The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE

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American sumo wrestler finds peace and guidance in journey to World Games

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Dale Association jail ministry feeding inmates' hunger for the gospel

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Faith Baptist Church in Myra, Kentucky, is hit hard by recent flooding. Disaster Relief volunteers from Marshall Baptist Association worked several days to clean out the church.

Facebook photo

Joining together to help

Disaster Relief volunteers make 'slow but steady progress' in Kentucky

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Around 50 Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are at work in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, helping residents recover from the state's worst flood on record.

Cookie Baker, who is serving at the command center, said while every disaster relief deployment has its challenges, access to the homeowners has been especially difficult in Elkhorn City.

'Only flat place'

"The mountain goes straight up here, so the houses are built along the creek because it's the only flat place," she said.

Residents there usually access their homes from narrow bridges built across the creek from the road, but the flooding washed many of those bridges away.

"In some cases, the volunteers are having to get their tools from the trailer and walk across the creek to get to the homes," Baker said. "It's difficult on the teams trying to help."

Mark Wakefield, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said what he's hearing overall is that teams are making "slow but steady progress" and are happy to have volunteers from other state conventions joining them in the work as well.

So far, 13 Disaster Relief teams from state conventions have responded to help with flood relief.

"One of the outstanding things about disaster relief, you really do see it — folks work together to get it done," Wakefield said.

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers have put in around 8,000 volunteer hours so far in the parts of eastern Kentucky affected by the flooding.

Serving residents

For Alabama Baptist volunteers, that work meant flood recovery and mold prevention, but it also meant manning two laundry units set up there to allow flood victims to wash clothes.

(*See 'Resilient,' page 17*)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Recipients of the inaugural Dr. Rick Lance Sunday School Leader Award are (from left) Lawrence Phipps, Morgan Bailey, John Thomas and Cindy Thomas. Also pictured are state missionaries Rick Lance, Daniel Edmonds and Steve Layton.

Small group leaders gather for annual conference

This year's Pinnacle conference, an annual event for small group Bible study leaders organized by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, included numerous workshops and a new award for Sunday School leaders.

Held Aug. 5–6 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, this year's conference focused on four areas of discipleship: loving God and others well, investing in the community, focusing on God's word and engaging the world with the gospel.

The program included workshops for traditional age-group teachers, along with new specialty tracks for Sunday School leaders, pastors and those in churches with around 100 in attendance.

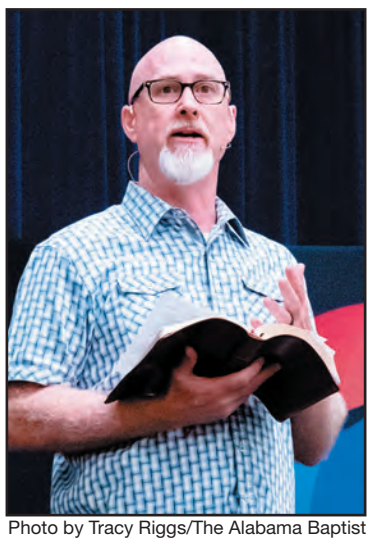

Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Craig Etheredge, pastor of FBC Colleyville, Texas, speaks on spiritual awakening Aug. 5 at Pinnacle Alabama.

Conversations

A number of "conversation outposts" were held for less formal discussions of current issues facing Bible study leaders. A prayer and counseling room also was available.

Steve Layton, SBOM lead strategist for groups, noted a good attendance at this year's Pinnacle.

"We know that many church leaders have been severely impacted by the pandemic," Layton said. "This year there was renewed interest in meeting and learning together."

New award

During the Friday night worship time, SBOM introduced a new award named in honor of Executive Director Rick Lance. The first Dr. Rick Lance Sunday School Leader Award was given to Lance. Other inaugural recipients were Lawrence Phipps, pastor of First Baptist Gulf Shores; Morgan Bailey, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne; Cindy Thomas, children's minister at First Baptist Church Dothan; and John Thomas, associational mission strategist for Southeast Alabama Baptist Association.

Layton said a number of the Pinnacle workshops were recorded and will be posted at makingdisciplesal.com, a website dedicated to discipleship resources. (Michael J. Brooks)

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

Thank you for making it possible to serve you in our calling

Can you imagine your week without The Alabama Baptist newspaper or its digital counterparts? I can't, and I'm so grateful we don't have to thanks to your continued support, encouragement and engagement.

It's such an honor to hold the reins during this current season — reins that are soaked and strengthened with 179 years of love, sweat and commitment from 12 other editors before me.

As far as the editors from the 20th and 21st centuries, I join in with what you've read and heard through the years from L.L. Gwaltney, Leon Macon, Hudson Baggett and Bob Terry — we couldn't do what we do without the amazing gifts and talents shared by our faithful team members.

I'm so proud of our team at TAB Media Group. Think about all the moving parts:

- The Alabama Baptist weekly print edition and digital edition
- The Baptist Paper print edition (every other week) and digital edition
- Daily coverage posted on thealabamabaptist.org
- Daily coverage posted on thebaptistpaper.org
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- Annual coverage and production of Fruitful magazine
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- Social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube
- Resourcing and assistance for churches and others needing help navigating the digital world
- Specialized workshops
- Advertising, subscriber and donor development
- Staying connected

It takes a variety of staff working in and out of each aspect.

Some are writers, editors, fact checkers and producers. Others are designing pages, analyzing data, checking print quality and running the business side of things. Still, others are developing code, upgrading software, and managing databases, while some are communicating with callers, sharing about opportunities and problem solving.

All the roles intertwine at multiple junctures.

Watching how easily they move in sync with each other — building each other up, backing each other up and pivoting around every obstacle — is something to behold.

As individuals, they are committed followers of Jesus and deeply invested in their families, friends, churches and communities. As a group, they are working together to bring you the best of what is possible through the pages of The Alabama Baptist and our endless supply of online offerings.

Celebrating 2022's

Read The Alabama Baptist Day

Aug. 21 by celebrating you!

Thank you for continuing to hold the ropes for those called to media ministries and Baptist journalism. Calm, fact-based reporting steeped in a continual focus on Jesus and resources to help us all grow as disciples — and in turn grow the Kingdom — is needed now more than ever.

You make the difference, and we are honored to serve you through this 179-year-old ministry that continues to develop and expand with each generation.

#TruthwithCompassion

CLICK HERE for a sneak peek of the 2022 Read TAB Day video.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

Help kids find healthy balance, pastor pleas

By Pastor Andy Frazier
Grace Baptist Church, Sumiton

Dear youth and school sports directors, coaches, administrators and volunteers,

As a parent, I am grateful for sports in our communities and the positive benefits our kids glean from the time invested.

Our younger kids and older students can learn a great deal about responsibility, sportsmanship, teamwork, respect for authority, sacrifice, disappointment, resilience, hard work, respect and so much more from sports.

Our communities benefit from youth and school sports by bringing people together. Friendships from ball fields, dugouts, sidelines, benches and bleachers are built that last lifetimes.

Now more than ever, our kids need to learn the benefits of physical activity and exercise.

Valuable lessons

Lessons learned from sports carry over into many areas of our lives. We cannot ignore the influence that professional athletes have on our society and especially our kids.

Sports are great, and thank you for investing in our kids!

Churches are thankful for the opportunity to partner with your teams and organizations in making our communities better and providing opportunities for our kids.

Churches have volunteered at your games to run the concession stands. Churches have fed your players and coaches. Churches have given money for your ads. Churches have allowed your teams to use our facilities for practices and events.

But as a Christian, pastor, father and church member who has supported organized sports my whole life, I have to speak up.

Gathering is essential

It is necessary for churches to gather on Sundays and Wednesdays (or other days during the week) for the benefit of believers and for the church's mission to be accomplished.

When youth sports, community leagues, travel ball and school teams expect their players and coaches to attend games, practices, camps and events on Sundays and Wednesdays, this hurts the local church.

Just like players need to be at practices and games, church members need to gather to worship, pray, fellowship, learn and serve together.

Coaches, do not be surprised when families attend church and players arrive late or miss your practices and games on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Priorities in life must be set, and boundaries must be enforced.

Our kids should not have to struggle with the decision to miss out on a game or to attend church.

There should be a healthy balance for players to be committed to both the local church and their team.

Churches are more than willing to partner with your teams and organizations. We love it!

When those same teams and organizations start requiring Sunday and Wednesday participation, it becomes much harder to get the full support of churches and Christian families.

Sports directors, coaches, school administrators and league volunteers, let's continue to partner together.

Let's stop trying to compete for our kids' time during the week and on weekends.

Christian families and churches love our communities. We pray for your success. We want to help. We want every kid to have the opportunity to enjoy sports. We want your teams and organizations to win on and off the field.

Top priority

Most importantly, we want our kids to grow up knowing that Jesus Christ and our commitment to Him should be the greatest priority in life, and that includes our commitment to gathering with our church on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Help us win at that. If our kids succeed in knowing the ultimate purpose in life is to love our Savior and live for Him, then we all win.

"Serving in ministry, one of the great joys is always seeing when those you are leading have their 'aha' moments — the times when their faith connects to their service, and they see God at work around them, through them and in them," said **Scott Underwood, associate pastor of worship and students at First Baptist Church Florence, Alabama.**

"God can take a piece of scrap, heat you up and forge or form you into something of value," explained **Daniel Long,** a member of **Grace Life Baptist Church in McCalla.** Long makes small metal crosses in the kiln in his garage.

What is the goal of your life? What is the goal of the church? The goal is to bring glory to Christ by being, winning and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Wade Wallace
Calvary Baptist Church
Russellville, Ala.

God is using students to reach the campus and the world!

Chris Mills
Student missions mobilizer
ALSBOM

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OPINION

Responses to letter opposing overturning of Roe

EDITOR'S NOTE — We received several responses to Amanda Oliver Hendricks' letter regarding the overturning of Roe v. Wade printed in the July 21 Your Voice section. Here are excerpts from those responses.

As I sit in my office at church and open my paper (that's what I call The Alabama Baptist), I grieved when I read a letter to the editor by Amanda Oliver Hendricks.

I read her words, and I try to understand where she is coming from so I don't simply react and say something callous or unloving.

She says in her letter it is possible to be pro-choice and not pro-abortion. She even says you can be pro-life and pro-choice at the same time. I disagree with both of these theories. Pro-choice is a belief that women have the right to abort their unborn baby. Pro-life and pro-choice are antithetical to each other. ...

Hendricks goes on to give an example of a young girl who is sexually assaulted in a church and gets pregnant, and ... is forced to carry this baby and is shunned by the church. Then the question is asked "Would you talk to her? Would you ask her to trust the Lord when the man who hurt her loves Him, too?"

I hate assault of any kind. Physical, emotional, sexual — all of it is wicked. And all who commit these acts need to be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

I pray someone in this situation would be loved and protected by the church ... and the one who assaulted her would be put in prison and punished. I pray she would be told that what happened to her in the church was wrong and not what God wants for her. But I also pray her baby would be given the right to live and be adopted. ...

I celebrate the SCOTUS decision not in the face of rape victims who get pregnant or friends who are pro-choice. I celebrate because all life is valuable. I celebrate because being pro-life saves more lives than being pro-choice. I am sorry there are women who don't feel free, but think of that little woman in the womb who will now get a chance to live. I bet she will feel free.

Pastor Robert "Robby" Joplin
Macedonia Baptist Church
Gadsden, Ala.

I am disappointed to see you print a letter from someone who says you can be pro-choice and pro-life at the same time and that a Christian can be pro-choice. It's not possible. God makes no mistakes, and only He can make a baby. No matter how you got pregnant, God knew that baby even before it was in your womb. It was created in His image, and He has plans for it, and you have no right to murder this blessing from God.

Larry Carmichael
Montgomery, Ala.

The letter to the editor about Roe v. Wade in the July 21 issue of The Alabama Baptist ... is representative of the ideological and theological mindset of many within our ranks. ... It is soaked in feminist rhetoric and viewpoints. It bears the hallmarks of the social justice gospel and employs several erroneous tactics that are becoming all too familiar. ... With humility and prayerfulness, I offer these thoughts. ...

The name Christian must mean something. ... That special name is reserved for those who are united by unchanging truths about God and His will for mankind as revealed in the Holy Bible. The name means we agree to be governed by His laws. The Christian faith is not an a la carte religion to select beliefs to fit personal preferences or cultural pressures.

The name Southern Baptist must mean something. ... Southern Baptists rejoice unapologetically whenever righteousness triumphs over evil, life over death. ...

Faithful Christians must ask some impolite questions here. Exactly how is this court ruling a "dagger to the woundedness of women"? Why are Christian women mourning, sad, dismayed and "kicked in the gut over those rejoicing"? ...

Another emotional appeal is in the insinuation that Southern Baptist women are oppressed. The writer even makes a blanket accusation that Southern Baptist men do not believe in, support or value women.

We must ask, who are these men? Our fathers, our sons, our husbands, our brothers, our grandfathers, our pastors? No! What a mistaken and unfair characterization of the very same men who, with few exceptions, would die to protect their women.

Finally, the letter strongly suggests our SBC president is unqualified to speak about abortion because "he has never been a woman." So men cannot clearly understand the sixth commandment (to not murder) because they are not women?

God help us if we apply that logic to other moral issues such as homosexuality and transgenderism. We must not allow the absolute, eternal, unchanging moral standards of God Almighty to be hijacked by the "lived experiences" of an endless number of identity groups.

To be faithful to the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, we desperately need a call to action from our pulpits and pews. Who will stand and say no to this soul-damning ideology that has cast a spell over our denomination?

Jeannie King
Jasper, Ala.

If a person has Jesus in their heart and their life has changed, they will not even contemplate destroying one of God's most precious creations. Attending a microbiology lab years ago, some class had left jars containing these little lives on display on the front table. They ranged in size from about thumb size to near full term. It was sad and disturbing to see such a sight.

My thought at the time was to wonder how they would have turned out if given the chance. Yet, for the sake of being inconvenienced as a result of their actions, the mothers chose to end these lives. I find it inconceivable that a Christian would choose anything other than life.

Sam Sharpe
Black, Ala.

The taking of life at any age is caused by sin. If we were all living lives pleasing to God, neither Hendricks' letter nor mine would be needed.

I'm not smart enough to understand most of life's problems. I do know it is God's domain to start life and to end life. The choice is not mine, yours or others.

Hendricks' letter diverts attention from the issue of ending a baby's life to the sin of abuse. Do not confuse the two separate sins. Concentrate on the ending of a life that God started.

The example used of the young abuse victim is very sad. It is also rare and the exception to the thousands of abortions that end a baby's life "just because." These rare exceptions being right or wrong are beyond me. ... Abortion is about the baby. God started a new life. Does a woman have any right to end that life "just because"?

Tony Berry
Foley, Ala.

I applaud the Southern Baptist Convention, pastors of churches and other Christians, for celebrating the overturning of Roe vs. Wade.

Scripture speaks to the value of life. The sixth commandment is "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). The Old Testament condemns pagan religious services in which there were child sacrifices.

Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." David wrote in a prayer in Psalm 139, "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Babies were considered a gift from God by women in the Bible: Sarah and Hannah ... and Elizabeth and Mary (mother of Jesus).

Abortion is a sin. Sexual acts outside of marriage are sins. Sexual indulgence is the "idol" of our culture. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "... Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers ... will inherit the kingdom of God."

There is forgiveness from God for those who regret participating in abortion or promoting abortion: doctors, medical staff, lawmakers, violent protesters, unwed parents, married parents.

Jesus was the substitute for sinners, taking the punishment for those who believe in His life, death and resurrection. Repent, turn from the sin of abortion and begin a new life with Jesus.

There is financial, spiritual, physical and social help to provide for babies saved from abortion, from the Department of Human Resources, churches, friends, relatives, adoption agencies, etc. Unborn babies deserve the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Faye B. Gaston
Union Springs, Ala.

NEWS

3 stories you should know

Photo courtesy of Auburn Basketball

Chance Westry, a freshman guard for the Auburn University men's basketball team, is baptized in the Jordan River by team chaplain Jeremy Napier. Several other players also were baptized. The team arrived in Jerusalem on July 31 for a 10-day visit that included basketball and so much more. Between games, they experienced the culture and history of the Holy Land, which was important to head coach Bruce Pearl, who is Jewish. The team also enjoyed a swim in the Dead Sea.

GuideStone leaders advise long-term focus

Noting volatile markets in 2022, GuideStone chief operating officer John R. Jones said retirement plan investors should not try to time the markets or be swayed by the headlines, but instead focus on their long-term objectives.

"We go through very difficult periods like this at times. This is the nature of the investment markets," he said.

Jones and GuideStone President Hance Dilbeck updated trustees on retirement plans, health insurance and other products during an Aug. 1–2 trustees meeting in Washington.

Jones said Mission:Dignity, which assists retirement-age Southern Baptist ministers, workers and widows struggling to meet basic needs, has raised $4.4 million this year, with 100% of gifts going to help a retired pastor or his widow in need. (TAB)

Moore, Allmond named to editorial positions

Russell Moore has been named editor in chief of Christianity Today, the publication announced Aug. 4.

Moore, who has served as director of the Public Theology Project at CT for more than a year, will step into his new role Sept. 1.

Moore previously served eight years as president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Joy Allmond will join CT as editorial chief of staff. Allmond most recently served as executive communications manager at Lifeway Christian Resources and has served with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Decision magazine.

Allmond will work alongside Moore to advance the Public Theology Project, according to a statement from CT. (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted church

Violence continues in Nigeria as two Christians die, another flees captors

ABUJA, Nigeria — Two Christians died in separate attacks and another escaped from abductors as violence continues against Christians in Nigeria.

Morning Star News reported two Catholic priests — John Mark Cheitnum and Donatus Cleopas Sulaiman — were abducted at gunpoint July 15, taken from the rectory of Christ the King Catholic Church in Yalding Garu in Kaduna State.

Sulaiman later escaped, but Cheitnum's body was found in a wilderness area.

Moses Bonugada, another Catholic priest, was quoted by Morning Star as saying 18 priests have been abducted in 2022.

On July 14 in Adamawa State, engineering teacher Yohanna Mbudai Bzegu, a Christian, was slain. Gunmen broke into his home behind Anglican Junior Seminary in Yola and shot him multiple times.

Police are searching for the assailants.

Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed or kidnapped for their faith. The country is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Court in Iran fines, denies rights of Farsi-speaking Christian

BANDAR ANZALI, Iran — A Christian has been fined and denied social rights for five years because he established house churches in Iran.

Earlier in the summer, the civil court of Bandar Anzali convicted Rahmat Rostamipour of disseminating propaganda by teaching or sending messages about Christianity, the relief group Barnabas Fund reported. Rahmat was fined 6 million tomans (US $185), with the threat of more fines if he continues sharing messages about Christianity.

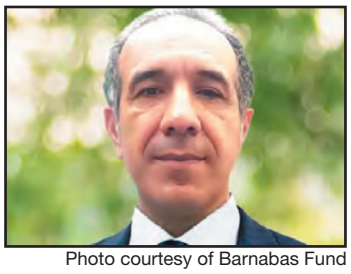


Photo courtesy of Barnabas Fund

Iran's penal code prohibits instruction "contrary to Islam," Barnabas Fund noted.

Rahmat was arrested after ministry of intelligence agents raided his home. His wife, Azar, was questioned but not charged.

Barnabas Fund said people who speak Farsi and convert from Islam to Christianity are subject to punishment for apostasy under Islamic law. Iran is No. 9 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

Prepping to focus on reforms

Alabama's Melissa Bowen named to SBC Abuse Response Implementation Task Force

Bart Barber, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, has announced the names of those who will lead and serve on the SBC Abuse Response Implementation Task Force. Among those named to the committee is Alabama's Melissa Bowen.

Bowen currently serves as vice chair of the Alabama Baptist Sexual Abuse Task Force. She made the motion approved by Alabama messengers during the 2021 state convention annual meeting to review policies and practices of Cooperative Program-funded entities and the State Board of Missions. Bowen is a member of First Baptist Church Prattville.

The news follows the early August announcement that Marshall Blalock will chair the task force and Mike Keahbone will serve as vice chair. Both men will help guide the group to implement the list of recommendations approved by messengers during the SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, in June.

Blalock, pastor of First Baptist Church Charleston, South Carolina, served as vice chair of the Sexual Abuse Task Force that brought recommendations concerning the investigation into the SBC Executive Committee's handling of sexual abuse cases to the June meeting. Keahbone, pastor of First Baptist Church Lawton, Oklahoma, serves on the Executive Committee and also served on this year's resolutions committee.

'Optimistic'

"Both of these pastors are well-respected by Southern Baptists, by survivors of sexual abuse, by state convention leadership and by their peers," Barber told Baptist Press. "I'm delighted at their willingness to serve and optimistic about the solutions that they will lead [ARITF] to propose."

In an interview with The Alabama Baptist, Blalock noted that ARITF is "charged with the essential task of making the reforms a reality."

"Having served on last year's task force, I know firsthand how much we need God's guidance and the prayers of Baptists from across our convention," he said. "We have much to consider, and we are desperate for the wisdom of God at every point."

The first step of the task force will be to "orient ARITF to the findings and recommendations of the original task force, then to begin work on the motions the messengers passed in Anaheim," Blalock said.

"The creation of the Ministry Check website will be one of the first major challenges," he added. "It's a priority because it will enable churches to identify sexual predators in order to stop them from going from church to church to abuse others."

Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Retired attorney Melissa Bowen of Prattville proposes a motion during the 2021 state convention annual meeting.

He noted, "In the end, the goal is for our churches to have the biblical and practical resources necessary to prevent sexual abuse and to have an authentic Christ-like compassion to minister to survivors."

Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church Farmersville, Texas, noted ARITF includes "survivors of clergy sexual abuse, pastors, lawyers, educators and one person who was the object of a false accusation of sexual abuse in the past."

He said the group will be "assisted in their work by a few consultants, whose names will be released later."

Other members

Other members of the team include the following:

- Todd Benkert, pastor and lead elder of Oak Creek Community Church in Mishawaka, Indiana
- Brad Eubank, pastor of Petal First Baptist Church in Petal, Mississippi
- Cyndi Lott, member of Catawba Valley Baptist Church in Morganton, North Carolina
- Jon Nelson, pastor of Soma Community Church in Jefferson City, Missouri
- Jarrett Stephens, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, Texas
- Gregory Wills, member of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Wills is also a professor of church history and Baptist heritage and dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. (The Alabama Baptist, Baptist Press)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

- **Craig Spurlin,** 66, former pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Anniston, died Aug. 2.

SPURLIN

Spurlin was licensed into gospel ministry by Mount Zion Baptist Church in Munford in 2013. He spent seven years in the Calhoun County Jail Ministry and was pastor of Providence from 2016 to 2019.

He was a member and deacon of Brookside Baptist Church in Oxford at the time of his death.

He is survived by his wife of 44 years, Peggy, two daughters and six grandchildren.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

- **First Baptist Church Rainsville** will host a parenting conference Aug. 28 with guest speaker Gary Maze of Mississippi. The four sessions will start at 9 a.m., 10:15 a.m., 5 p.m. and 6:15 p.m. in the auditorium. There is no charge for this event. For more information visit rainsvillefirst.com. David Cofield is pastor.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

- **East Highland Baptist Church, Hartselle**, is hosting a revival Aug. 28–31. Evangelist Phil Glisson of Memphis, Tennessee, is preaching. Walter Blackman is pastor.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

- **Oak Mountain Baptist Church, Pelham,** will celebrate homecoming Sept. 11. The service will begin at 10:30 a.m. with special guests Chosen Witness. Dinner provided by the church will follow the morning worship service. Contact Scott Martin at 205-532-1849 for more information.

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

Generously help the hurting

Willowbrook Church team practices ministry of presence in rural Ukraine communities

By Lanell Downs Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Well before Russia invaded Ukraine, John Stone, associate pastor of Willowbrook Church in Huntsville, sensed God calling him to minister there.

In early July he and other Willowbrook members answered that call, going to love, support and provide supplies to hurting, war-weary Ukrainians.

"God began dealing with my heart before the war ever began," Stone recalled. "We had a prayer night for Ukraine at Willowbrook, and [God] asked me if I cared [for Him enough] to sacrifice for Ukraine. Did I care enough to go?"

Stone said "yes," and the trip began to take shape after a Ukrainian connection contacted him to ask the church to consider ways it could support the Ukrainian people.

Stone shared his calling with Pastor Mark McClelland. Church members Matt Adams and James Ward agreed God was leading them to partner with Ukrainian believers, too.

Many didn't understand how he could hear God calling him into a war zone and ask others to join, Stone reflected. At first he also questioned it.

"And then that call became very powerful inside my heart," Stone remembered. "I realized that when God calls us to do something, there are going to be obstacles. There are going to be roadblocks to our plans, and we had to take into account a little bit of a roadblock called war.

"But Jesus wants us to take time for individuals. He wants us to hear the cries of hurting people."

During the next few weeks the church hosted a fundraising drive and plans began to solidify. The congregation purchased and shipped more than 1,300 pounds of aid supplies: nonperishable food, clothes, sleeping bags, boots and medical supplies.

'The Lord is my shield'

The team prepared to enter a war zone, acquiring body armor and helmets and learning to apply tourniquets and pressure bandages correctly. During the trip they would witness missiles flying overhead and encounter Russian spies and drones watching the compound where they slept.

"People asked our team time and time again [if we were] afraid to be there because of the war. And the only answer that we could give them is that 'the Lord is my shield and my protector. In whom shall I fear? In whom shall I be afraid?'" Stone said, paraphrasing Psalm 27.

According to Adams, the team connected with local Ukrainian churches, making nearly 50 house visits in rural communities. Team members preached in two local churches, and Adams, an illusionist, conducted impromptu magic shows with a gospel message for children, students and soldiers.

Photo courtesy of Matt Adams

Missions team members visit a Ukrainian school destroyed in a missile attack.

One man they met lost his leg and his livelihood from injuries sustained during a missile attack. Insurance denied the claim as a war injury and the government rejected his appeal for war injury benefits. The Willowbrook team members were the first people he allowed to visit since his injury.

"We took him a basket of food so that he could feed his family," Stone recalled. "He looked at us and he said, 'My life is now over.' And we were able to say to him, 'Your life is not over. Jesus still has a plan and a purpose for your life. He has a future for you if you'll just put your trust in Him.'

Photo courtesy of Matt Adams

A vision team from Willowbrook Church in Huntsville serves at a Ukrainian church. Christian illusionist Matt Adams performed magic shows with a gospel message for soldiers, students and children.

"We saw so many people that needed encouragement and help," Adams said. "The most important thing for them was not the supplies, it was literally our presence there.

"Just that ministry of presence is so powerful, just to be able to sit with somebody in their grief as their homes are being attacked, and their loved ones are being captured or killed. And just to be with people, cry with them and hurt with them — they were so grateful, so encouraged by that."

In-country supplies

Donations from Willowbrook purchased more supplies in country, and the team partnered with local churches, distributing nearly 100 bags of food and supplies to residents and refugees displaced after their homes were invaded.

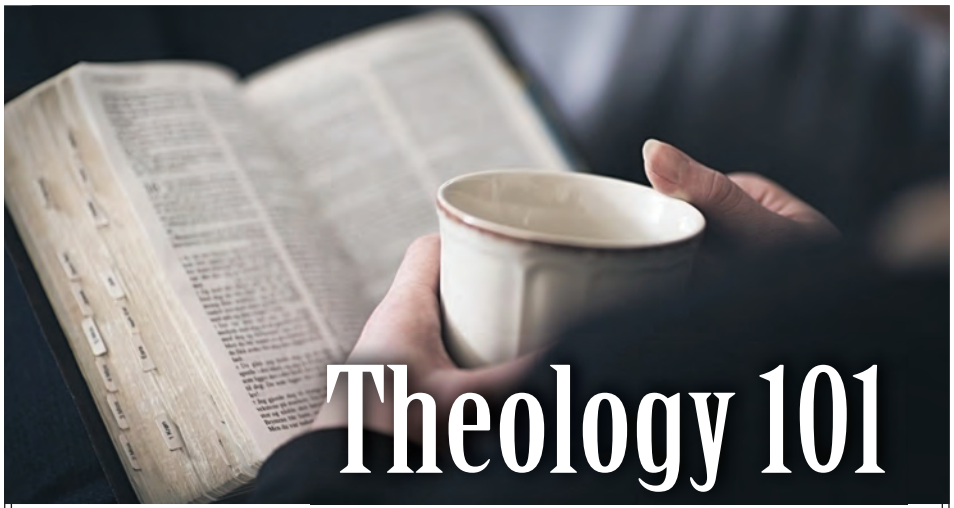
"I left a large amount of money that had been given by our church with the church where we were so that could [be used] to buy food and supplies as needed," Stone said. "Willowbrook has always been very generous through our world missions offering. This offering allows us to generously help the hurting all over the world."

'Spiritual battle'

Stone's mother died the day the team was scheduled to depart. Many encouraged him not to go on the trip, he said.

"I was in a real spiritual battle," he recalled. "As much as I love my mother, she told me when God calls you to do something, you always do it no matter the price. I began to pray and look at the Scriptures. I said 'yes,' the team said 'yes,' and you know, great things happened because we were obedient.

"We will continue our partnership with the church in Ukraine. The pastor and his wife work tirelessly to help their flock and those hurting in their area. We feel very led by God to continue our physical presence on the ground with them. How that [looks] is still in the works."



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Spiritual Blessings

Crossing the Boundaries

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Not only does the Bible describe sin as "missing the mark" as noted last week in Theology 101, but it also describes sin in terms of crossing boundaries.

Perhaps you have passed a piece of property or a building that has a sign posted: "No Trespassing."

That message is a warning about crossing the boundary that surrounds the property or entering the building. The common biblical term for crossing boundaries is "transgression."

First John 3:4 is straightforward in declaring, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

If God in Holy Scripture declares concerning some attitude, "Thou shalt not," and a person crosses the forbidden boundary, that person has transgressed.

In fact, 1 John 3:4 labels this as lawlessness, saying, "Whoever commits sins also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."

On the other hand, Romans 4:15 allows, "Where there is no law, there is no transgression."

'Thou shalt not'

The Bible identifies some behaviors about which God has issued the negative commandment, "No trespassing," worded, "Thou shalt not."

For example, eight of the Ten Commandments contain "No Trespassing" signs about certain actions and attitudes:

- You shall have no other gods.
- You shall not make a carved image.
- You shall not take God's name in vain.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness.
- You shall not covet.

Actions toward others

God has set other boundaries. For example, Titus 3:1–3 says, "... be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."

It is evident God also hangs the "No Trespassing" sign out related to speaking evil of others; showing ill will or hatred toward others; and being prideful, malicious or lustful. To cross these boundaries is an act of sin.

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.

Macedonia, Beulah team helps with VBS in Guatemala

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Morgan Bailey says he'll never forget a visit he and his missions team had with a grandmother in Guatemala in late June.

"She was making tortillas over an open fire, and we asked her if she would encourage her grandson to come to the Vacation Bible School we were going to be having," he recalled. "She said, 'Oh, he'll be there. He's been counting the days until you come.'"

Missions message

Bailey, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne, said the woman's words were encouraging, but they were also a missions message on a larger scale — that "people are counting the days until we come."

It was also a meaningful moment for him and the Macedonia team in a different way. In the summer of 2021, Bailey and Kris Henderson, discipleship pastor at Macedonia, visited Guatemala as part of a vision trip to reconnect with partners and start new works.

At several places along their journey, they delivered portions of an offering collected at Macedonia during VBS to go toward children's ministry.

"It was from our children to their children," Bailey said.

So to go back and work alongside Pastor Oscar Lopez, holding one-day VBS events at several churches he planted, was a full-circle moment. The team was able to impact 446 children and sow gospel seeds, Bailey said.

They also held a pastors conference, and the women on the team led Bible studies with the women of the church.

Several volunteers from Beulah Baptist Church in Muscadine, a sister Cleburne Baptist Association church, joined the Macedonia team.

Owen McWhorter, a team member from Beulah, said getting to be involved in Macedonia's partnership with Lopez was "very beneficial."

"You could just see the respect Lopez had built over time," McWhorter recalled. "Seeing his work and his presence there really stood out to me, as well as seeing how Macedonia's support was paying off through his work in the different communities.

"He just met the needs where they were."

'Broader view'

McWhorter said he also enjoyed getting to work alongside team members from Macedonia.

"That was a highlight for me," he said. "You get a broader view of a lot of things working side by side like that."

Photo courtesy of Macedonia Baptist Church

A team of 11 missions volunteers from Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne and Beulah Baptist Church in Muscadine pause for a photo while serving in Guatemala. Both churches are in Cleburne Baptist Association.

Alabama Baptist STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

INVESTING IN CHILDREN

By Grace Thornton
Special to the SBOM

IMB missionary's 18 years in Africa started with seeds planted at WorldSong

When Hannah Thomas* thinks about what it's like to serve God in Sub-Saharan Africa, she thinks of her good friend Hawa.

"I loved her smile and her laughter," Thomas said. "She was in a very poor village. We would sit each week and I would share Bible stories with her and pray with her. She loved to hear the stories and learned them all so well. My prayer and hope is that one day she will fully understand the love of Christ."

Thomas doesn't live in Hawa's country anymore — her family has moved around Sub-Saharan Africa some in their nearly 18 years on the mission field. But she hasn't forgotten Hawa or the faces of the other friends she's shared the Gospel with over the years.

Her time on the field hasn't looked like what she thought it would back when she was a camper at WorldSong Missions Place years ago.

"I think my mental image was small children running toward me and clambering to hear stories about Jesus," Thomas said. "The reality of where the Lord called us to serve is not quite as picturesque at all."

But it's been wonderful in unexpected ways, she said. For years, she ran a clinic for malnourished children and orphans.

"The Lord gave me many opportunities to share truth through that clinic," she said.

And right now, Thomas serves as a director and tutor for a center for children with special needs.

"The Lord is really using this as a place to show love to the unloved and spend time with families each day," she said.

She also teaches women and children at church and homeschools her three children.

Her missions journey started at WorldSong.

"I really felt confirmation there that I was to be a full-time missionary in Africa," Thomas said. "I have so many amazing memories of WorldSong. It is a place where I feel at home and where I have always felt the presence of God. I feel like the heart and soul of WorldSong is the desire to help children understand missions and the role they can play in taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth."

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, said WorldSong's Missions Adventure Camp — which is run by Alabama WMU and made possible by gifts to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering — is a vital way to plant those seeds early. And it's not just for girls, she said — the camp is for boys too.

For all campers, "we plant that understanding of God's desire of all peoples of the world to know who He is and have that personal relationship with Him," McIntosh said. "We help each child at an early age know they can be a part of that, whether it's serving their community, state or the world."

Thomas definitely feels that in her own story. She went to WorldSong as often as she could. After going there as a camper, she served every summer in college at the camp.

"I loved being a cabin leader and a unit leader," she said.

She also went back this summer to invest in children for three weeks as someone who now knows what it's like to start out as a WorldSong camper and then serve God on the mission field.

"I have so many amazing memories of WorldSong," Thomas said. "It is a place where I feel at home and where I have always felt the presence of God."

For more information about WorldSong, visit worldsongretreat.org. To learn more about all of the ministries of Alabama WMU, visit AlabamaWMU.org or contact Kathryn Helms, 334-613-2325, khelms@alsbom.org.

**Name changed for security reasons.*

Photo by Doug Rogers

Hannah Thomas answers questions about life in Sub-Saharan Africa from campers at WorldSong this summer.*

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‘God led me here’

American sumo wrestler finds peace and guidance in journey to World Games

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Sumo wrestling might be considered an unusual sport for an American, but for Andrew “Stonewall” Roden, whose Alabama roots go back to the Revolutionary War, it was literally taking a different traveling route that led him to the sport.

After a visit to Birmingham, Roden and a friend decided to take a different route home.

“For whatever reason, on our way back to the interstate, we ended up taking more surface roads,” Roden recalled. “We didn’t go back the way we came. We just happened to pass the city limit sign that said, ‘Home of the World Games.’”

He was intrigued. So while riding back to Huntsville, Roden did an internet search to find out more, thinking about attending. While scrolling through the sports, sumo wrestling stood out to him.

Perfect fit

After some research to learn about the sport, he eventually realized it was possible he might be a good fit for it.

“When I wrestled in high school and college, I was very physical, very explosive and very powerful, which are three of the main tenets of sumo,” Roden explained. “When I looked at sumo and started learning about it and realized I might be good, I thought, ‘Wow. It’s almost like everything I’d been through as far as my athletic career was concerned.’ It was almost like God was [preparing] me to be a sumo wrestler.”

He began training in May 2020, with the specific goal of making the World Games U.S. sumo team.

During his first tournament in September 2020, he competed against two defending national champions. Roden went undefeated and won two gold medals.

“I was like, ‘I think this is the right path,’” he laughed.

He went on to win the 2021 National Championship as well as the 2021 North American Championship, which was the qualifier for the World Games.

Just as he didn’t grow up in the world of sumo wrestling, Roden also didn’t grow up going to church. His family was Baptist and, though his grandmother went to church “every time the doors opened,” he lived with his father, who only attended on major holidays.

To follow Roden’s continuing journey find him on Instagram at @stonewall_roden.

Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

U.S. Sumo team member Andrew “Stonewall” Roden (r) gives his all during a first-round match at the World Games in Birmingham.

Wrestling exposed Roden to a relatable faith journey, with two coaches who had strong faith and shared it with him without being pushy.

‘Rough patch’

In 2016, Roden went through a “rough patch,” thinking being a good person was enough. Even though he tried to “do right,” bad things kept happening. He said he often thought, “Why?”

Then he had a personal experience with God.

“I heard God call to me,” Roden remembered. “I said, ‘You know what — this is the problem: I can be a good person and try to do good things, but my spiritual life is a wreck.’ I started realizing that’s sort of why all this stuff — part of the reason at least — was happening.”

Roden found a church, Bakers Chapel Baptist in Guntersville, and got serious about his faith journey.

“We as people get wrapped up in the moment, want to control the moment,” Roden reflected. “We want to control the adversity and bad things that happen in life.

“Through building a relationship with God, building that faith, that understanding that He is moving me to where He wants me to be, it’s helped me be a lot more at peace with things. It’s helped me get a lot more open-minded to try to see His guidance, for example, all the stuff that led me into sumo.”

Photo by Andrew Roden

Andrew Roden takes a selfie during the Opening Ceremonies of the World Games.

Though the sport’s history can be traced back to the Shinto religion, only professional sumo wrestlers in Japan include religious rituals now. The spirituality has been taken out at the amateur level.

Fighting fair

There is one nonreligious tradition practiced by all wrestlers, however. Early competitors would wear long flowing robes and upon entering the “dohyo,” the area of play, would squat and move their extended arms around in a circle, showing there wasn’t a hidden weapon. The tradition now shows that an athlete will fight fair.

‘Mawashi’

Fighting fair also is behind the mawashi, the uniform sumo wrestlers wear. Because it’s so revealing, it’s not possible to hide a weapon.

Roden said he will continue competing until he feels God telling him to move on. In the meantime he has begun working on a Ph.D. in psychology.

Though not happy with his World Games performance, where he slipped and lost his first round, Roden wouldn’t change anything about his journey.

“Maybe that’s part of it, the way God wants things to play out,” Roden said philosophically. “It wasn’t in the cards for me to medal. That’s where, ‘Well, God isn’t ready for this to be over.’ If I had won gold this year, I might have just hung it up.

“Your faith gets challenged every day in some capacity,” he acknowledged. “When you compete in a sport at my level, it’s going to get challenged a lot more. I’m keeping a positive mentality because I know I’m chasing something greater than myself.

“God led me here — this is what God wants,” he said confidently.

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Church Communications Conference set for Nashville

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For a person in charge of a church's communications, it can be tough to find ways to constantly be creative or stay motivated while navigating everything going on in the church and the world.

That's why Katie Allred said the Church Communications Conference "has your back."

Set for Sept. 22 in Nashville, the conference offers an opportunity to learn from experts, collaborate in table discussions, develop creative strategies and network with others in the field.

"We just want to equip people with the right tools to share the gospel as effectively as they can," Allred said.

Allred, the conference's facilitator, is the founder of Church Communications and moderator of the Facebook group of the same name, an online community of more than 31,000 church communications leaders.

The conference will feature:

- Allred speaking on branding and how to tell your story well
- Todd Adkins, director of leadership development at Lifeway Christian Resources, speaking on processes and how to build better systems
- Dave Adamson, author of "Meta Church," speaking on church strategy and how to best clarify a message to get the gospel out online
- Jennifer Benton, a social media aficionado, community builder and founder of Jenetic Marketing Group, speaking on creativity and how to bring out the best work in yourself and others.

After each session, participants will have a chance to workshop ideas in a roundtable format.

The conference is "about hearing from speakers and working with each other but also walking away with a communication plan," Allred said.

Alabama Baptists get a discount with the code ALBAPTISTS. For more information or to register, visit churchcommunications.com.

"We just want to equip people with the right tools to share the gospel as effectively as they can."

Katie Allred, founder of Church Communications

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Place a classified ad for $1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 102, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

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Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek, Alabama, is in search of a senior pastor. Please send resumés to: jcrosslin89@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Sweet Home Baptist Church in Guntersville, Alabama, is in search of a pastor. Interested candidates may send a resumé to: sweethomesearchcommittee@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Spring Bank Baptist Church in Silas, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumés to: michaelcthorn@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, Alabama, is now accepting resumés for the position of full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: pastorsearch@lbcpc.org or 4011 Lakewood Drive, Phenix City, AL 36867.

PASTOR
Union Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumés will be received through Sept. 30 by mail at: Pastor Search Committee, Union Baptist Church, 5251 Grand Bay Wilmer Road S, Grand Bay, AL 36541 or by email at: admin@ubcgrandbay.org.

PASTOR
Thomaston Baptist Church, Thomaston, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: thomastonbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Westlawn Baptist Church of Huntsville is seeking a pastor. Please send resumés to: pastorsearchcommittee@westlawnbaptist.org.

PASTOR
First Baptist Church Irvington is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumés to: DARBREL59@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Prattville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumés to: PHBCPrattville@gmail.com.

WORSHIP PASTOR
FBC Fairhope is searching for a full-time worship pastor to lead corporate worship, including choir, praise team, orchestra and praise band. The worship ministry also includes administrating children, youth and senior adult choirs and leading several special events during the year. For more information, contact Kerry Flowers at kerrybflowers@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC
Collinsville Baptist Church is seeking a minister of music to direct a small sanctuary choir and lead traditional music for our friendly congregation. Starting salary is $800 a month, may fluctuate based on training and experience. Mail your resumé or letter of interest to: CBC, P.O. 558, Collinsville, AL 35961.

MUSIC MINISTER
Philadelphia Baptist Church in Smiths Station, Alabama, is seeking a full-time music minister. Our congregation enjoys worshipping to both traditional and contemporary music. If you enjoy Jesus and serving His church, please send your resumé to: duck.clay1@gmail.com.

YOUTH MINISTER
Immanuel Baptist Church of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, is seeking applications for a full-time youth minister. Must have a love for Christ and a passion for ministering to young people. Send resumé to: ibc.youthsearch@myimmanuel.net.

OTHER POSITIONS

EDITOR/PRESIDENT
The Baptist Courier, the oldest ministry partner of the South Carolina Baptist Convention (153 years), is seeking a full-time editor and president. The position requires oversight of the print and electronic editions of the monthly magazine, the website, weekly podcast, social media, Courier Publishing (books), tours and fundraising. Qualifications include significant experience as a Baptist communicator/writer who adheres to the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message; active member of a Southern Baptist church; resumé with at least three references; and at least a master's degree. Deadline for receiving resumés and letters of reference is Sept. 30. Please email resumés and letters of reference to: tarafreeman@fbccola.com.

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS
FBC Tallassee's PreSchool Academy has job openings for teachers for 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. Send a letter of interest or resumé to: julie@fbctallassee.com. For more information, contact Denise Voss, dvoss@fbctallassee.com.

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‘GOD WANTS US TO LAUGH’

Unexpected ministry brings ‘joy, smiles and laughter’ to the hurting

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Preachers have many talents. Some have an uncanny ability to touch the heart with their message; some have the ability to make a sermon relevant; some have a passion for an outside interest that drives a point home.

Bill King has humor.

However, he never planned to use his gift in any way other than as an integral part of his sermons — until a Valentine banquet in 2002.

His church was ready, having invited a humorist to be the highlight of the evening. Then about a week before the banquet, the guest speaker canceled.

“He called and said something had happened,” King recalled. “That close to Valentine’s we couldn’t find anybody. So I kind of by default agreed to do the program in a staff meeting after one staff member said, ‘You should do something funny.’ ”

Thus, “Billy Bob the Baptist Bohannon” (later known as Bro. Billy Bob) was born.

Facebook photo

Bill King performs as Bro. Billy Bob Bohannon, a storytelling, song singing, character created in 2002 by King for what he intended to be a one-time appearance at a Valentine banquet.

‘The rest is history’

King performed at the banquet and though it went well, he assumed he would never do it again.

“I started getting phone calls from other churches and other groups,” King remembered. “The rest is history — 20 years later, I’m still doing Billy Bob programs and have appeared as Billy Bob over 1,000 times. I never would have imagined doing that.”

Through the years King has seen a lot of changes. When he first started as Bro. Billy Bob, humor often wasn’t accepted within the church or church groups.

“One of the funnier things that I remember — there was a man sitting in the congregation in the second pew from the front right in front of me,” King recalled. “He sat through my entire program and he never laughed; he never cracked a smile. He just sat there staring straight at me.

“It affected my program a little bit. I kept thinking he does not like what I’m doing. He does not appreciate this. I’m ticking him off.”

Afterward the man went straight to the book table and had his arms folded. When King got there the man didn’t say anything; he just stared.

“Boy, I’m about to get a tongue-lashing,” King thought. Then the man said, “I want to tell you something, Bro. Billy Bob.”

King was braced when the man said, “That was the funniest thing I ever heard in my life.”

Bro. Billy Bob is available anytime except Sunday mornings. Visit BroBillyBob.com for more information.

Expressions

“What?! If that’s true, you need to notify your face,” King said he thought to himself, actually saying, “Sir, I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

“You never know what’s going through the minds of people,” King said. “You can’t always read what they’re thinking by the expression on the face, especially in church.”

Another time King performed at a senior adult rally, and afterward a woman told him her son had been killed in an auto accident several years before and she hadn’t been able to laugh since.

She told King she laughed that night for the first time she could remember — and laughed until she cried.

“Thank you so much for bringing me some joy back,” she said.

Facebook photo

Bill King is a multi-talented songwriter/musician who plays several instruments.

Many roles

King’s ministry has involved many roles through the years. He started preaching at age 17 and became a pastor at 21. He was a director of missions for 15 years and now serves in interim pastorates after retiring in 2021.

He also is a musician, including music in the Billy Bob act, and a writer.

“My writing work kind of flowed out of Billy Bob. People kept saying when I did a Billy Bob concert, ‘You need to write a book and have these stories you tell in it.’ My first book was Billy Bob stories. In fact, I’ve written three of those.”

Published work

King also has written novels and a weekly newspaper column, publishing a compilation of some of the columns in, “I’m Fixin’ to Show Out for Y’all.”

He was one of the speakers at the Southern Christian Writers Conference in June.

“I enjoy the fellowship — meeting with other writers. I mean, not that I’ve learned everything about writing — I have not. I still always learn something when I go to the conference,” King said.

“The networking is always good. Most of the time good things come out of networking with people who do the same things you do.”

Bro. Billy Bob holds an invitation at the close of his performances and has seen people come to Christ.

“That says to me that God can speak to people’s hearts even through humor.

“God is good, and God loves us. But God wants us to laugh. God wants us to enjoy life ... life in and through Him,” he said.

“There are a lot of people who are out there hurting, and I need to bring joy, smiles and laughter.”

‘Starved for the gospel’

Dale Association jail ministry feeding inmates’ hunger for good news

By Lanell Downs Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Jail ministry volunteers from Dale Baptist Association conducted a baptism service July 21 for 44 Dale County inmates who made salvation decisions through their effort.

The culmination of more than a year of prayer and planning, the service represented the efforts of 21 men and 15 women volunteers from nine churches of multiple denominations. Since the ministry’s beginning in May there has been much fruit — 58 professions of faith in Christ, 12 rededications and many others who requested Bibles and study material, hungry for the word of God.

“The Holy Spirit is leading this ministry and God gets all the glory,” said ministry coordinator Mike Whitt, pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Ozark. “This team gives all the glory to God for calling each one of us to this ministry and allowing us to see Him at work.”

Photo by Jim Hill

Dale Baptist Association volunteers baptize 44 Dale County inmates. Since the ministry began in May, nearly 60 have made salvation decisions and 12 have rededicated their lives to Christ.

Unique calling

“I would like to thank the Dale County Sheriff and the Dale County Jail staff for their commitment and support for this ministry. Without them [it] could not happen.”

Whitt recognizes that serving in jail ministry is a unique calling — one that has always been part of his pastoral ministry.

When he first met Jim Hill, Dale Association director of missions, he discovered they had a shared passion for jail ministry and the desire to begin one in Dale County, where Hill already was a jail chaplain.

The two began praying in mid-2021 about how to meet the need. The COVID-19 pandemic had halted an existing ministry and a change in jail staff delayed the implementation of a new one.

Whitt and Hill met with Dale County Sheriff Wally Olson in January 2022, who granted permission for a restart once the pandemic calmed down. The two also met with jailer Steven Baxley in the next few months and volunteers began meeting with inmates in May.

They “put out the word, had a mass meeting and had background checks done on all participants,” Hill noted, and Whitt recalled seeing God’s hand working out every detail along the way.

“It cannot be overstated how we feel and see God’s involvement with this ministry,” he declared. “He opened the doors for this ministry that we could not open and we give all glory to Him. It is a very humbling experience to be allowed to participate in God’s work.”

Photo by Jim Hill

Ministry volunteers from Dale Baptist Association gather for prayer each Thursday evening outside the Dale County Jail in Ozark before conducting Bible study, discipleship and prayer with inmates.

Where people are

Once the path was cleared, ministry leaders invited association churches and other congregations to join in. Word spread quickly, and now each Thursday volunteers conduct Bible study with prayer, offering a message and time of decision for men and women on six cell blocks. Each volunteer and church contributes time and resources like study materials and Bibles.

“When you go into jails [inmates are] starved for the gospel,” Whitt asserted. “And that’s been our experience here. God gave Jesus Christ a ministry and He went where the people were.”

Getting uncomfortable

“And I have always been convicted that you just don’t preach or minister to the folks who come to church — you’ve got to go where the people are. It’s not always clean, and it’s not always where it’s a comfortable place to be.”

Inmates seem hungry for God, Whitt added. Many who were baptized felt like the day would never come, thinking they wouldn’t make it through their particular challenges. Many resolved to move forward, to be different for Jesus.

One inmate, when asked about her number one need upon release, said, “The churches come and share with us and that is appreciated, but where are they when we get out? The only thing waiting for us when we get out is the streets, and we end up back where we were.

“Most of us do not want the streets, the drugs or to live that lifestyle, but we feel that we have no alternative right now when we leave jail.”

Ministry leaders currently are planning for an aftercare ministry, Hill noted.

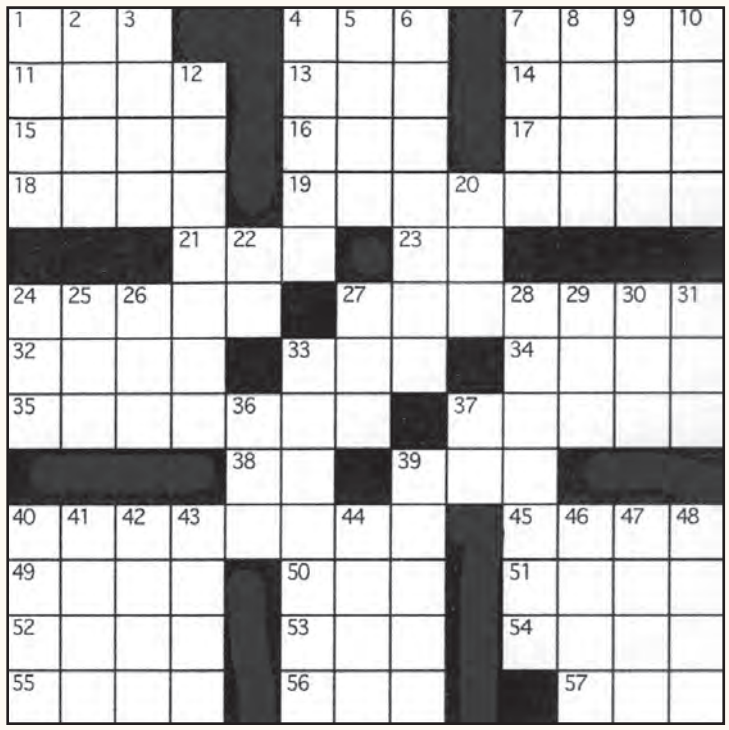
“We are looking forward to taking the next step in the ministry for follow-up care after release from jail. This will also include steps to get those released involved in one of our local churches.

“The Word says that the fields are ‘white unto harvest,’” Hill added. “I praise our God for these who have gone to work in this field called jail ministry.

“Perhaps it is time for all Christians to ‘push away from the table’ and let’s go to work in the field God has planted us.

“May God get all the honor and praise for the great things He is doing!”

CHRISTIAN crossword



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ACROSS

1. Fowl that is unclean. (Deut. 14:18)
4. Baby food.
7. "Faith, ___, and charity." (1 Cor. 13:13)
11. College grad.
13. Patriotic inits.
14. Zest.
15. "Casting all your ___ upon Him." (1 Pet. 5:7)
16. Kin. (abbr.)
17. Dodecanese island.
18. "Fear God. Honour the ___." (1 Pet. 2:17)
19. "The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be ___ unto thee." (Num. 6:25)
21. Wrath.
23. West. state.
24. "Let thy servant ___ instead of the lad." (Gen. 44:33)
27. Abraham's second wife. (Gen. 25:1)
32. Kept from falling.
33. ___-a-vis.
34. Blue ___.
35. "We were ___ of God to be put in trust with the gospel." (1 Thess. 2:4)
37. "And ___ the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." (2 Sam. 24:1)
38. Article.
39. Aunt's mate (Spanish)
40. "They will not endure sound ___." (2 Tim. 4:3)
45. Dew ___.
49. "Next to them builded Zaccur, the son of ___." (Neh. 3:2)
50. Weep.
51. Feminine name.
52. "The earth shall ___ to and fro." (Isa. 24:20)
53. ___ ___ limb.
54. Tale.
55. "Be like a ___ planted by the rivers of waters." (Ps. 1:3)
56. He follows Ezra. (abbr.)
57. King ___, Clavell work.

DOWN

1. ___ court.
2. Turkish regiment.
3. "And Naomi said, ___ again my daughters." (Ruth 1:11)
4. "___ me with hyssop." (Ps. 51:7)
5. Tribe of Israel (var., Luke 2:36)
6. "Peace ... within thy walls, and prosperity within thy ___." (Ps. 122:7)
7. Radiant. (comb. form)
8. Tastes like butter.
9. Butterfly fish.
10. Son of Seth. (Gen. 5:6)
12. Where Josiah was slain. (2 Kings 23:29)
20. Tractor.
22. Back. (prefix)
24. Exclamation of surprise.
25. ___ canto.
26. "Love worketh no ___." (Rom. 13:10)
27. Leather.
28. "The floods of ___ men made me afraid." (2 Sam. 22:5)
29. Stream.
30. Feminine nickname.
31. "As a ___ gathereth her chicks under her wings." (Matt. 23:37)
33. Prepared by Esau. (Gen. 27)
36. "And there was ___ in heaven." (Rev. 12:7)
37. Achan's sin caused defeat at this city. (Josh. 7:1–4)
39. Son of Nahor and Reumah. (Gen. 22:24)
40. Bane of Mr. Clean.
41. "According to his eating, an ___ for every man." (Ex. 16:16)
42. Canadian Indian tribe.
43. Playing piece.
44. "___ other name under heaven." (Acts 4:12)
46. "The young lions ___ after their prey." (Ps. 104:21)
47. Extra. (Scot.)
48. "That ___ after the dust of the earth." (Amos 2:7)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Pastors called to be 'intentional leaders'

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Pensacola pastor Ted Traylor worked in his family's grocery store as a boy, and when he answered the call to ministry, his mother gave him some sage advice.

"She said, 'We're in the people business at the IGA. If you can sell green beans here, you can share the gospel in your church.' She told me I needed to work on having a good relationship with people in order to be a good pastor, and she was correct," he shared.

Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, for nearly 32 years, spoke at the Intentional Leader Conference hosted by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville on July 26.

'Called to proclaim'

Traylor said the pulpit in our churches is central and elevated for a purpose.

"We're called to proclaim God's word, and this is primary," he said. "We must walk with God and be committed to the highest ethics in money, marriage and morality. And though it's the hardest thing I do, we must be committed to personal evangelism, not just preaching evangelistic sermons."

State missionary Ken Allen, director of the SBOM office of LeaderCare, said he and colleague Rob Jackson, director of the office of church health, plan to offer resources for church leaders based on four aspects of leadership: person, pastor, preacher and pathfinder. The event served as a launch and overview of this effort.

Know your people

As pastors, ministers must work at being likable, which serves to pave the way for their messages, Allen said.

"When we walk into a room, do we bring blue sky or torrential downpours?" he asked with a laugh. "We must look people in the eye and really listen to them. We should know the color of their eyes and the names of their children!"

The next training installment will be Jan. 17 with certified Christian conciliator Ken Sande, co-author of the book "Resolving Everyday Conflict." This will focus on the pastor as a person of peacemaking. The third installment will highlight pathfinding and will be April 10–11 in partnership with a transitional pastor training event.

More information is available at 334-613-2210 or by emailing Ken Allen at kallen@alsbom.org.

Photo by Michael J. Brooks/The Alabama Baptist

Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, speaks at the Intentional Leader Conference hosted by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville on July 26.

FREE

It doesn't matter at what stage you are in ministry, there is something for everyone at **SPARK**. This online conference is designed with YOU in mind, no matter your experience or skill level. Keynote addresses feature Fred Luter, Michael Catt, Tod Bolsinger and Robby Gallaty, plus you can choose from **more than 40 topical breakout sessions**.

To register *(at no charge)* and see the list of breakout sessions, visit **thesparkconference.com**. You can attend online all day **August 25** as the session releases in real time beginning at 8 a.m. CST at that website. To access all training afterward, **visit alsbom.org/spark22.**

This resource is being made available free of charge to all Alabama Baptists because of your gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

Resilient residents

Disaster Relief volunteer asks for prayer for teams and for God to hold off rain

(*continued from page 1*)
Many don't have water restored to their homes yet.

'Positive traction'

Wakefield said emergency responders in the area have expressed their gratitude for the presence of the laundry units too.

"That has given us some positive traction," he said.

Around 40 of the state's other volunteers are working with homeowners to clean out homes so they can dry out without molding. Some of the homes have to be gutted completely. Some have too much foundation damage to save.

Baker asked for prayer for the teams as they work, but also for God to hold off the rain.

"We've been under a flood watch again, and there's nowhere for the water to go — the creeks are full," she said.

'No stranger'

But the people there are resilient, she said. Even though this disaster was the worst yet, they are no stranger to floods.

"They're thankful it wasn't any worse than it was," Baker said. "They're just amazing; they consider this kind of a part of life here. It rains, it floods, they rebuild, and it happens again."

"They're thankful it wasn't any worse than it was. They're just amazing; they consider this kind of a part of life here. It rains, it floods, they rebuild, and it happens again."

Cookie Baker
Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer

Facebook photo

Disaster Relief volunteers gather at Marrowbone Missionary Baptist Church in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, one of three churches in the area housing Alabama Baptist volunteers.

For more information or to give, visit sbdr.org/kentucky-flooding-relief. One hundred percent of your gift will help people whose lives have been affected by the flooding in Kentucky.

ALABAMA CITIZENS ACTION PROGRAM

For more information, visit alcap.com.

was founded in 1937 and it is my true privilege to now be your missionary in our shared ministry to Montgomery and the Alabama Legislature. Our mission to serve and represent the churches of Alabama has not changed. Along with the ALCAP Board of Directors, our staff plans to build upon the ministry foundation laid by Dr. Dan Ireland and Dr. Joe Godfrey. Churches, you are a vital part of the process. Thank you for your support through the Cooperative Program and for the additional offerings designated for ALCAP. We need your support now more than ever!

Greg Davis
President and CEO

alcap

DAN IRELAND
1978–2008

JOE GODFREY
2008–2022

GREG DAVIS
Current

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 21

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology, University of Mobile

GOD HEARS
2 Kings 19:10–19, 32–34

The Taunt (10–13)

King Hezekiah's nation of Judah was under attack by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who had invaded Judah and captured many of its cities (2 Kings 18:13–16). He then sent his top officials and a massive army to taunt Hezekiah's three representatives in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17–37). In the lesson this week, we will focus on the third confrontation between Sennacherib and Hezekiah.

Sennacherib's messengers attacked Hezekiah's faith by casting doubt on the character of God. In the second confrontation, Sennacherib's royal spokesman mocked Hezekiah for trusting in his God. He insisted Hezekiah had no dependable source of help from the Egyptians or even from God Himself.

In the third confrontation, Sennacherib's messengers challenged Hezekiah not to let his God deceive him into thinking God would deliver him from the Assyrians. Recent history appeared to be on the side of the Assyrians. Sennacherib's messengers taunted Hezekiah by reciting how the Assyrians had left a trail of defeated kings and their defeated gods with them. The path of destruction they described was the route from Assyria to Jerusalem. Each conquest moved the Assyrian army closer and closer to Jerusalem.

The Prayer (14–19)

Thankfully Hezekiah did not believe the lies of the enemy. He did not surrender. He trusted in the Lord and cried out to Him in prayer. His view of the Lord was different from that of the pagan king.

Hezekiah took the letter from the Assyrian messengers' hands, read it for himself and then went up to the Lord's temple and spread it out before God. Earlier, Hezekiah had asked Isaiah to pray about the impending attack, but now the king himself prayed to the Lord.

Hezekiah's prayer consisted of three parts. First, Hezekiah recognized the Lord's greatness. He began with adoration of God. The Lord was the God not only of Israel but also of all the kingdoms of the earth. He alone was the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Since the Lord was the Creator and ruler of all nations, Hezekiah could hope for deliverance in this seemingly impossible situation.

Second, Hezekiah explained his problem to the Lord. He expressed realism and a sense of urgency. He acknowledged the Assyrians' power.

The major feature of Hezekiah's prayer, however, was his passion for God's glory and honor. Sennacherib had dared to insult the living God. More was at stake than simply the peace and security of Jerusalem.

The very honor of God was on the line. The Lord delights in prayer that is more concerned with His glory than with our peace, prosperity or pleasure.

Third, Hezekiah asked directly for the Lord's help against the Assyrians. Even in his petition, Hezekiah based his request on a concern for God's glory. He cried out for God to demonstrate His sovereign power by defeating the Assyrians, and then all the kingdoms of the earth would know the Lord alone was God. Hezekiah wanted freedom for his people, but he never lost sight of Israel's responsibility to bring recognition and glory to the Lord.

The Answer (32–34)

God responded to Hezekiah's prayer through the prophet Isaiah. The Lord had heard Sennacherib's taunting, mocking and boasting. God promised to put a hook in Sennacherib's nose and a bit in his mouth (v. 28).

The Lord declared Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem, shoot an arrow there, come against the city with a shield or build a siege ramp against it. Instead, he would return home without ever entering Jerusalem. The angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers that night. The next morning Sennacherib broke camp and returned to Nineveh. One day after he returned home, two of his sons killed him.

God will not be mocked and He hears the prayers of His people.

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D.
Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University

FORGIVE YOUR NEIGHBOR
Matthew 18:21–35

As long as we live in this fallen world as fallen creatures, we will be in need of forgiveness and will need to be prepared to offer forgiveness to those around us.

Love forgives — and keeps forgiving. (21–22)

Peter asked Jesus how extravagant he had to be in forgiving someone who repeatedly sinned against him.

Since seven was the number of perfection and seemed like a large number of times to forgive a repeat offender, Peter guessed seven times might be enough.

But Jesus says Peter must radically expand his understanding of God's mercy and generosity and how we are to reflect that ourselves. He says we must forgive the repeat offender 70 times 7 (or 77 times; the Greek is ambiguous).

Clearly, Jesus does not want Peter to take Him literally and keep an extensive record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5), but He wants Peter to realize there is no limit to the forgiveness God grants to us and expects of us.

God extends forgiveness to us. (23–27)

To explain His answer, Jesus tells a parable to show why we need to be so extravagant in offering forgiveness. Jesus says we should imagine a king who had a servant (literally a slave) who owed him 10,000 talents.

This is like saying the man owed a "gazillion" dollars. The Greek word for 10,000 was used to suggest an extremely large or incalculable number. Ten thousand literal talents would take a typical worker thousands of years to pay off. No slave could ever pay such an enormous debt. Therefore, the man's wife, children and property were all going to be sold to pay off part of the debt.

Keep in mind this is a parable, and the king is like God in that he was owed a debt that couldn't possibly be paid. But unlike in the parable, God does not eternally condemn other family members for the sins of their relative.

The point is each one of us is like the servant, owing an enormous debt we could not possibly ever repay.

But the man begs for mercy, promising to pay the whole debt (which was not really possible) if the master will be patient. The master has mercy on him and forgives the entire debt.

Like the servant in the story, when we ask God for His mercy, He has compassion on us and frees us from the guilt of our sins.

God expects us to forgive even as He has forgiven us. (28–35)

The servant who had received such extravagant forgiveness goes and finds a colleague who owed him 100 days' wages (100 denarii) and insists on being paid back immediately. That servant makes the same plea for patience and mercy as the other had made to his master, offering to pay the debt off in time.

This debt could actually have been paid off over time, but the servant who had been forgiven so much was unwilling to extend the much smaller forgiveness to his colleague, and he had the man thrown into prison until the debt would be paid.

When the master found out about his servant's lack of mercy, he wanted to know why the servant hadn't followed the master's example.

The main point of the parable is found in verse 33: The master's servant should have shown the same mercy to his fellow servant as the master had shown him.

In response the master rescinded the forgiveness he had extended to the unforgiving servant. Jesus warns the Father will do the same to us, unless we forgive our brothers and sisters from our hearts.

An unforgiving spirit is not an unforgiveable sin, since it may be repented of at any moment. But, as Jesus warns us here and elsewhere (Matt. 6:15), we who need God's forgiveness cannot afford to withhold forgiveness from others.

The mercy we have received leads us to extend mercy to those around us.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

New book, Facebook group help churches leverage the internet for outreach

Katie Allred enjoys helping people learn how to share the gospel on the internet.

It is a passion and career she stumbled into unexpectedly — and early.

"When I was 9, I started a Harry Potter forum with some friends on the internet," she said. "What happened there was we loved Harry Potter and went online to find people who wanted to talk about it. But we ended up creating a huge community."

The online forum grew to more than 5,000 people, enough to win an award from J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series. Allred moderated that site from age 9 to 16.

"This was before social media even existed," she said. "We were on AOL and MSN Chat in this forum we built ourselves as children."

Interesting hobby

It was an interesting hobby but she was a "completely normal kid" and had other interests like soccer. She grew up at Mulberry Baptist Church in Maplesville, a place with deep roots for her family. Her great-grandfather, Wiley Tucker, built the church's current building in the 1950s.

KATIE ALLRED

Facebook photo

Allred's Harry Potter hobby complemented her life in ways she wouldn't have expected.

"That time was so crucial for me to learn how I loved sharing the gospel and sharing the gospel on the internet," she explained. "These were real people, and I loved them and cared about them and wanted them to hear the gospel."

Allred went on to study computer information systems at the University of Mobile, then got a master's degree in web development from the University of Florida. She served as professor of marketing and software development for a while at UM, then in 2013 started working with Brentwood Baptist Church in Tennessee as web content manager.

Much like her forum, it was a role that expanded more than Allred expected.

"Brentwood Baptist grew from one church to nine churches, and I oversaw social media and websites for them," she said.

During that time she also started a Facebook group called Church Communications.

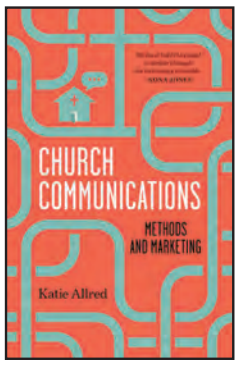
"I knew I loved online community, and I had seen it work before. I thought I'd find five people who hate papyrus font as much as I do," she joked.

Wanting to help people

Allred found more than 31,000, though her real purpose behind the group wasn't font related at all.

"I just wanted to help people share the gospel online," Allred explained.

The group serves as a resource for marketing and communication strategies, as does the business she started with the same name. Allred will facilitate the group's first conference Sept. 22 in Nashville (see page 12 for more information).



Allred's book, "Church Communications: Methods and Marketing," released Aug. 15.

"It's written as a textbook," she noted. "I was writing it with my students in my classroom (back at UM) in mind."

The book covers marketing strategy, branding, crisis communication and public relations. Allred said it offers a starting point for church leaders or volunteers who have no idea what they're doing and, if it doesn't offer the answers someone needs, helps them generate the right questions.

"And then you can ask the Church Communications community for more answers," she added.

To learn more about Katie Allred and her book visit katieallred.com or churchcommunications.com. To join the Church Communications group on Facebook visit facebook.com/groups/churchcomm.

"These were real people, and I loved them and cared about them and wanted them to hear the gospel."

Katie Allred
author and founder of Church Communications

EDITOR'S NOTE

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