Laura.

A winner of four Primetime Emmys, “Little House” was a family-centric drama that taught viewers about contentment, determination and love.

The Ingalls worked hard for everything they owned while exhibiting joy and peace amid hardship.

It’s a series that has plenty of lessons for our rich, me-centric Western world.

“Little House” isn’t the only classic show on Peacock TV. While there, you may want to check out “The Dick Van Dyke Show,” “The Carol Burnett Show” and “Highway to Heaven.”

All are free.

Of course you’ll have to endure a few commercials on the free side of Peacock TV.

But for the price, it’s probably worth it.

Peacock TV is available at PeacockTV.com and on all major streaming platforms.

Other options

Also worth watching this month:

▸ ***“Freelancers,” Season Two (Angel Studios) —*** A group of quirky friends run a video production company on a shoestring budget.

This hilarious, family-friendly comedy series was released by the same company, Angel Studios, behind “The Chosen.” Season Two is available on the Angel Studios app. (Season One tallied 7 million views on YouTube.)

“DESPICABLE ME” Screenshot

▸ ***“Home Sweet Home Alone” (Disney Plus) —*** A boy is left alone at home during the Christmas season and must fend off two burglars who are trying to steal a high-priced toy.

It’s the latest chapter in the “Home Alone” franchise and includes a new cast, although one character in the old movies — the bully brother named “Buzz” — is now a policeman. Rated TV-PG.

▸ ***“Despicable Me”/ “Despicable Me 2” (Netflix) —*** A heartless outlaw named Gru (Steve Carell) hatches a plan to steal the moon in order to become the world’s most famous supervillain. However, his outlook on life is dramatically changed when he adopts three young girls who soften his heart.

The first two films in the “Despicable Me” franchise entered the Netflix lineup Feb. 1. Both are rated PG for rude humor and mild action. Animated.

▸ ***“The Jesus Music”/“Show Me the Father” (Home Video) —*** The two best faith-based documentaries of 2021 are now on home video. “The Jesus Music,” directed by Jon and Andrew Erwin, tells the history of contemporary Christian music beginning in the 1960s. The film includes appearances by artists Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, DC Talk, CeCe Winans and more.

“Show Me the Father,” produced by Mark Miller with executive producers Alex and Stephen Kendrick, spotlights the fatherhood of God alongside inspiring stories of earthly fathers. Commentary by Tony Evans connects the stories.

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.

MEET THE REVIEWER

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

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